

# Connecting Prayer and Spirituality

## *Kol Haneshamah* as a Creative Teaching and Learning Text



Dr. Jeffrey L. Schein, Editor-in-Chief

Rabbi Joseph M. Blair,  
Leah M. Mundell, Assistant Editors

The Reconstructionist Press, Wyncote, Pennsylvania

To my wife Deborah and my children Benjamin, Jonah, and Hana for their love and support.

And with a deep appreciation for the forces of Godliness and spirituality that inspired the contributors to this volume.

J.L.S.

With much love to my wife, Karen, my daughter, Kitra, my mother, Lillian, my sisters, Koren, Sara, Ruth, and Sarah, my brothers, Bill and Jonathan, and my niece, Eva Rebecca, each of whom has supported and sustained me, and both shared in and contributed to my many joys and blessings.

With gratitude to my teachers, colleagues, associates, and students, all of whom have enriched my understanding and taught me so much.

With appreciation to the many contributors to this volume. You are too numerous to name, but all have my heartfelt thanks.

J.M.B.

42062

# Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
Foreword	xiii

## I. PREFACE AND INTRODUCTORY MATERIALS

The Guide to <i>Kol Haneshamah</i> , <i>Jeffrey L. Schein</i>	3
Thoughts from the Editor of the <i>Kol Haneshamah</i> Series, <i>David A. Teutsch</i>	5
On Religious Formation, <i>Allan Kensky</i>	7

## II. APPROACHING THE SIDDUR

Seeking God in the Siddur: Reflections on <i>Kol Haneshamah</i> , <i>David A. Teutsch</i>	11
How Can Reconstructionists Pray?, <i>Jacob J. Staub</i>	17
The Nature of Spirituality, <i>Sheila Peltz Weinberg</i>	23
The Journey Towards Prayer: How Beautiful Are Your Footsteps, <i>Steven Sager</i>	29
Some Call it God, <i>Sidney H. Schwarz</i>	35
The Education of a Prayer Leader, <i>Herbert J. Levine</i>	43
Questions for Further Study and Discussion, <i>Leah M. Mundell</i>	47
Writing Spiritual Autobiography:	
A Workshop in Narrative Theology, <i>Marc J. Margolius</i>	53
How the Siddur Affected Me, <i>Barbara Stark</i>	55
My Experience As a Member of the Prayerbook Commission, <i>Lillian Kaplan</i>	63

## III. TEACHING AND LEARNING THE SIDDUR

Nurturing Students' Spirituality and Prayerfulness, <i>Roberta Louis Goodman</i>	67
Actors in the Drama of Prayer and Spirituality: The Teacher, <i>Lifsa Schachter</i>	75
Making a <i>Shiduk</i> : Text as a Vehicle	
for Dialogue Between Student and Teacher, <i>Jeffrey L. Schein</i>	79
Reconstructionist Goals for Teaching Prayer and Spirituality,	
<i>JRF Education Commission</i>	85

### A. THE SIDDUR AS TEXT

"Prayer for the Perplexed" as a Tool for Faculty Development, <i>Jeffrey L. Schein</i>	89
Prayer for the Perplexed, <i>Elliot N. Dorff</i>	91
Teaching <i>Tefilah</i> , <i>Steven C. Segar</i>	109
The <i>Matbe'ah</i> : Keva vs. Kavanah, <i>Steven C. Segar and Eric Traiger</i>	111
The One Page Amidah: A Teaching Tool, <i>David Sulomm Stein</i>	117

### B. CHILDREN AND THE SIDDUR

Evoking the Indefinable: Spirituality in the Classroom, <i>Barbara Carr</i>	121
---	-----

<b>C. THE SHEMA</b>	
<i>Shema Uvirhoteha</i> for Ages Eight to Twelve, <i>Judith Kummer</i> .....	129
<i>Shema Uvirhoteha</i> for Ages Twelve to Seventeen, <i>Deborah Waxman</i> .....	137
<b>D. THE AMIDAH</b>	
Ten <i>Eytzot</i> for Seven <i>Berachot</i> : Background to Teaching the Amidah,	
<i>Joseph M. Blair</i> .....	149
Amidah Curriculum for Grades Three to Six, <i>Joseph M. Blair</i> .....	153
Curriculum for Shabbat <i>Shaharit</i> Amidah	
for Upper-Middle Grades/Early High School, <i>Marsha J. Pik-Nathan</i> .....	169
Notes on Using the Interpretive Amidah, <i>Sherry Lee Linkon</i> .....	181
<b>E. PRAYER AND THE SIDDUR</b>	
A Guide to Creating Children's Services Based on <i>Kol Haneshamah</i> ,	
<i>Aviva Batya Bass and Toba Spitzer</i> .....	185
A Prayer Service for Ages Four to Seven, <i>Aviva Batya Bass</i> .....	187
A <i>Kol Haneshamah</i> Children's Service for Ages Eight to Eleven, <i>Toba Spitzer</i> .....	197
<b>F. THE MINI-SIDDUR</b>	
Teacher's Guide to the <i>Kol Haneshamah</i> Children's Siddur, <i>Toba Spitzer</i> .....	199
Background and Introduction to the Mini-Siddur, <i>Joseph M. Blair</i> .....	213
A <i>Kol Haneshamah</i> Mini-Siddur: The Contents, <i>Toba Spitzer</i> .....	215
Family Davening Activities, <i>Jeffrey Eisenstat</i> .....	217
The Mini-Siddur, <i>Toba Spitzer (enclosed separately)</i>	
<b>G. ADULTS AND THE SIDDUR</b>	
An Experience in Adult Jewish Learning:	
Exploring Prayer in <i>Kol Haneshamah</i> , <i>Jeffrey L. Schein</i> .....	223
The Next Step: Teaching Prayer to Adults, <i>Sheryl Lewart Shulewitz</i> .....	229
An Exploration of Innovations in the Shabbat Morning Service, <i>Amy J. Levenson</i> ..	235
Comparing Texts: An Exercise, <i>Joseph M. Blair</i> .....	237
<b>IV. USING THE SIDDUR</b>	
Schools and Congregations as Supportive Environments:	
Making Room for Children and Families to Pray, <i>Jeffrey L. Schein</i> .....	243
Using Commentary to Teach, <i>Joseph M. Blair</i> .....	249
Using the Siddur as a Non-liturgical Teaching Tool:	
<i>Erev</i> Shabbat Services for the Family, <i>Leila Gal Berner</i> .....	251
Applying <i>Kol Haneshamah</i> to Life Cycle Events, <i>Seth Daniel Riemer</i> .....	255
<b>V. MAKING THE SIDDUR A FRIEND: YOUR SIDDUR SAFARI</b>	
Make of the Siddur a Friend, <i>Jeffrey L. Schein</i> .....	263
Rabbi Wayback: A Play, <i>Daniel Mordecai Silberman Brenner</i> .....	265
Once Upon a Prayer: Finding an Entry into Prayer	
for Children and Families, <i>Marilyn Price</i> .....	277



“...That This Song May be a Witness”: The Power of Chant, <i>Shefa Gold</i> .....	281
God Talk for Children, <i>Barbara W. Staub</i> .....	285
<i>Yom Iyun</i> : A Learning Day About Prayer for Families and Congregants, <i>Mindy Eilender</i> .....	289

## VI. GROWING IN THE FUTURE

Resources for Teaching Prayer and Spirituality .....	297
--	-----

## VII. APPENDICES

Appendix A: How to Sign the Shema .....	303
Appendix B: A <i>Tu B'shevat</i> Lesson Plan for Ages Four to Six, <i>Aviva Batya Bass</i> ...	307
Appendix C: Suggested Learning Activities for the Reconstructionist Teaching Model, <i>Shelly Melzer</i> .....	311
Appendix D: Contributors .....	313

## Acknowledgments

The editors wish to acknowledge each of the authors who contributed to this volume. We also recognize Rabbi Steven M. Brown for his valuable consultation and suggestions. The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism is acknowledged for granting permission to incorporate two of Rabbi Brown's exercises from *Higher and Higher*. Thanks to Rabbi Allan Kensky for permission to reprint his poem, "On Religious Formation." We acknowledge Elliot Dorff for allowing us to reprint his article here. Michael Seidman of Almo Printing printed this volume and contributed to many technical aspects of its production. Lani Moss, Phyllis Zeeman, and Sarah Fenner provided assistance in many areas in support of this volume. Mordechai Liebling, Executive Director of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation (JRF) provided publishing support and kindly provided permission to reprint articles that appeared in other JRF publications, including *Windows on the Jewish Soul: Resources for Teaching the Values of Spiritual Peoplehood*; *Gesher Vekesher: A Bridge and Connection*; *The Reconstructionist*; *Reconstructionism Today*; and several other education publications. The Covenant Foundation provided the grant that supported the production of this volume as part of the pilot project. Daniel Silberman Brenner was responsible for drawings, and Betsy Platkin Teutsch for the cover and section artwork. The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College made it possible to offer to rabbinical students the course that launched this project. Pesha Leichter provided optical character recognition services. David Teutsch offered his assistance by reading the manuscript with a critical eye. Randy Rosenthal Tunkel and S. Miriam Weinberg served as proofreaders and critical eyes in the final preparation of the manuscript.

## Foreword

The contents of this volume are an eclectic mix of materials intended to help address the need for a way to teach people how to gain access to the spiritual richness of Judaism through prayer and praying. These materials span a broad spectrum of approaches, directions, styles, and interests. Some of these articles have appeared previously, but the majority are newly written for this project.

I do not want anyone to be under the mistaken impression that the editors consider this to be a completed work; on the contrary, we see this as a work-in-progress. We have chosen to publish this volume in a loose-leaf format with the idea that additional materials will be produced for insertion into this volume to address further the issues and concerns noted, and to expand the scope of coverage of this volume.

In editing this volume, we have consciously chosen to allow the authors to speak in their own voices. This allows the individual works to be stronger than they would be if squeezed into a pre-determined mold. Items here range from sets of questions to lesson plans, plays, games, and curricula. May these serve you well, and may your prayers lead you to the spiritual growth that you seek.

J.M.B.

[illegible]

## The Guide to *Kol Haneshamah*

Jeffrey L. Schein

As complex as prayer is, there is also something entirely simple and natural about it. Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan once said that asking why a person prays is a little bit like asking why a person breathes. Spirituality is inherent within the human soul and breath, as the name of our prayerbook series, *Kol Haneshamah* (Every Breath, or Every Soul), indicates. Our challenge as rabbis, educators, teachers, and lay leaders is to foster that spirituality, to restore the natural spiritual breath of our students. This is a different task, though perhaps a no less challenging one, than the more frequent educational goal of “creating” an experience or product.

The challenge in putting together this guide to teaching prayer and spirituality has been embracing both sides of this duality of prayer as a complex yet a simple and natural phenomena. The complexity in the volume comes from both the subtleties of the life of prayer at its deepest levels and from the complexities of contemporary Jewish life, which have made prayer so problematic. Our writers often reflect this complexity in ways that we hope will be both challenging and helpful to anyone seeking to teach Jewish prayer to adults or children in a spiritually and intellectually honest fashion.

Yet, on the natural side of the ledger, we have assumed that there is a basic process by which Jewish prayer becomes meaningful to individuals and communities. We believe that this process includes:

- Approaching the Siddur
- Experiencing and Understanding the Siddur (Teaching and Learning the Siddur)
- Using the Siddur
- Deepening, Challenging, and Changing One’s Relationship with the Siddur (Making The Siddur a Friend: Your Siddur Safari)

These, then, have become the major organizing rubrics of this guide. The section “Approaching the Siddur” includes fundamental reflections about the nature of God, spirituality, and Reconstructionism that give individuals access to prayer as a meaningful Jewish activity and discipline. As the process of discovery and appropriation is personal, we have encouraged our writers to speak in personal voices and discuss their own journeys. This will give grids or maps on which educators and adult learners alike can locate themselves in relationship to issues fundamental to Jewish prayer.

In “Teaching and Learning the Siddur,” we try to provide two things. First, an orientation to the basic dynamics of learning and teaching prayer. The key players in this process—teachers, learners, and text—are each examined. A rich selection of *tahlis* (practical) techniques and lesson plans follows. They can help both adults and children better understand and experience the content and structure of the prayers in *Shabbat Vehagim*.

The “Using the Siddur” section is aimed at helping people make the most of the resources within *Kol Haneshamah*. These reflect the Reconstructionist commitment to lay leadership in many areas of Jewish life normally thought to be the province of the professional. Thus, there are sections here on

## Thoughts from the Editor of the *Kol Haneshamah* Series

David A. Teutsch

Studying Jewish prayer is a complex task. The siddur has rightly been described as containing a history of the Jewish heart. One key aspect of study in Jewish prayer is understanding the history, structure and themes of the Jewish prayerbook. Given its complex history and many layers, this is by itself no small task. But studying the siddur in this fashion alone is a bit like examining the literature of an ancient civilization. Understanding it does not guarantee empathy or active engagement. Jewish liturgy is to be studied by us not merely for the purpose of understanding its ancient roots and gradual development. We study it in order to be able to participate in it as a part of our lives.

In order to engage liturgy in that way, we need also to explore what the major themes of the liturgy have to do with the emotional, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of ourselves. We need to examine our own fears, aspirations, and sources of gratitude, and to consider the complex relationship between the individual spiritual being, the community, and prayer. We also need to understand the way in which words and ritual interact in making up liturgy.

That is obviously an enormous challenge. The wonderful thing about this volume is that it takes that challenge seriously. Its use by children and adults should not only substantially increase their awareness of the nature of Jewish liturgy. It should also make it easier for them to pray. If indeed it has that impact, that will be an extraordinary accomplishment!

The *Kol Haneshamah* prayerbook series is designed to be as user-friendly as possible. Its commentary is meant to teach; its translations, to be vivid enough to use as prayer; its readings, to open contemporary perspectives. Used in conjunction with the materials in this volume, *Kol Haneshamah* should lead Jews who seek to do so to substantially increase their ability to gain the strength, solace and direction that centuries of Jews have found in Jewish worship.

## On Religious Formation

Allan Kensky

To help other souls to grow you must first  
unlock the gates of your own soul  
You must remove your robe of pretense and  
reveal yourself as you are  
You look into the eyes of those before you  
and form words from the sparks of the flame within  
You laugh, you cry, you show strength and weakness  
You share struggle and triumph  
And you live that love which God has planted in you  
You pray that you will rise to the task  
and you set God before you, always  
You stand in awe of the wonders before you  
of eyes sparkling with commitment  
of minds thirsting for wisdom  
of hearts hungry for holiness  
of souls yearning for God  
And quietly summoning every God-given strength  
within you  
you allow your soul to speak to theirs  
One by one they open the gates to their souls  
And true learning may begin

March 23, 1990  
26 Adar 5750

## II. Approaching the Siddur







## Seeking God in the Siddur: Reflections on *Kol Haneshamah*

David A. Teutsch

We all use myth and metaphor to structure our lives and interpret reality. Language, our primary interpretive device, contains an elaborate mythic structure. Consider the sentences:

- He had a brainstorm.
- We want your input in this process.

In these two sentences, the realms of nature and computers offer metaphors by which we process and understand reality. Even the seemingly neutral word “realms” in the previous sentence harkens back to a political metaphor. One of the major changes in our understanding of prayer over the last fifty years has been our growing recognition of the role myth and metaphor play in prayer. A critical part of prayer is interpreting and explaining our world. We can say that *tefilah* embodies the Jewish understanding of reality. Jewish prayer must therefore speak in mythic language to portray our vision in its full vividness. We speak of God as Creator in the *Yotzer* (pages 246-51).<sup>1</sup> Mordecai Kaplan’s “God the Life of Nature” (pages 757-59) retains much of the same mythic content as does the *Yotzer*—God as the source of unity in nature and of the power and intricacy that cause us to wonder at our world. To strip the liturgy of the language of Creation would remove mythic language critical not only to the structure of the liturgy, but to the Jewish worldview. Moreover, the Shema assumes the divine origin of that natural unity proclaimed in the *Yotzer*. Creation, Revelation, and Redemption are central to the mythic structure of the Siddur. These three principles of Jewish thought and living—the world’s unity, the existence of an objective morality that presumes the worth of human life, and the presence of meaning in history (strikingly explicated in Franz Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*), were already embedded in the *halakah* by the time of the *Mishnah* (*Berachot* 1:4). With the modifications required by the Reconstructionist shift from classical supernaturalism (with an omniscient, just God concerned with particulars) to transnaturalism and naturalism, these principles remain just as central in Reconstructionist thought as in the classical rabbinic understanding. Retaining the mythic structure is not just a matter of maintaining continuity with the Jewish past for the purpose of preserving Jewish ethnicity. It charts the Jewish self-understanding in a way that guarantees an encounter with it every morning and evening that a Jew prays from the Siddur.

A literal understanding of Jewish myths results in believing in a supernatural God who created the world, gave an immutable Torah at Sinai, and will bring final justice and completeness to the world through a personal messiah at the end of time. This is obviously quite distant from a Reconstructionist understanding that there is a divine unity to the world that we can encounter in our evolving Torah, a unity that can lead toward improved human conduct and a world at peace. The literal understanding creates both intellectual and moral problems for most of us. Furthermore, it is

---

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all page numbers listed here refer to *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*.

so widespread—in the liturgy of all the other major Jewish movements—that we Reconstructionists believe it critical to dissociate ourselves from it.

### LIVING MYTH AND PRAYING METAPHOR

How do we retain the powerful mythic structure while signaling our rejection of a literal interpretation of it? That is a critically important and most difficult question. Consider how *Kol Haneshamah* deals with imaging the revelation at Sinai. When the Torah is raised after it has been read, a traditional congregation proclaims, *vezot hatorah asher sam Mosheh lifney beney Yisra'el al pi Adonay beyad Mosheh*. (This is the Torah that came to the people Israel from the mouth of God through the hand of Moses.) The 1945 *Reconstructionist Sabbath Prayer Book* substituted *eytz hayim hi*. (This Torah is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it; and of them that uphold it, every one is rendered happy.) *Kol Haneshamah* gives both Hebrew versions (page 407) with interpretive translations (pages 440-41), because it was agreed that here the myth would not be taken literally by those likely to use the book. "Torah from Sinai" here means commitment to the Jewish people and its ancient-yet-contemporary legacy of Jewish learning and practice, and not to any particular theory of the Torah's origin.

We reached a different conclusion regarding a paragraph in the Shabbat Amidah, *Yismah Moshe*, which deals with the same theme. There the myth becomes more literal, with Moses descending from Sinai with a crown of splendor around his head and two stone tablets in his hand. We avoided that literalism by substituting *Ashreynu* (How happy are we, how fortunate our lot, . . . happy are we to be at rest upon the seventh day) (pages 306-07). *Vezot hatorah* is sung communally, with a focus on shared celebration. *Yismah Moshe* is from the Amidah, where prayer is silent, and exploration of the meaning of the words is strongly encouraged. The need for affirmation of *klal Yisra'el* took precedence in the first case, while stating a theology that we can comfortably affirm took precedence in the second. This balancing of change with continuity in making the image of Sinai our own reflects our moment in time and who we are. I have no illusion that this formulation is eternal, no certainty that it will survive even thirty years. But it says what we felt it ought to say today: we are heirs to Sinai who seek God's presence in Shabbat. That statement is no compromise. While avoiding the literalist claims of the Torah myth, it nevertheless speaks the resonant myth of the tradition in our own voice.

Another aspect of the Revelation myth can be found in the second blessing before the *Shema*, *Ahavah Rabah* (pages 272-75). It equates divine love, the giving of Torah, and the ongoing process of learning and teaching. It traditionally concludes with the words, *haboher be'amo Yisra'el be'ahavah*, (who chooses His [sic] people Israel in love). This expression of chosenness raises significant moral issues, as it does elsewhere in the liturgy. Its reference to divine love being in the choosing makes it particularly problematic, a problem intensified by the fact that these notions are here associated with references to Torah and the Sinai myth. We have followed the 1945 prayerbook in substituting the words of the evening service, *ohav amo Yisra'el*, (who lovingly cares for your people Israel). Associating love, teaching, and Torah with each other, while avoiding exclusive or triumphalist claims, is a critical moral move.

Reinterpreted myth plays a role in our liturgical life, as well as in our communal/political life, moral life, and personal, spiritual life. Eliminating myth's verbal content would make it no longer myth. Leaving it unchanged would suggest an unassimilable literalism. We live in-between, listening for the Voice murmuring amidst the myth.

## LEARNING FEMINIST LESSONS

Reconstructionists have long been committed to the inclusion of women. Ensuring women's equality in the movement's leadership has long been taken as a norm, so that it is no surprise to find women on the Prayerbook Commission and among the section editors. Growing attention over the last twenty years has resulted in our similarly taking for granted the need to include the voices of women poets, liturgists, and commentators inside the prayerbook, so that we can all benefit from their wisdom, insight and vision.

It has been slightly more difficult, if no less important, to emend the Hebrew text to include references to the matriarchs alongside the patriarchs. However, that is only the beginning of what we need to learn from feminism, which is a particularly rich resource for Reconstructionism, because so many of its insights extend and deepen the founding vision of Reconstructionism. There has long been talk in Reconstructionist circles about the problems with reciting the traditional formulation of *berahot* (blessings). How can we address God as 'You,' if we don't assume a Being who is personally concerned with us? Isn't the language of God as King in conflict with a non-personalistic approach (and isn't it, to Americans raised on democracy, somewhat obscure, and to Canadians, pleasantly irrelevant)?

And yet these formulations have two thousand years of use behind them. Two thousand years of memory, of resonance, of *minhag* (tradition). They link every Jew who recites Kiddush or lights Shabbat candles with friends, family, the Jewish people, and previous generations. Furthermore, the mythic 'You' has been a critical form of address as a metaphor that helps to shape our spiritual lives. In short, these *berakah* formulas are not so easy to give up.

We talk about God alternately as the unifying Power in the universe, the Source of transcendence or salvation, and the moral Voice within. How can that imagery be made compatible with the willful King of the world in the *berakah* formula? If we want to express our own beliefs, wouldn't *ruah ha'olam* or *hey ha'olamim* or *Shekinah* come closer?

## LITURGICAL IMAGERY MIRRORS POLITICAL REALITY

One of the central insights that has emerged from feminist thought is that the image of God as King not only reinforces the notion that men are the real leaders; it also reinforces hierarchy rooted in a single, powerful, patriarchal authority figure, whether that figure be the rabbi, the corporate executive, or the public official. Jewish liturgy can unintentionally reinforce the legitimacy of excessive presidential power, a message that comes through loudly, for instance, in the political use of the media in this electronic age. Images of God can also reinforce the image of the rabbi as a



powerful and somewhat removed decision-maker, which does not correlate with the kind of synagogue communities we aim to create. If liturgy does not powerfully play this reinforcing role for people, it is because the language of the prayerbook is seen by most of its users as irrelevant to most of their lives. I don't know which is worse: for the prayerbook to undermine ideals to which we are committed, or for it to be irrelevant to them.

In *Kol Haneshamah*, the supplementary readings, commentary, and Joel Rosenberg's superb translations have effectively answered our need for a gender-neutral prayer language. The issue is more complex in Hebrew, because the Hebrew language has only two genders. The gender neutrality of 'you' found in English is unavailable in Hebrew. Thus, both with nouns and pronouns, the Hebrew God-language poses no simple solutions.

The problems with the *berahah* formula, then, involve three issues: 1) direct address to an impersonal God; 2) the hierarchical and performative nature of the royal imagery; and 3) the implied gender of God as addressee.

Awareness of the need to face these problems is hardly new. Judith Plaskow and Marcia Falk state the problems vividly and move us toward provisional solutions. In some congregations and havurot, experimentation with alternatives is underway. Yet clearly this is a transitional period. Most congregations have not yet begun to tackle this problem on a regular basis. Those that have moved ahead do not yet have commonly agreed-upon formulations. Many people do not want change because of their concern for continuity over time and geography that has been and remains so central to the Jewish experience. They argue that while many changes are possible, this one is simply too basic and sweeping, too discontinuous.

### ENCOURAGING NEW FORMULAS

The Prayerbook Commission asked, "how does one validate ongoing use of the inherited formula and use of alternatives at the same time?" The provisional *Erev Shabbat* volume of *Kol Haneshamah* included Marcia Falk's Interpretive Amidah (pages 150-178) as one step in that direction. In the full *Shabbat Vehagim* volume, the traditional formula was left in place in the main Hebrew text, but the following instructions for constructing substitutes appear at regular intervals in the commentary:

Many contemporary Jews are reciting *berahot*/blessings in ways that reflect their theological outlooks and ethical concerns. At any place where a blessing occurs in the liturgy, the following elements can be combined to create alternative formulas for *berahot*. This can be done by selecting one phrase from each group to form the introductory clause.

I	<i>Baruh atah adonay</i>	Blessed are you Adonay
	<i>Beruhah at yah</i>	Blessed are you Yah
	<i>Nevareh et</i>	Let us bless



II	<i>eloheynu</i> <i>hashehinah</i> <i>eyn hahayim</i>	our God <i>Shehinah</i> Source of Life
III	<i>meleh ha'olam</i> <i>hey ha'olamim</i> <i>ruah ha'olam</i>	Sovereign of all worlds Life of all the worlds Spirit of the world

### THE CHALLENGES OF RETURN

Competent people do not long participate in activities where they are incompetent—they either leave or take steps to become competent. For those returning or turning anew to Jewish involvement, *Kol Haneshamah* lowers the hurdle of Hebrew competence by providing substantial transliteration. It lowers the hurdle of intellectual competence by providing extensive commentary explaining the history and theology of the liturgy, and by including readings in a contemporary idiom. These tools lift people to the level that allows them to sing along and participate in the prayer community.

The response to the first volume of *Kol Haneshamah* indicates that it provides sufficient support for a large number of people to make a successful transition to participating comfortably in public worship. This is obviously good news in terms of minimally involving people in synagogue life. But it is not enough. We need far more than that minimal involvement if communal prayer is to be a source of moral vigor and spiritual sustenance.

Some non-Orthodox congregations conduct services that presume substantial knowledge, skill and commitment for congregations whose members rarely have these prerequisites. Other congregations conduct services that resemble cantatas, which are not meant to stand up to weekly use. Still other congregations settle for an uneasy compromise between these two modes. We can and should do better. Some techniques are already in common use for helping us move beyond where most congregations now are. They include guided meditation, *kavanot*, visual imagery, a variety of uses of *nigun* and song, silence, and physical movement. Congregational or havurah worship can help people begin using these spiritual techniques, and thereby glimpse the possibilities. The examples of these techniques in *Kol Haneshamah* barely scratch the surface of what is possible. This is so because we had neither the space nor the consensus that would have allowed us to be more thorough. Nevertheless, we recognized the task as being too critical for us to ignore. I hope first that these samples will get used, and second, that using them will lead to a desire to reach beyond the prayerbook to include many more such undertakings in public worship.

To accomplish this, many prayer leaders will have to broaden and deepen their experience as participants and their skills as leaders. This is a daunting challenge, and I worry about how easily it can be achieved. We cannot effectively lead others to spiritual realms we have not explored ourselves. The skill of the leader is a particularly critical matter because breaking new ground is uncomfortable even when it is exciting. Beginners depend heavily upon the leader's ability to create trust and move people naturally.



## TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Later on, spiritual growth requires a more active stance on the part of the worshiper. To progress very far, the worshiper must take conscious responsibility for shaping her/his own spiritual life. *Kol Haneshamah* encourages this by providing opportunities for the worshiper to move out of lock-step with the congregation and wander around the page, focusing on commentary, translation, a visual image, or a particular name of God, and from there into private, inner space and back again.

To be sure, an element in this is subversive of congregational unity. How can we be united, after all, if not everyone is in the same place on the page? It is true that encouraging the worshiper's self-reliance will mean that not everyone has eyes only for the service leader, which can be disconcerting until you get used to it. But if the worshiper wanders off for a while, only to return more energized, engaged and open, the result will be a more intense and exciting worship experience for everyone. Precisely by encouraging worshipers to take private spiritual journeys do we strengthen public prayer.

As its rubrics demonstrate, *Kol Haneshamah* is also designed for private prayer. Over the long term, a major test of whether we will have achieved the prayerbook's goal of spiritual activism will be the number of people who use *Kol Haneshamah* away from the synagogue. I remember a prayerbook from my childhood that opened almost automatically to the pages for Hanukah candle-lighting and Festival Kiddush, because those were the only times it was regularly used. The editorial design of *Kol Haneshamah* reflects broader ambitions than that, but they will be fulfilled only if congregations take seriously the responsibility for teaching private prayer and inwardness.

Part of that process should be about developing Hebrew skills and mastering music; many congregations are doing these things already. Part involves acquiring some of the spiritual techniques—including comfort with silence—that I have mentioned above. Another part is exploring people's spiritual aspirations, and expanding their vision of what is possible. Helping Jews understand the theology of the liturgy and its periodicity also opens important vistas.

The new prayerbook supports these efforts, but even its nine hundred pages cannot carry this burden without the active partnership and commitment of rabbis, teachers, and prayer leaders. This work will often be difficult. But our spiritual and intellectual lives as Jews were not intended to be simple. I will be more than satisfied if, as a result of using *Kol Haneshamah*, our lives are Jewishly anchored and intellectually honest, spiritually rich, and morally vigorous.

## **How Can Reconstructionists Pray?**

Jacob J. Staub

If you don't believe in a "traditional" God, why do you bother attending services in synagogue? Why go to the trouble and expense of publishing a new prayerbook?

These kinds of questions are asked of Reconstructionists all the time. They are based on the assumption that "prayer" means "petitionary prayer"—prayer in which the one who prays asks God to grant a request or a wish. Prayer is thought of as a conversation with God. But Reconstructionists do not believe in a God who is supernatural—a God who intervenes in nature and causes things to happen in violation of the laws of nature. And Reconstructionists do not believe that God can be described anthropomorphically—as having human form and human characteristics, as if God were an invisible person in Heaven watching over us. So, if I don't believe that God literally hears my prayers, and if I don't believe that God responds to my prayerful wishes, why do I bother to open a siddur?

For the record, it is not true, historically speaking, that all or even most praying Jews throughout Jewish history have believed that God hears prayers or that God intervenes supernaturally in response to our requests. There are many other tried and tested Jewish reasons for prayer, some of which will be discussed below. First, however, I will briefly examine what Reconstructionists can and do believe about God.

### **WHAT RECONSTRUCTIONISTS BELIEVE**

Reconstructionists are not atheists. The founder of Reconstructionism, Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan, was falsely accused of atheism during his lifetime and has been so labeled since his death. Those accusations are made by people who think that either you believe in a God who governs the details of our lives, rewarding and punishing us, orchestrating the things that happen to us, or you don't believe in God at all. It's not that I have a mistaken belief about God, they would say; it is that I don't believe in God.

Most Reconstructionists reject that attempt to define our beliefs, because it does not correspond to our experience. On good days, my life is permeated with God's presence. I open my eyes in the morning and am in awe of the light of the morning sun. Kissing my wife and children goodbye, I am overcome with the way that our very imperfect family generates love and joy among us. Solving a difficult challenge on the job, I take a breath and notice the constructive, healing processes that I have harnessed.

I don't believe that God decided to cause the sun to rise this morning. I don't believe that God watches over my children and makes them mature. I don't believe that God solves my work problems. But in all these cases and more, I do believe that I live in a world that God underlies and suffuses. I do believe that I do not generate my virtuous deeds and insights independently but rather am connected to a greater Source of strength and blessing with whom I am always trying to align.

I believe some things are right and some things are wrong, and I believe that when you do the wrong thing, you are opposing the divine will, and that the world is so constructed that you will suffer for it internally.

Not all Reconstructionists share each of these specific beliefs. What we do share is a conviction that a) the words of the Torah, and consequently the *mitzvot* (including those about prayer) were not literally spoken and commanded by God at Sinai **and** b) that **nevertheless** our inherited tradition (including the prayerbook) is an invaluable treasure that can help us to unfold the deeper meaning of our lives and our relationship to God.

In other words, if I had brought a tape recorder to Mount Sinai, I believe there would have been no audible divine voice to record; only the human side of the conversation was recordable. But I also believe that God was at Sinai, encountered by Moses, so that even though the words of the Torah are Moses' human interpretation of God's will, they are inspired by that encounter and contain divine insight.

And so with every divine-human encounter up to the present day: what we hear and understand of God is necessarily conditioned by who we are, by where and when we live, by our culture's values, by our individual propensities. We are the flawed filters through which the word of God is conveyed. Therefore, we Reconstructionists don't believe that everything that preceding generations said about God and about what God wants is true. But we do believe in a God who is beyond all of the historically conditioned human portraits of God. And we seek to express our intuitions of God in ways that both correspond to the teachings we inherit and that are compelling in the cultural idiom of our own day.

There are three primary ways that Jews have pictured God at work in our lives - as the God of Creation, the God of Revelation, and the God of Redemption. Each of these can still serve us well as we seek to give words to our encounters with God:

**CREATION:** God is the Source of the universe. God is therefore met in the laws and cycles of nature, in the expanse of the galaxies, in the miracle of life. Even as scientists explore quarks and black holes, new facets of DNA and new evidence about evolution, we are aware that we will never comprehend it all. But when we catch the breeze on a sunny spring day or watch a toddler take her first step, we get a glimpse of the ineffable oneness that underlies it all.

**REVELATION:** God is the Source of our spiritual and moral passion. The human species may or may not be the crown of creation, but there is definitely a connection between our minds and souls and the divinely infused world out there. It is as if God's word overflows perpetually, embedded in the color of the sky and the behavior of groups, in test tubes and mathematical formulas, waiting for us to open ourselves to its message and interpret it for our lives and time. The more open we are, the more we hear.

**REDEMPTION:** God is the Source of all of our tendencies to help and love and cooperate. It is easy enough for each of us to remain self-centered, not to care about others, to regard others as Other and therefore not worthy of our kindness. Human history documents the prevalence of these tendencies. But there is a divine spark in each of us that can be nurtured, a source of goodness and caring that can move us to act on principle, to do what is right even if it is not in our own best interest in the short term. It enables us to envision the world redeemed so that we can work towards that vision.

The kabbalists seized upon the rabbinic assertion that we are partners with God in the work of creation and expanded on it. They pictured this world as having been created imperfect by God, who then needs us to release the divine sparks hidden within it.

### WHY RECONSTRUCTIONISTS PRAY

Here then is a nonexhaustive list of why a Reconstructionist Jew, who does not believe that God hears her or his prayers nor answers our petitions, might choose to pray:

**1. Spiritual Discipline.** Most of us go through the day without experiencing God's presence. A spiritual sense is a faculty that must be developed and maintained. Focusing regularly on our sacred encounters helps us to notice them as they occur.

**2. Meditation.** Most of us live at a very rapid pace. We welcome the opportunity to slow down to remember what has deeper meaning beyond our daily distractions.

**3. Group Connection.** If we are not careful, it is pretty easy to become isolated. Even if we interact frequently with others, our daily lives rarely afford many opportunities to let our guards down and express what is really important to us. It is a real treat to be connected to a group, all of whom are seeking together.

**4. Celebration.** For many of us, few experiences transport us beyond ourselves like that of group singing. I may be awash in gratitude for a life cycle passage, or for the blossoming of flowers in my yard, but without my *minyan*, where could I sing out?

**5. Group Support.** Life is unfortunately filled with disappointment, illness, and tragedy. Social scientists now tell us what we already knew: that recovery from family discord, depression, and even physical illness is enhanced when we experience the support of a caring group. You therefore might believe that praying for a sick person is efficacious even if you don't believe that God intercedes supernaturally. Our prayers do have power.

**6. Rededication to Principles.** It is very easy to lose perspective, to miss the forest for the trees, to get so wound up in a situation that you lose sight of who you are and what you stand for. Praying draws us out of ourselves and helps to restore the larger picture.

**7. Acknowledgment of Need.** Most of us are raised to think that we have control of our lives, and that therefore we are responsible for what happens to us—good and bad. In truth, we have far less control than we think, and it is good to acknowledge our vulnerability. Prayer allows us to ask for help, admitting that we need help, that we are frightened or overwhelmed or desperate. Removing our defenses before God can move us to the honest self-awareness we require to get past our personal obstacles.

## USING THE SIDDUR

The rabbis engaged in interesting discussions about the relationship in prayer between *keva* (fixed prayers, the words of which are provided) and *kavanah* (spontaneous reflections by the one praying). They understood that mindless recitation of words written by others was not prayer. But they also understood that without a prepared format to induce us to pray, most of us would rarely achieve a prayerful state.

The traditional prayers in the Siddur are thus intended as a format to assist us in getting in touch with our own personal prayers. In my own experience, for example, it was the regular recitation of the *Modim* (thanksgiving) section of the Amidah that first enabled me, after six months, to become regularly connected with my feelings of thankfulness. I then went on to other parts of the fixed service until the entire fixed service has become a set of mnemonics that jump-start me in an ever new variety of meditations.

But isn't the traditional service, even in the new Reconstructionist siddur, laden with anthropomorphic, supernatural language that presents challenges to our intellectual integrity and is thus an obstacle to genuine prayer? The answer for many people is yes—unless and until we reinterpret the meaning of images so often that we reach a point at which we read them with new meanings without needing to reinterpret consciously any longer. Here are two illustrations:

**1. *Modim*.** In every Amidah, we *daven* (pray) the *Modim* paragraph, a prayer of thanksgiving in which we say:

We acknowledge you, declare your praise, and thank you...for your miracles that greet us every day, and for your wonders and good things that are with us every hour.

Now the words *niseha* (your miracles) and *nifla'oteha* (your wonders) are terms that have traditionally been used to apply to God's splitting of the Sea of Reeds and God's enabling of the one flask of oil to burn for eight days—in other words, to classical supernatural events in which we Reconstructionists do not literally believe.

From what I have written above, it should be obvious that I believe that it is a central challenge for late twentieth-century Reconstructionist Jews, living in a secular society, to become more aware of God's presence in our lives. Along with the rest of Western culture of which we are a part, we tend to reduce the wonders of nature or of human development to their scientific causes, ignoring their

sacred dimension and thus impoverishing our spirits. On that level alone, these traditional words can be helpful if we use them to re-introduce a sense of awe, wonder, and thankfulness into our consciousness.

Do you nevertheless remain resistant to using the word “miracle”? Consider then the interpretation of Rabbi Levi ben Gerson (Gersonides), a fourteenth century Jewish philosopher who was as uncomfortable as we are with the notion that God intervenes supernaturally to perform miracles. He understood miracles as extraordinary events that violated no laws of nature but were sufficiently rare so that most people are surprised by them. He believed it is the function of prophets, who have a heightened understanding of nature, to anticipate and point out these extraordinary events, and to use them to remind the rest of us of God’s presence in the world.

Here then is a “traditional” (over 600 years old, and published in traditional Bible commentaries) understanding of miracles: natural events that evoke awe and wonder. A sunrise. Childbirth. Love. Insight. An unexpected recovery from illness. An unanticipated peace treaty. An overwhelming obstacle overcome. Miracles.

**2. The Morning Blessings.** Every *Shaharit* morning service begins with *Birkhot Hashahar*, the Morning Blessings, in which we praise God for such things as “making the blind to see,” “clothing the naked,” “making the captive free,” etc.

How can we honestly say that our non-supernatural God does these things? God doesn’t cause blindness, and most blind people are never able to see. And if the vision of a blind person is restored by surgery, thanking God for the work of the surgeon is a bit naive and saccharine.

In each of these cases, it is critically important to realize that our questions are not new in Jewish history. It is incorrect to imagine all of our ancestors as pious, simple peasants who thought they literally saw God’s finger in every occurrence, waiting around for the next miraculous intervention. They knew that blind people don’t see, that beggars in rags aren’t often provided with wardrobes, that captives often perish. And so we have a centuries-old treasury of interpretative traditions that give rich expression to the multiple meanings of these phrases.

There are many forms of blindness. We don’t see because we fail to notice out of carelessness. Or because we are enraged. Or because we lack the insight that comes from maturity. Or because we are blinded by preconceptions or prejudice. Or because we are emotionally blocked. Or because we had glaucoma or cataracts. Or because we lacked the right teachers and mentors. Or because cultural conceptions misled us. Seen in this way, all of life is a process of acquiring new and better sight, and God is the force within us and around us that helps us to grow in ever new ways.

Each of these *berakhot* acknowledges an aspect of our experience in which it is possible to become frustrated, to lose hope, to get caught in a rut. The Morning Blessings are an invaluable tool to help us begin the new day by opening to new possibilities.

Each of us can be enriched in our own way by the experience of regular *davening*. Praying allows us to center our focus, to look inward, to be elevated beyond our individual concerns, and the words and structure of the traditional service can be very helpful in all of these regards. The answer to our prayers comes not from a supernatural God but from our own transformed hearts.

## The Nature of Spirituality

Sheila Peltz Weinberg

I look back at my life and try to chart my spiritual journey. I find that my spiritual journey is the essence of my life. It is what is left. It is what is remembered. Yet it is fragile and evanescent. It evaporates upon close analysis and contact. It has an eternal quality and it only exists in the moment. It is not something I can gaze at, put in my drawer, or send through the mail. The most precious threads woven through my life are the most gossamer and resistant to close analysis. Ultimately everyone must tell the story of their own lives and identify their own threads—sturdy and diaphanous—that form the spiritual structure of their days.

I would like to offer seven strands that emerge as I look back. This is not a definitive list. Rather it is an effort to grasp the components and moments of a process we call our spiritual journey. I hope you will be able to identify these strands in your own lives, even though the details of your stories may be very different.

### THE RHYTHM OF HIDING AND RETURNING

When I was 13, in 1959, I wanted to become bat mitzvah even though I had never been to a bat mitzvah and it was not something anyone expected me to do. The rabbi of my synagogue said I could become bat mitzvah on Friday night. Since the Torah was not read on Friday night, I would not be called for an *aliyah*, which was still reserved for men. I was also allowed to choose my own *haftarah* as long as it was not the *haftarah* of that particular Shabbat. I chose Jonah. I had studied it during the summer at Camp Ramah. The theme that drew me to Jonah was the fact that Jonah could not run away from God. At 13, I was at the height of a very pious phase, filled with innocence and passion, in close relationship with a demanding God. I sought earnestly to fulfill His expectations of me. This harsh faith was an anchor in a lonely childhood. It was very important for me to affirm the fact that I would never be lost from God's sight.

In Genesis, Adam and Eve attempt to hide from God after they eat the fruit of the tree. Of course God finds them. I played out the rhythm of innocent connection and subsequent loss of certainty, absence of caring and hiding that so interested me at the time of my bat mitzvah. From my late teens until the birth of my son, when I was 29, God, religious practice, and Judaism as a faith were remote from my life.

God found me, too, or I recognized my own inability to stay hidden. The return bore only a shadowy resemblance to the youthful connection. I was much more hesitant. God had changed as well. He wasn't a He anymore. God's presence was more internal, more loving and generous, less particular and more universal, less grumpy and scolding. The return did not come through the synagogue or the Jewish community, but it led me back to a Jewish community that had also changed and had become more accepting, more tolerant, less perfect, more human.



## **LIBERATING AND TURNING MOMENTS—DISCOVERY**

The process of return, which I hope continues my entire life, has been marked by certain electric moments. In those moments I realized that I was not alone, that I was not crazy, that I could be seen and understood by others who spoke my language. In 1970 I went to my first women's group. It was an astonishing experience of naming truths about my relationship to self and others that I never believed could be stated out loud. The naming of a hidden truth is the beginning of awakening in both spiritual and political contexts. In 1970 I found the awakening too threatening and terrifying and I hid for another seven years. But it was futile. The seeds had been planted.

When I came across the work of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan I felt profoundly liberated. I loved Judaism deeply but hated the aspects of Judaism that I saw as sexist and xenophobic—or anti-democratic. Here was a brilliant articulation of Judaism that I could embrace with my whole being. No part of my mind or heart needed to stay hidden and denied.

When I moved to Philadelphia in 1977 I felt like I was coming home to a community of spiritual brothers and sisters. I found people who validated my questions, who understood my struggles, whose understanding and love raised my own badly tattered self-image.

I have been blessed several other times in my life to find kindred spirits and to feel the great joy of a burden shared and isolation crumbling: when I joined a group of spiritual Jewish feminists; when I met with Jews practicing meditation; and when I walked into a group of addicts who were willing to face their own powerlessness in the face of their addiction. There is an extraordinary spiritual power in naming our secrets. The word spoken literally creates a new reality of common effort to replace a private prison of shame and doubt. Blessed is the One who Spoke and the World Came into Being.

## **TAKING RISKS AND MAKING CHOICES**

We all meet crossroads. These are spiritual opportunities. Even though every day of our lives we face the unknown, we are often unaware due to our routines and habits. When a major choice or change confronts us, we directly face the immensity of the unknown with which we live. My life teaches that when I face my greatest fear directly, I am helped to leap across the abyss.

There have been times in my life when there was a compelling reason to take a particular step, but the fear of the unknown was overwhelming. These included leaving my marriage, entering rabbinical school, leaving Philadelphia, getting on the pulpit for the first time, and letting go of addictive behaviors. The only antidote to fear is faith and the only way that faith arises is when we have the experience in our cells of walking through our fears. To the extent that my life is totally governed by my fears I have very little freedom, and my spirituality is at a low level. I am immobile and confined in a small life.

One way to conceptualize the spiritual path is as a perennial re-engagement with fear. As we touch the fear, as we seek hands to grasp across it, as we see ourselves smiling on the other end, we gain the strength to meet the next moment, the next abyss. I am still not looking to hang glide or bungee jump, but I hope to be prepared for the next risk that my life urges me to take.

### HIGHER PURPOSE

I love speaking to children before their bar or bat mitzvah about the prophets. I explain to them that the prophets have a higher view than the rest of us. They see the bigger picture. They are committed to realizing certain values of goodness, compassion, justice and truth in the world, and they know that there will be a lot of ups and downs along the way. They see the consequences of venality and corruption, and they believe that goodness is its own ultimate reward.

To the extent that I remain committed to values of justice and compassion, the alleviation of oppression, the redistribution of wealth and power in our world, I feel close to God's purpose. This has been a constant theme in my life. I fell in love with the ancient prophetic message of liberation as a child. I never doubted that one of the central directives of Judaism was to remember our liberation from Egypt in order to be a force for the freedom of the weak and powerless.

Of course it is true that history does not always manifest these ideals. In fact, the course of public affairs may be streaming in the opposite direction as politicians scapegoat marginal groups—immigrants, welfare mothers, gays. This does not diminish the importance of the message and the urgency to proclaim it.

In our time gay and lesbian Jews have been welcomed into the synagogue in certain quarters. This is an important example of spiritual process where a part of our community formerly feared and distanced is being embraced as a fully authentic part of the whole community with great gifts to offer.

The collective spiritual imperative of *tikun olam* (repair of the world) has always been a major component of my spiritual life. I hope that I have the courage and the internal strength, with allies and friends, to lift up the banner of the prophets in an increasingly ugly political climate.

### A WORD ABOUT TEACHERS

I have had many spiritual teachers over the years. Those whom I remember with deepest gratitude are those who encouraged me to be myself, who returned my questions back to my life unanswered. They were the ones with the most excitement and passion about their own lives and work. They were the ones who listened best and spoke to the person, not to the abstract point. I have learned that only those with a great deal of self-confidence are willing to be themselves, and allow others to be themselves. This is the greatest gift of a spiritual teacher.

The content that I learned was never more important than the process, the attitude, the respect and patience that were embodied by the teacher. As a rabbi and teacher myself I recognize the obstacles

before teachers. I must continually ask myself if I am being honest. I must confront my own agendas. Every time I experience something Jewish or spiritual I must ask myself, is this for them or for me? I must face the danger of losing my self in the role of rabbi.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Spirituality manifests most profoundly in my close relationships, as a daughter, mother, partner/lover and friend. In this arena I am challenged to trust God, rather than play God. I am challenged to move from a state of needy dependence when I demand that the other gratify my wishes, expectations and imagination to a state of acceptance and understanding of all our human strengths and weaknesses and a willingness to give and receive.

The human spiritual journey begins in a state of enormous dependence and helplessness. Throughout our entire life we change and learn in relation to those we love. In this process, hopefully, our capacity to love and accept ourselves and others grows. In my adolescent relationships I was willing to give my power away. I was willing to rely on someone else to validate my very existence. In this process I felt the need to control and manage the other person, because my entire life was in his hands.

The process of individuation, of learning my own values and standing up for them, allows me to meet another human being who is different from me with respect and appreciation. I consider this a spiritual process because it allows the unique beauty of each of God's creations, each an image of Divinity, to shine in our own special way. It also allows us to value the other as a precious and original beloved child of God. It is not easy for many of us to learn these spiritual lessons. We may have to experience great pain and loss. We may find ourselves wounding our children and suffering rejection and abuse. It is difficult to learn these lessons when our parents never made these journeys. They could not provide us with models and sometimes even sought unwittingly, because of their own fears and needs, to hinder us from becoming whole and separate human beings.

It is no accident that the Torah is filled with family stories. It is not coincidental that the Jewish people began in a family setting beset with conflict and turmoil. It is no accident that our ancestors, too, sought to know God in the context of family and that we put our faith in the possibility of the transmission of God's compassion from generation to generation.

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

We need to close with a few concrete words about practice. Any spiritual path will encourage integration, namely coordinated action on all levels, body, mind, emotion and spirit. I have vacillated over the years in how much to embrace, how eclectic to be, how to balance the ever struggling dyad of *keva* (regular discipline) with *kavanah* (spontaneous expression). I have experienced periods of living with the notion that the more difficult and demanding my observance, the more pleasing I would be to God. At other times I railed against hypocrisy in worship and would only do what was perfectly meant and felt. Today I think we need to practice ritual. Sometimes they will be inspired.

Sometimes they will be dull. I think regularity and commitment is basic to a religious life and Judaism certainly offers a most exotic and tantalizing banquet.

Some practices are more basic than others. I believe prayer and/or meditation is essential. I need a regular intention to seek God's presence in my life. I need to be available regularly to Spirit. I can't imagine Judaism without Shabbat and its tremendous power to connect us to self, other and God. I value *kashrut*—conscious religious forms of eating. Jewish rituals elevate and enhance the cycle of the year and one's life. Torah study is a crucial Jewish spiritual practice. I also value diversity of practice among individuals and among communities and the process of working through these issues of practice in community. In our day it is imperative that we struggle together to apply Jewish values, texts and practices to ethical dilemmas involving health care, work, sexuality, and power politics.

How we integrate our Jewish learning and observance with our spiritual growth is a great personal and collective challenge. I am in the early stages of this process, even though this has been a long-term goal. I believe that this is the task of reconstructing, renewing Judaism in our time. We have before us the task of identifying and holding the varied strands of our spiritual life and weaving with the shuttle of tradition the whole garment of holiness for ourselves and others. Fortunately we are not alone in this task, nor is it incumbent upon us to complete it. It is before us, however, and it is a great joy and honor to begin.



## The Journey Towards Prayer: How Beautiful Are Your Footsteps

Steven Sager

A knock at my office door. Someone, more or less of my own generation, brings a question that is hard to form, hard to ask, a question that, until recently, was hard even to imagine—How can I learn to pray? The question captures an urgency that rises from a thicket of some experience. It is a question produced by a ripening of spirit, echoing from high or deep moments that are beyond words: “My soul insists that I say something but I don’t know what to say.”

I understand. My soul is just as insistent. I oftentimes do not know what to say. And this is as it should be. Experience, ripening of the spirit, deepening of the mind and heart always open a gap between yearning and language. Perhaps I am at a different stage of the journey towards prayer, but I am a traveler as surely as he, or she, who brings the question. My own quest is renewed each time someone knocks, asks, and invites me to share a length of the journey towards prayer.

At my stage of the journey, however, I know something that is, as yet, unknown to my questioner; each step carries its own reward. The ancient sages lovingly enwrap the pilgrimage to Jerusalem in a verse of the Bible’s great love song: “How beautiful are your footsteps!” (Song of Songs 7:2) Each step is beautiful—more than one can know at the beginning.

I have discovered, in my journeys, that there are some common stages, plateaus of experience, to which serious travelers arrive. These plateaus offer a grander vision of riches and challenges that lay ahead. I hope to narrate the journey towards prayer by describing several of these stages to which travelers arrive in their own ways and at their own hours.

Let me describe some of my fellow travelers. She is Jewish by birth—tied in a mysterious, powerful way to a tradition of Hebrew names and Kaddish. He is a Jew by choice, schooled in a rudimentary way, bearing no pack of Jewish experiences. She is the product of a liberal afternoon Hebrew school—knowing something about *mitzvot*, observing a few. A Hebrew day school-educated traveler learned all the right words and music, but something is still missing. Another product of a liberal synagogue has strong ties to the *Pesach* Seder and the Shabbat candles. The uneasy truce between the adult spirit and childhood education is now broken, because a son will soon be 12 years old.

These are the people who invite me to share a length of the journey with them. These travelers stand at the door bearing a yearning, a longing for attachment to something higher and deeper than the everydayness of their lives. The one so equipped who knocks on my door—on the Rabbi’s door—supposes that, somehow, Jewish prayer can help to name and shape that which rises up, unanticipated, amidst the profusion of the everyday.

Such a traveler has already, unwittingly, arrived at the first stage that leads an adult to prayer: An adult who wants to pray must carry a yearning for attachment to something higher and deeper than the self that she knows day to day. Furthermore, she must have the sense that this yearning for attachment can best be explored, named, and shaped by the language and liturgy of Israel.

Adults begin with yearning; children with learning. For the child, disciplined, rote behavior creates the vessel into which a young, molten consciousness can pour itself. Instruction in the language and form of prayer is the first line of service to the ongoing needs of the worshiping community. The child who can vocalize the ancient words and join in the routines is able to strike an adult pose in the midst of a congregation as it fulfills the duty of public prayer. After all, bodies, not spirits, are counted in the *minyan*; voices, not souls, respond, "Amen."

But the adult who wants to pray seeks not only to be counted, but to account for himself. An adult journeys with a pack of life skills, ripened fruit of experience, of intellect. . . . An adult who wants to pray requires different guidance than a child. My fellow travelers and I are not children; nor are our motivations the same as those of children.

Unfortunately, it is to the paradigm of child-teaching that we most often turn in order to address the needs of adults who want to pray. We tend to identify a paucity of information as the flaw; lack of technical know-how is the quantifiable, observable—and correctable—constraint upon the spirit.

What is the curriculum for learning to pray? Suppose one learns the history of Jewish prayer and becomes well versed in its rules. Suppose one learns to form the sounds of the Hebrew and begins to recognize some vocabulary; the texts begin to reveal themselves as compositions of ancient Judaism, as the work of medieval prayer-poets. Language, movement, melody, story, all learned, the road well mapped—is one ready to pray?

Consider this: "One who has knowledge but lacks the awe of heaven is like a treasurer who possess the inner keys to the vault but lacks the outer keys to the treasure house. How can he enter?" (*Babylonian Talmud*, Shabbat, 31a). There is learning that is locked away from experience. Even with learning, practically speaking, "How will he enter" the treasured place? The Talmud suggests, "Let him enter through the gate of his awe." In my experience, "yearning" more often than "awe" characterizes one who travels towards prayer. ("Yearning" has the taste of "search" about it. "Awe" is a mountain already discovered, before which I already stand.) The learning is important, and necessary. However, let him enter the gates of the synagogue prayer service through his yearning.

The stage of yearning lies before a steep climb: "I am lost in the service, Rabbi. I always seem to be in the wrong place." The predicament is described in map language. The siddur (prayerbook) is the map that cannot be read. Adults know enough to be intimidated by the siddur. "Siddur" means "ordered," "arranged." The word "siddur" is a passive participle; it is *faits accomplis*, majestic, inscrutable, perfectly ordered: first this, then (and only then) that. Can I ever learn enough? Will I always feel inadequate, lost?

Here is an assumption worth challenging: To be lost is bad. I am not saying that information is unimportant, that longitude and latitude are contrivances that mar and dilute pure travel. The language of the prayer service is a treasure for which one must labor. The structure of the prayer service is glorious. Its very architecture proclaims sublime messages; the merge and flow of its themes carries a sense of wise-hearted presence to the world—evening, morning, noon. The shades and colors of scripture and song-poem, the textured threads of language gather up the consciousness of centuries, echoes of the past, a chorus of voices joining ours.

Yet, even with all of the learning, how will one enter? If one wants to be an archeologist of the prayer service one will never pray. Layer upon layer of prayer strata invite study, reflection, contemplation. But the experience of prayer can only come from getting lost in a world to which I am certain that I belong; I am compelled to celebrate, struggle, praise, accuse, reflect, and grow towards myself right here—in the traffic of these centuries, in the company of these throngs.

The pray-er who enters through the gate of her yearning and tries to acquire learning along the way will certainly get lost. How can it be otherwise? The articulate, seasoned adult now struggles for language! The polished professional labors over syllables! What is more, those words—mimicked from others, haltingly formed—have no meaning! In so many other aspects of her life she has a voice that matches her need for self-expression. How can she help but feel lost, dislocated, when feeling and language are painfully out of joint?

For the lost traveler, the “here and now” can be a nightmare. “Here” is a signpost of failure. “Now” is a moment of engulfing embarrassment, of anxiety. “Lost” is the defeat of the reasoning intellect; “lost” is the knife that cuts the clear dichotomy of learned and ignorant, right and wrong. This is the manner of “lost” that accompanies many adults to the synagogue, an anguish intensified by the significant presence of a Siddur-map that cannot be read.

“Lost” only appears to be an assault on the intellect because an adult’s concept of knowing comes so fully from the world of learning, of map reading. One who feels so assaulted would do well to remember that she is entering prayer through the gate of yearning. Unlike the one who has only the inner keys of learning, the one who has yearning does not have to puzzle over how to enter. She who owns the outer keys knows to take her yearning together with her desire to name it into the synagogue. She enters into a rich world where the very search is the destination, where meaning will be born of something other than directed intention. Hers is not a journey to find a way to a place, but rather to explore a place in which she has already arrived, a place where her spirit knows that it can and must exert itself.

The spirit knows to honor the intelligence of yearning that did not emerge from the intellect alone, but from a fire that fuels it—sparks of which illuminate chasms of pains and pleasures that ripen and sustain us, chasms which gape at the edge of language. Let intellect wait patiently at the border of language; let it wait there for the yearning spirit now lost in the flow of public prayer. The spirit will have much to teach it. The intellect knows the name of yearning; it does not know the yearning itself.



Yearning is a pre-condition of prayer and a condition of "lostness." I would like to offer an invitation to be lost:

I walked around Prague, hardly caring if I hit the right tourist spots . . . getting lost, leaving the hotel without a map as if I had no destination. I just walked. . . . I was in the thirties, I'd finally arrived in my parents' decade. . . . For the first time I recognized the truth of beauty. . . . I had ceased to be even a reverse immigrant—I sought no one. . . . I walked and got lost and didn't care because I couldn't get lost.

Patricia Hampl, *A Romantic Education*

"I got lost and didn't care because I couldn't get lost." Here is the challenge to the one whose yearning brings him to the prayer service, Siddur-map in hand: relieve the anxiety of getting lost by shifting the very ground upon which its drama unfolds. Find lostness, as in, "I found myself lost in the music"—freed of the constraints of expectation, privileging travel and exploration over expectation, a wanderer become pilgrim, not tourist.

Another stage of the journey towards prayer is that one must be ready to be lost. More than that, one must be hospitable to lostness as a richly important way of learning by entering into the flow, into the traffic of the prayer service without expectation—but with patience! (Rabbi Yohanan of Sepphoris anticipates the dilemma of the adult who despairs of ever learning the vast tradition: "The open-eyed one says, 'I will learn two rules today and two tomorrow until I have acquired it all.'")

Wandering among the texts, collecting letters, words, and phrases along the way—the one who journeys towards prayer arrives at the next stage: Yearning spills itself into words. The first words of prayer will be a phrase of the prayer service that has become comfortable, familiar—attractive, perhaps, because of cadence, melody, or texture of sound. Perhaps familiarity stems from the frequency with which a phrase appears in the service, perhaps from that text's meaning discerned from a translation.

Perhaps it will be the same for fellow travelers as it was for me. *Shema Yisra'el* will be the first point plotted on the Siddur-map, the first vessel of word into which the yearning is poured. "*Shema Yisra'el, Adonay eloheynu, Adonay ehad!*" Let the declaration stand—ancient, powerful in its very utterance. No translation beyond the essential principle: **one!**

I am joining my voice to the voices of those who declared, "**One,**" and therein made themselves "One." I am attached by ancient word to the One of Israel. Again, Hampl: "For the first time I recognized the truth of beauty. . . . I walked and got lost and didn't care because I couldn't get lost."

At last, the truth of beauty: I am part of a One that declares, "**One!**" These words evoke, they "call out the voice" of my yearning to be attached to something higher and deeper than my everyday. In my journey towards prayer I have reached another stage. I exult in attachment through common word. Now, when I get lost I will not care, because I cannot get lost.

“*Shema Yisra’el* . . .” I thrill to feel each syllable. My mouth shaping breath into declaration. I am imagining the words in my heights, I am sieving them up from my depths. I am exhaling my people’s faith. I am part of a Oneness born up and into the world on the breath of countless generations.

Molten yearning is spilled into the vessel of sacred language. Intention (*kavanah*) meets the regular practice of a fixed form (*keva*) to produce prayer. The pray-er who begins to pay attention to *keva*—to the fixity of prayer at its times and in its language—stands at a new stage on the journey into prayer. On the one hand, the spirit is no longer moored to words that do not come easily to the tongue; it can ride the crest of discipline, climbing higher than the well practiced words. On the other hand, fixity in prayer makes it increasingly apparent that yearning is not present at every moment. Yearning sometimes says to practice, “carry on without me.” With the appearance of *keva* a new relationship with prayer begins to take shape. Sometimes I carry the prayer. Sometimes the prayer carries me while I slip away, unnoticed, to wander among the letters while still offering the words.

Now, meaning and questions grow into the increasingly familiar curve of letters and into the flow of the few words that I rehearse regularly. As the practiced word begins to acquire shades of meaning, I, among other travelers, see a challenge on the horizon. What happens if—when—I begin to struggle with the meaning of the now familiar prayer text? The next stage on the journey towards prayer is the stage of honoring and acknowledging the struggles over the words that are emerging ever more clearly from the mists.

My advice to travelers offered from my own journey: Keep in mind that the truth of beauty is the commonality of shared words in which one can get lost without being lost. Philosophy, theology, commentary will have their moments. For now, it is enough that I am part of the One that can sustain the struggles of mind and heart that must come as I learn more about my place in the many-threaded diversity. The truth of beauty takes precedence over the beauty of truth. It is sufficient that the base of the spine knows the exhilaration of this merge of yearning and language.

The traveler has reached the next stage on the journey towards prayer when the safe haven of familiar text becomes a landmark that founds new journeys. One for whom the first six words of the Shema are now well plotted in the Siddur might now venture out on other explorations, raising new questions about an extended horizon.

Venturing a few steps past “*Shema Yisra’el, Adonay eloheynu, Adonay ehad*,” one discovers, “You shall speak of these words when lying down and when rising up.” We learn that this is an invitation to declare, “**One!**” at the edges of wakefulness. Exploring the plains of text that extend before Shema’s grand rise, one discovers a *berahah* that appropriately celebrates morning or evening—the outposts at which the world’s splendid orchestration is best seen, at which **Oneness** is rightly declared and elaborated in the world. Now the declaration, “**One!**” rises and unifies a larger landscape, with center and the surroundings complementing and completing one another. The domain of Oneness is extended into the night, into the morning; into the house where one rise and retires.

**“How beautiful are your footsteps!”** (Song of Songs 7:2) Step by step, one who journeys into prayer unifies the landscape. “*Shema Yisra’el, Adonay eloheynu, Adonay ehad*” becomes a feature among others, familiar, yet freshly viewed, more beautiful against the backdrop of its now expanded setting. Such is the terrain of *Shema Yisra’el*.

This is the cycle of stages in the journey towards prayer: One travels from the stage of yearning to the stage of trustfulness and from there to the enwording of yearning in ways that proclaim attachment to something greater than the self—higher and deeper than the everyday. The stage at which yearning and wording work together leads to the stage of honoring the questions that spring from a mind that can relax into the comfort of familiar words and rhythms.

Finally, the pray-er arrives at the stage of beginning the cycle again. The journeying pray-er ventures forth time and again led by yearning, solidifying knowledge and experience into a new context for “lostness” that leads to ever widening circles of knowing, of understanding, of attachment in which yearning is honored and given voice.

We travelers are a great throng—travelers become pilgrims—all embarking upon our own cycles while sharing the company of the journey. To us the sages say, “How beautiful are your steps.” In such company one is inclined to show hospitality to fellow travelers—to those who knock on the door.

## Some Call It God

Sidney H. Schwarz

For the past three years I have taught a course at the local Jewish Community Center on "Exploring Jewish Spirituality." Typical courses get ten to twenty registrants; this course has attracted sixty to seventy. About half are affiliated with synagogues. I ask, "How many of you would say that your synagogue experience has been spiritually satisfying?" Very few hands remain in the air. Then I ask, "How many of you have explored other religious/spiritual disciplines?" Over half raise their hands. Some were part of the pool of synagogue members; most were not.

The synagogue world, the primary vehicle delivering Judaism to Jews in America, has failed in its mission to teach our heritage in a way that is spiritually compelling. Likewise, large numbers of Jews have taken to exploring a myriad of other religious/spiritual paths. Both the findings of the National Jewish Population Study (1990) and a more recent sociological study on American religious mores<sup>1</sup> bear this out. Since millions of dollars are currently being spent on outreach to marginally affiliated and unaffiliated Jews, it would seem logical to spend some energy in discovering how *batey tefilah* (houses of Jewish prayer) can become more inviting places to Jews who are seeking a spiritual dimension to their lives.

The problem of spiritually dead synagogues knows no denominational boundaries. All rabbis and prayer leaders must better understand what Jews are looking for within a religious institution to meet their spiritual hunger. I dare say that if only 10% of the money that Jews currently spend at ashrams, Buddhist retreats, mass therapy experiences and in psycho-spiritual counseling were spent in the synagogue orbit, we would see a renaissance of Jewish religious life in America that would stagger the imagination. Allow me to make some suggestions to take us down that road.

### GOD TALK—GOD BABBLE

When I ask my spirituality classes if they believe in God, about half raise their hands, albeit tentatively. This is a good start because part of what I later teach them is that this is not only a bad question, it is the wrong question. When, however, I ask them how many have had profound and life-affirming spiritual experiences, virtually all of the hands shoot up. Only after I ask this somewhat ambiguous question do we begin to explore what we mean by the term "spiritual." Answers vary, but they fall along a clear line: a sense of oneness, a relationship to something greater than oneself, an ability to transcend the everyday, a sense of inner self and inner peace, and a feeling of being part of some universal consciousness. And all this from people who are not sure that they believe in God!

---

<sup>1</sup> Wade C. Roof, *et. al.*, *A Generation of Seekers: Baby Boomers and the Quest for Spiritual Style* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

## IS ANYONE SPEAKING A LANGUAGE THAT THESE JEWS CAN RELATE TO?

Our Reconstructionist theological legacy here is very rich indeed. From Mordecai Kaplan's transnaturalism to Harold Schulweis' "predicate theology" to Arthur Green's "neo-Hasidism," Reconstructionism can stake claim to some of the most creative theological thinking of this century. Each of these three theological positions moves us beyond an overtly supernatural and hierarchical vision of God to one that is increasingly humanistic and horizontal. They allow us to take our experiences of life and see them in transcendent dimensions. When I read the New Age and Eastern religious texts that seem to capture the imagination of so many Jews, I tell the people who share them with me how beautiful are the insights of these books and traditions, and then I guide them to parallels in the Jewish tradition.

We are losing Jews because the theological models that are being put forth continue to be largely literalist and fundamentalist, despite Reconstructionists' having rejected these models over seventy years ago. Today there is an explosion of books and courses about God in the Jewish community. But I still don't see rabbis and synagogues translating this sophisticated thinking about God to the places where it matters most—the congregational school and religious worship. I am convinced that Reconstructionism is uniquely prepared to bring such a sophisticated theological message to Jews who hunger for one.

Too many rabbis respond to the current upsurge of interest in God and spirituality by simply using the G-word more frequently from the pulpit. I am afraid that this comes across to most Jews as merely God-babble. We turn off when we cannot relate to the God that is being invoked. Rabbis must connect the G-word to the very real experiences of Jews. Since we rabbis mean different things when we use the G-word in different contexts, we must explicate our code. I cannot now use the G-word without an explanation that sounds apologetic. But I gladly accept this fate because, in my experience, it has meant that people don't automatically turn off when I use the term "God." Instead, they are brought to a far better question than "Do I believe in God?" They ask themselves, "What experience in my life can I associate with what our ancestors called God?"

*Kol Haneshamah* is a pioneering work in this regard. By utilizing different attributes for God each time a Hebrew name for God is translated, worshipers can have their understanding broadened by the infinite number of ways we can see a transcendent power manifested in our lives and in our worlds.

## LITURGY: FROM PRISON TO GATEWAY

What rabbis say or don't say is only one part of the problem. We all know too well our problem with our liturgy. We can't live with it, and we can't live without it. On the one hand, the language is so hierarchical, supernaturalist and male-oriented that it at least confirms, if not creates, the fundamentalist assumptions about God that turn off so many Jews. On the other hand, to jettison the better part of that inherited liturgy is to rob our generation and future generations of Jews of a critical link to our past. We are, after all, perpetuating a tradition with a three thousand year-old history. Even Mordecai Kaplan, in his editing of the first series of Reconstructionist liturgy, could not bring

himself to alter the basic *Baruh Atah Adonay* formula, even though we could make the case that retaining it undermined much of what he wanted to convey theologically.

For most Jews, therefore, the Jewish liturgy is a prison. It is constricting. It suffocates. It is boring. English translations, when they are good ones, help a bit. Alternative versions of prayers help much more. When we are able to express the essence of a traditional prayer in a way that relates to the real experience of people, then suddenly the prayer becomes not only a link to our past, but also a gateway to express and make more meaningful something that has been lived. The richness and beauty of the traditional liturgy sits behind a locked door. We must provide the key.

### ONE EXAMPLE

In the *Ahavah Rabah* prayer, we express the hope that, “we will one day be brought in peace from the four corners of the earth and be able to live in dignity in the land of Israel.” I use this passage to talk about how prayers can, in fact, be realized. A prayer that has been said for centuries now becomes a prophecy anticipating the miraculous arrival of Jews from Russia, Ethiopia, and the former Yugoslavia to the land of Israel. Who cannot marvel at the poignancy of such a prayer? Who would not want to recite it today as a celebration of a dream, at least partially fulfilled?

### ANOTHER EXAMPLE

Many congregations are involved in social action work. It is the way that Jews and others do “God’s work” in this world. But the experience can be made more spiritual by connecting it with prayer. Envision bringing a group of congregants to a homeless shelter where they are engaged in the act of preparing meals, bringing clothing, offering medical assistance and providing companionship. Picture the group taking a few minutes before they leave to recite from the Amidah: “You sustain the living with loving kindness, in great mercy you allow the (spiritually) dead to come alive; You support the fallen, heal the sick, free the captives and remain faithful to those who sleep in the dust.” Suddenly a good deed becomes a mitzvah and a piece of traditional liturgy becomes a gateway to a world of ethical activity. The people who recite such a prayer *in situ* will never see that prayer the same way again. Every time it is recited, it will remind them of that particular experience, and give them an incentive to find other ways to do such *mitzvot* again.

### A THIRD EXAMPLE

I sometimes use the morning prayer *Modeh Ani* to explore how we can express gratitude for the singular gift of life. Meant to be recited immediately upon arising from sleep, the prayer reminds us that for our ancestors, sleep was a form of semi-death. When we awake, we express gratitude that the “breath of life” or our “unique soul/life force” has come back into our bodies. For those who have stood over the bed of a comatose patient, it is easy to understand that we have not changed much from our ancestors who authored this prayer. We still fear death, and are constantly reminded of the thin line that separates us from life’s end. The *Modeh Ani* prayer helps us to appreciate the great blessing of being alive, conscious, able to laugh and cry and love.

All of the above examples utilize traditional prayers. To the extent that one wants to work with contemporary prayers or alternative versions of the classical liturgy, the process that I describe here becomes even easier, although one loses some of the power that inheres in prayers that are ancient. The use of prayers as gateways to expressions of spirituality does not presuppose any particular God belief, and certainly not a fundamentalist view of God.

Taking the time to open up the liturgy requires a willingness not to take liturgy for granted. Most synagogues are populated by two kinds of Jews: those for whom the traditional liturgy has always worked and has had meaning, and those who are waiting for the Kiddush to pay their respects to the bar/bat mitzvah family. The first group of Jews would be enriched by the kinds of explanations described above. The second, much larger group of Jews have not come expecting any message. You might connect with them, but your chances are slim, because people need to be asking certain questions, before they will be interested in your answers.

If, however, you do not assume that the service will automatically work for that first group of those who attend, and you are willing to structure a service that presents prayers as gateways, seekers will come. It means that you won't be able to *daven* every prayer all the time. It means allowing worshipers to ask questions in the midst of a service. It means bringing in texts and examples from prayerbooks that have not been approved by the ritual committee. So be it. This is not religious worship as it is delivered in synagogues across America, but it can be very spiritually exciting.

To break out of the prison of liturgy, we must move beyond the words in the prayerbook. Literalism is the enemy of the spiritual experience. We come to know God when we tune into the subtle but eternal truths of life: righteousness, kindness, birth, death, the inventor's genius, the tenor's perfect note, the majestic order of the galaxy and the intricate perfection of the human body. The "reality" of these aspects of life is not affirmed in the physical realm; their "reality" exists in the spiritual realm. To "see" and appreciate these parts of life, one must acquire the third eye, which Hindus paint on their foreheads. To allow the prayerbook to speak to that level of our consciousness, we must learn to read the words of prayer with an eye for poetry and metaphor.

### PLAYING SHAMASH

The impact of the havurah movement on American Judaism is well documented. Its ability to get Jews to accept ownership for their own Judaism and to create, celebrate and learn with little or no professional guidance stands as an important lesson to the established Jewish community. But it is remarkable how little most rabbis and synagogues have learned from the havurah phenomenon. Most rabbis acknowledge the value of havurot, but see themselves inhabiting a totally different world. It is true that synagogue institutions do some things better than havurot, but most synagogues would benefit from a healthy dose of havurah-style egalitarianism that allows for many voices to be heard within a synagogue. This calls for the rabbi to become like the *shamash* on the *hanukiah*—lighting other candles so as to enable them to add their own light to illumine the darkness.

I have long been an advocate for lay people having a substantial voice within a synagogue. This is as necessary in defining worship as in congregational decision-making. It is an essential tenet of Reconstructionism that Judaism is shaped by the Jewish people. If we sincerely believe this, then we have to hear what Jews are saying. Using a sermon-dialogue approach to Torah study on Shabbat is one way to encourage congregants to see that their insights into Torah are as important to share as the rabbi's. We now need to go much further than this in helping congregants recognize their own spiritual voices.

As part of the practicum of my course on Jewish spirituality, the class is divided into dyads. I ask them to share a spiritual experience with their partner (often someone whom they hardly know). I tell students they can bring in a poem, a piece of music on tape, an object or piece of artwork that has spiritual meaning for them. They spend about fifteen minutes sharing their spiritual "treasure" with their partner and then they have the opportunity to share with the entire group.

One person shares a poem that she has had in her wallet for twenty-five years. Another spontaneously performs a dance that she composed for a class of retarded adults. One person brings in a four-foot tall, brass menorah. She found it at a yard sale and had to buy it, because, to her mind, it deserved an honored place in a Jewish home, not to be left in some pile of junk in a backyard. Though she was born Jewish, she had no Jewish education and was a member of an ethical culture society. But from the day she bought the menorah, she set upon a mission to make her home a fitting Jewish abode for the menorah. Her taking the course was part of that journey.

I was not prepared for the power of this exercise. Nor was I the only one to sense the magic of those shared thoughts and experiences. Members of my synagogue who were in the class stayed late after we ended, and urged me to find some way to allow what happened in the class to take place in the context of our regular morning service. So we started a program at which, each week, a different member of the congregation chooses a prayer that she or he finds particularly meaningful. I ask them to share a life experience that makes that prayer come alive. By sharing that insight with the congregation, we begin to open up more and more liturgy to Jews for whom the Hebrew siddur is mostly a closed book.

We also use life cycle occasions to allow members to share something personal with the congregation. Since ours is a young congregation, our most frequent life-cycle event is a covenant ceremony for newborns. After the parents receive an *aliyah*, they deliver a brief statement explaining who the child is being named after. So much of the power of religion and life cycle ritual is invested in the memories that we invoke of family members who are deceased. Through the "name legacy," not only do parents strengthen their connections to parents and grandparents, but they articulate the qualities that they then commit themselves to impart to their new children. When week after week I see tears well up in the eyes of congregants of all ages, I know that we are striking spiritual chords of great significance.



## GOOD AND WELFARE

Towards the end of our service, at the same time that I encourage visitors to stand up and introduce themselves, so that our members can reach out to them at Kiddush, I invite members to share "good and welfare." People get up and share good news and bad. We hear of people getting new jobs and getting laid off; of engagements, which lead to spontaneous applause, and of graduations. It is part of the work of building community, of making people feel comfortable sharing their lives with the rest of the congregation. Such sharing is often rewarded many times over by expressions of *mazal tov*, or the tendering of help.

Similarly, when we invite anyone who wants a prayer of healing for themselves or a loved one to come forward between the Torah reading and the *haftarah*, each has the opportunity to state the name of the person who is in their prayers. I have all those who assemble link arms during the chanting of Debbie Friedman's *Mi Sheberach* prayer. I know that after the service, this public display of pain and prayerful hope is supported by the loving approach of dozens of members who would otherwise remain unaware of the situation.

However insightful or inspiring a rabbi may be, if s/he structures a service so that only his/her voice is heard, the service will never reach its spiritual potential. People have locked up inside them the most profound spiritual experiences and insights, which can inspire just as much as a rabbi's words do. The rabbi's challenge is to provide a forum for the expression of such insights. Only when the leader holds back some of him or herself (read "ego") can other people blossom.<sup>2</sup>

There is no little danger that a service opened up for all manner of spiritual expression can drift very far from the *keva*, or regular format that would make it recognizable as a Jewish service. I am well aware of the danger of emotional exhibitionism and of some individuals seeking to dominate those parts of the service that allow for participation. There need to be limits and the rabbi should exercise such limits. But I think the far greater danger lies in religious worship that is exactly the same week after week, all *keva* and no *kavanah*. Most worship that goes on in all stripes of synagogues across America continues to be top-down. Such worship obscures the light that is waiting to pour forth from the Jews who come to sense God's presence. If, as I believe, experiences of the spiritual realm come in an infinite number of varieties, the synagogue must invite different voices to express how that happens. Jews must share the rich gifts of their souls, their *neshamas*, with one another.

As it now stands, most Jews experience their most spiritual moments outside the walls of the synagogue and outside the confines of Judaism. Tens of thousands of Jews are engaged in a

---

<sup>2</sup>On this topic, see Eugene Borowitz, "Tzimtzum: A Mystic Model for Contemporary Leadership." *Religious Education* 69 (1974), 687-700.

serious search for places to support and nurture their quest for religious and spiritual truth. Reconstructionism has a theological language and religious style that is singularly equipped to meet this need. If we learn how to connect our language and style with Jewish seekers, we might find ourselves leading many Jews back to what some people call God.



## The Education of a Prayer Leader

Herbert J. Levine

Teachers have several choices in constructing a prayer curriculum. They can teach what the prayers mean and use them as a point of entry to Jewish theology. They can teach the history of the prayers as a point of entry to understanding both Judaism as an evolving religious civilization and Reconstructionism's contribution to that history with the new *Kol Haneshamah* series of prayerbooks. While these are both valuable approaches, to my mind, they presuppose the students' prior interest in prayer. Either of these approaches makes sense only after the students have learned how to be involved in Jewish prayer. This article presents one person's experience of becoming involved in Jewish prayer as a case study in how a deep involvement in Jewish prayer can be cultivated.

One who leads Jewish prayer is known by several names: *hazan* (the singer and, originally, composer of prayer), *shaliah tzibur* (the one sent by the congregation), and *ba'al tefilah* (the master of prayer). Though the story I tell of how that commitment developed is autobiographical, I mean it to convey some broader truths about experiences and attitudes that can be crucial in forming the sensibility of a contemporary *ba'al tefilah*, one who has joined his or her personal voice with the collective voice of the Jewish people.

What forms the initial attachment to communal prayer is likely to be a powerful emotional bond. For me, this came during the Jewish holidays of my youth, when my brother and I and our small band of Hebrew school friends sat with my father in the first or second row of what seemed our enormous sanctuary. The other kids' fathers were working, but my Dad had arranged his schedule to be there with us. My father taught us to respond to Cantor Hochberg with "*Baruk hu uvaruk shemo*" and "*Amen*," serving as the cantor's unofficial choir. With evident enjoyment, the *hazan's* eyes encouraged us. What began as my father's commitment to pass on to his sons a certain quality of synagogue experience from his own childhood—he had been in such a choir backing up his childhood *hazan*—became for us a public role. Our close association with the cantor's powerful voice made the whole synagogue experience something larger than life. To this day, when I chant certain sections of *Hallel* or the *Kedushah*, it is not my own intonations, but his, powerfully imprinted in childhood, which I hear.

The services at our synagogue in those years were quite formal, with both rabbi and cantor wearing robes. The cantor also wore a tall hat, which looked like the fluted stopper on one of our Passover wine decanters. Between his fluted black hat and fluted black robe, his smooth and elegantly mustachioed pale pink face turned shades of red as he sang. Watching him, I learned what it means to sing your heart out, to love God *behol meodeha* (with all your might). I remember sitting with my own heart in my mouth as I watched the swelling of blood vessels in his neck, the protuberance of his eyeballs, which looked as if they could have popped from the pressure building up inside him. Prayer must be wondrous indeed, I thought, if it could call forth that kind of total commitment of self. I got the chance to experience that intensity myself in a very different context, the small front-room *hasidic* Simhat Torah celebrations to which my father

annually brought me. There, whirling around the Torah, I experienced ecstasy, losing touch with my small individual selfhood and experiencing what it might mean to merge oneself in a larger “self,” the Jewish people’s collective experience of Torah and God.

For six years, through my early teen years, I spent every summer in an Orthodox Hebrew-speaking summer camp, *Yavneh* in Northwood, New Hampshire. Though most of the campers were not from Orthodox homes, our parents had in many cases grown up with Orthodoxy, and they accepted the premise that an Orthodox camp would allow all to participate on an equal footing. (This was pre-feminism! Today the camp has both Orthodox and egalitarian *minyanim*.) Every morning we filed into the camp assembly room/synagogue, and sat fidgeting on hard benches facing the ark. Along the wall, there was a bench arranged perpendicular to the ones on which we kids sat. Here sat the camp’s teaching staff, mostly rabbis and rabbinical students, where they could keep an eye on us. And among them sat Lithuanian-trained Rav Reguer. He sat wrapped in a large, yellowed *tallit* with wide black stripes, which totally hid his body from view. He took it upon himself to keep us quiet. He did this not as one might expect with a finger placed discreetly on the lips, nor even with a peremptory “shah!,” launched in the direction of an offending child. No, he maintained silence and decorum by glaring at us, his gaze shielded by his preternaturally large eyebrows, which seemed to bristle as he looked in our direction. With his arms akimbo, covered by his ancient *tallit* and his eyebrows shooting out rays of powerful influence, Rav Reguer was the Chief Sitting Bull of my childhood, an embodiment of what the Torah seemed to mean when it described the fear and reverence (*yirah*) that God evoked in our ancestors. He made it clear, as no one else in my life ever did, that prayer was serious business.

One of the things that distinguished those Orthodox prayer services of my youth, as I look back on them, was that there was no rabbi standing at the front, no English page-calling or responsive readings to interrupt the flow of the Hebrew prayers. As a prayer leader, weaving English and Hebrew, traditional chant and contemporary melodies and *kavanot*, I have consistently sought for this same seamless feeling. We began at the beginning of the *Shaharit* service and went to the end, omitting nothing. This was also true for *Kabalat Shabbat*, when, showered and dressed in our best clothes, we sat in an outdoor amphitheatre surrounded by fragrant pine trees. The Hebrew words of *Kabalat Shabbat* unfolded from the first notes of *Leku Neraneneh* (Ps. 95). Everyone seemed to know the unique *nusah* (musical mode). Our voices took up the first phrase of each psalm, and joined again with the *ba'al tefilah* in the phrases that concluded each one. In this setting, not just four or five of us, as at home, but the whole camp was a single choir. I remember with what anticipation I aspired to the post-bar mitzvah role of *ba'al tefilah* for this service. I wanted to be the one in front, the single voice that caused all the others to ring out, but when I eventually got the chance to lead, it was not my voice, but the community’s voice that I heard. This, then, was what it meant to be the *shaliach tzibur*, the one sent by the congregation to lead prayers on its behalf.

The experience of leading Jewish prayer as an adolescent—knowing the feel of the Hebrew phrases tripping unhaltingly off the tongue—was an invaluable aspect of my Jewish education. It came from years of immersion in Hebrew and daily prayer. I don’t pretend that we Reconstructionists

can or should offer our children Orthodox childhoods. I am advocating, though, that we seek out and offer them experiences of immersion in Jewish life; a few of them—surely not all—will glimpse in intense prayer worlds of possibility that can last their whole lives. I also want to make clear that if my education had ended at Camp *Yavneh*, I would have been equipped to lead services in Orthodox and Conservative congregations, which I have since done, but not in the Havurah and Reconstructionist contexts, where I have also been privileged to lead. These contexts require creativity as well as ease and familiarity with the tradition. How does one learn Jewish creativity? Can it be taught?

My education in Havurah and Reconstructionist modes of prayer has come from praying with masters of prayer, wise souls who have known what kind of experience they were aiming toward, and sought means of bringing a congregation along with them. Over the last twenty years, I have gravitated to prayer groups where there were a number of people capable of this kind of thoughtful, conscious leading. Synagogue communities can be spiritually stymied by always relying on the rabbi or cantor to lead the congregation. If we see it as their job, then we don't develop the facility within ourselves to become living links in the chain of tradition. Congregations grow spiritually when there are several wise souls who can lead the community in prayer, each of whom respects the traditional *matbe 'ah ha 'tefilah* (the "coin" through which prayer is molded) and each of whom works his or her own thoughtful variations on that mold. The result will be a community that can respect and creatively nourish the ebb and flow of spirit in its midst.

If each of the many *ba'aley tefilah* who have influenced me were to write an article similar to this one, tracing the influences on their own spiritual education, I am quite sure that the name of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi would appear on almost all the lists of most significant spiritual influences. From Reb Zalman and his many students, I have learned five crucial lessons, which I'd like to relate briefly.

1. Always wear a watch: The leader has an unofficial contract with the congregation that says when the service will begin and when it will end. This time frame needs to be respected in order for people to give you their trust and relax into your care.
2. Slow down your singing: Many people learn to sing *nigunim* (wordless tunes) and other Jewish songs at a very fast tempo; this pace may be appropriate to camps and youth groups, the rhythms of childhood and teen years, but it generally does not suit adult spiritual development. Prayer rhythms require the commitment to a slowly building intensity that can reach people at many different points in the life cycle.
3. Take from the songs of the land where you live (*kehu mezimrat ha 'aretz*; cf. Reb Nahman of Bratzlav's comment on Genesis 43:11): there is great spirituality invested in every nation's folk tunes; we can make that spirituality our own by incorporating appropriate American folk melodies into our prayer life. Be prepared for amazing energy to be released.

4. Chant in English, to a traditional-sounding *musah*, particularly poetic passages: this can be incredibly opening for people (including kids) who don't have complete access to the Hebrew.
5. Judaism is over-verbalized, and under-experienced: The words of the siddur are not to be said for their own sake. These particular words, which have changed over time, are the residue of the Jewish people's experience of their quest for holiness; they are not the experience itself. The task of the *ba'al tefilah* is to help people onto that quest, using the siddur as the map to the territory of spiritual growth and awareness. The Kabbalistic map of four worlds that Reb Zalman shares—correlative to body, feelings, mind, and spirit, and to different needs that can be met during any prayer service—has taught me that sometimes as part of the spiritual journey, the siddur may even need temporarily to be left behind. The *ba'al tefilah* cannot lead people to an experience he or she has not had. Therefore private prayer and meditation is an important laboratory in which the prayer leader discovers the goal toward which he or she aims the community.

In addition to contemporary *ba'aley tefilah*, my spiritual teachers have included the composers of Jewish liturgy, especially the ancient psalmists. In studying and writing about the psalms, I have sought to make the ancient composers of Hebrew prayer-poems my contemporaries.<sup>3</sup> Measuring my spirit against theirs, I have found in ancient biblical prayer a template of my own experience—crying out for succor at times of distress, thrilling with my community at times of joyous celebration. Entering into the prayer rhythms of the biblical psalmists, I have sought to make their prayers my own and, in turn, the prayers of the congregation. Though I may not feel their partnership completely on every page of the siddur, I generally find myself stirred by one or another phrase from the Psalms and recognize that if I am not, someone else in the congregation is likely to be. In commenting on a number of psalms in *Kol Haneshamah*, I have tried to give the worshiper tools for entering into the unique experience and setting of each psalm and psalmist, in the hopes of creating a kind of spiritual partnership between contemporary and ancient worshipers through the text we share.

---

<sup>3</sup>Herbert Levine is the author of *Sing Unto God a New Song: A Contemporary Reading of the Psalms*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995.

## Questions for Further Study and Discussion

Leah M. Mundell

The following is a series of questions for study and discussion on each of the noted articles which appeared earlier in this compilation. The questions are designed to expand such discussion about the articles. An entire adult learning series could be built out of these articles and the evolving discussion. The questions labeled for educators might be especially well-suited for use as part of a teacher development program.

### “SEEKING GOD IN THE SIDDUR”—DAVID A. TEUTSCH

#### For Adult Learners:

1. What myths have spiritual meaning for you even if you do not believe in their literal meaning?
2. Is the idea of Torah as revelation important to you? If you do not believe that Torah is divine revelation, what value does it have for you?
3. Within your community, how are decisions made about changes in liturgy or customs in services? How might decisions be made in a more inclusive, equitable way?
4. How does the inclusion of women's names and voices (commentary) influence your prayer experience?
5. To whom/what do you address a *berahah*? Does the traditional formulation “*Baruk atah Adonay*” restrict your vision of the object of your prayer?
6. Dr. Teutsch discusses the political power of *berahot* as reinforcing hierarchy rooted in a single patriarchal figure. What other elements of the siddur imply a political reality?
7. How has your congregation addressed Reconstructionist discomfort with *berahot*?
8. Try writing your own *berahah* for being called to the Torah. What parts of the structure would you retain and which would you change?
9. Dr. Teutsch describes a process of introducing innovation to the community (in the section “Encouraging New Formulas”)—at what point in that process is your community? How can you help it move to the next step?
10. What type of prayerbook would you like to see your children or grandchildren using 30 years from now? Would you like innovations of today to have become standard or for innovations still to be alternatives to the traditional text?



**For Educators:**

1. What myths do you think must be passed on in order for Judaism to retain integrity? At what ages should students be taught to question myth?
2. Dr. Teutsch asks how we retain mythic structure when we reject literal interpretation. How do you do this on a community level (when we must reconcile the diverse needs of that community)? In the classroom? On a personal level?
3. What do you see as the role of translation in the siddur? Do you prefer poetic, interpretive translation or direct, literal translation? Is it important for us to learn Hebrew at all? Is translation/transliteration a crutch?
4. What other spiritual techniques have you found helpful in prayer experience? How could you incorporate these in teaching *Kol Haneshamah*?
5. How do we effectively train prayer leaders to guide us in this process?

**“HOW CAN RECONSTRUCTIONISTS PRAY?”—JACOB J. STAUB****For Adult Learners:**

1. What is your personal experience of God? Where do you find God in daily life or in “miraculous” events?
2. Rabbi Staub defines his theology by describing what he does not believe about God. What would you add or subtract from this list?
3. What has most shaped your personal theological beliefs (upbringing, life experience, children, etc.)?
4. What do you see as our culture’s attitude toward God? How do your beliefs fit into (or not fit into) that cultural paradigm?
5. Does this list of “Why Reconstructionists Pray” include your reasons for praying? Which of these reasons do you find most compelling?
6. Often, we pray for different reasons at different times. What life/Jewish contexts do you see each of these reasons address (e.g. group support when mourning, spiritual discipline when caught up in mundane decisions)?
7. How do you understand miracles?

**For Educators:**

1. How might you use the categories of Creation, Revelation and Redemption as a framework for your lessons around prayer and spirituality?
2. How might a second-grader understand these three categories? A fifth-grader? A high school student?
3. Rabbi Staub's list of reasons for prayer is written from an adult's perspective. Do you think the list applies as well to children? If not, what might a list of "Why Reconstructionist children pray" look like?
4. What texts might you study or class projects might you use to reveal to students the long interpretive tradition of Judaism to which Rabbi Staub refers?

**"THE NATURE OF SPIRITUALITY"—SHEILA PELTZ WEINBERG****For Adult Learners:**

1. What do you remember as your childhood experience of spirituality?
2. Following Rabbi Weinberg's model, chart your own spiritual journey. What have been the defining moments? Have you taken any spiritual steps that were not constructive? If so, how can you avoid such pitfalls in the future?
3. Where do you find kindred spirits? If you do not currently have this kind of support, where might you begin to look for it?
4. What works of literature or criticism have moved you in the way Kaplan moved Weinberg? Have such encounters led to life changes for you?
5. What have been the crossroads in your life? Have they presented themselves to you as spiritual opportunities?
6. What do you see as Judaism's higher purpose, both for you as an individual and for the community or the world?
7. What is the role of family in your Jewish development? Has family played a positive role or has it created additional stresses?
8. How have you made decisions about observance in your life? What Jewish/spiritual practice is basic in your life, what practices are still "under discussion," and what have you rejected?

**For Educators:**

1. What type of classroom environment would help nurture a sense of spirituality in our students? What barriers do students face (and do you face as their teacher) in developing spirituality?
2. What do you see as the most important types of written works, works of art, etc., that you might introduce to your students to inspire them "spiritually."
3. Who have been your spiritual teachers? Do you think of yourself as a spiritual teacher for anyone else? In what ways?
4. How can you help students to connect Jewishly even when their families are minimally involved with Jewish life?

**"THE JOURNEY TOWARDS PRAYER"—STEVEN SAGER****For Adult Learners:**

1. What are the advantages of trying to learn to pray as an adult rather than as a child?
2. What do you yearn for in prayer? Sager describes yearning as the beginning of the journey, but how did you even come to arrive at a sense of yearning?
3. What do you find familiar or reassuring about the service? What do you find intimidating?
4. Would you find a better "map" to the siddur helpful, harmful or neutral?

**For Educators:**

1. How do we instill children's learning with the sense of yearning found among adults trying to pray?
2. Do you agree that "rote behavior creates the vessel . . ."?
3. What level of skill do children need in order to participate in prayer?
4. In teaching children to pray, how do you teach the importance of **knowing** the *nusach* while at the same time allowing them room to "get lost" in prayer?

**“SOME CALL IT GOD”—SIDNEY H. SCHWARZ**

**For Adult Learners:**

1. How would you answer the questions Rabbi Schwarz presents to his class participants?
2. Is your synagogue experience spiritually satisfying? If not, why not?
3. How would you define “spiritual”? Describe spiritual experiences that you have had.
4. If we can find spiritual sustenance in other religions, why bother trying to find parallels in Judaism?
5. How do you approach the trade-off between meaning and tradition? What prayers/texts do you have trouble changing even though you disagree with the content?
6. Do you feel a connection between your ethical actions and your Judaism? If so, what is that connection? If not, what do you see as your motivator to act ethically in the world?
7. What other non-prayer experiences do you recall or consider in prayer? What is the relationship between prayer and action in your life?
8. When do you feel most moved (if ever) to pray?
9. How might your havurah/synagogue facilitate the kind of openness to talking about God experience described in this article?

**For Educators:**

1. How can teachers use God-language without alienating students or stifling developing notions of God?
2. How can teachers reveal their own insecurities and confusion about theology without losing students' respect?
3. Is there an extra element added when you ask people to share their experience rather than think of an experience (e.g., think of a meaningful prayer vs. tell us why you find this prayer meaningful)? How does this affect others in the congregation?
4. When does asking congregants to share something personal seem like an intrusion? How can we create experiences of group sharing without being intrusive?
5. How can we create a similar spirit of community in the religious school setting?

## **“THE EDUCATION OF A PRAYER LEADER”—HERBERT J. LEVINE**

### **For Adult Learners:**

1. What emotional/nostalgic bonds do you have with prayer?
2. Is it possible for us, in Reconstructionist settings, to recreate the passion Dr. Levine experienced as a child in an Orthodox setting? How? If not, what do we offer instead?
3. Where can we create experiences of Jewish immersion? Must this be at home or religious school or do camp experiences have as much of an impact?
4. In your experiences of Jewish immersion, did you respond with the same excitement that Levine did? If not, what hindered that excitement?
5. How does the prayer service work in your community? Are there opportunities for community members to lead? How can we include as leaders those who do not have the skills to lead the traditional service?
6. Looking through *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim* (or your own memory), which traditional prayer-poems do you find most compelling?

### **For Educators:**

1. What is the role of the teacher in the creation of an emotional connection with prayer? In what settings might the educator best facilitate this connection?
2. Could such encouragement as Dr. Levine received come from teachers or is this only effective when transmitted by parents?
3. The experience of leading the prayer service is listed as a priority of Reconstructionist education (see “Educational Goals of the Reconstructionist Movement”). Why might this be important or beneficial for all children?

## Writing Spiritual Autobiography: A Workshop in Narrative Theology<sup>1</sup>

Marc J. Margolius

In a course several years ago on Contemporary Jewish Thought at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Rabbi Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer requested each of us graduating seniors to compose and share our "spiritual autobiographies." This was such a moving and revelatory experience that in each year of my own congregational rabbinate, I have led a group of seven congregants in a similar exercise. In this Narrative Theology Workshop, each participant writes about and shares one or more life experiences which helped to shape his or her religious beliefs. Each group has been a marvelous experience, both for me and for the participants.

The Narrative Theology Workshop takes place each spring. Registration is limited to seven participants simply because that number tends to optimize group dynamics. Each weekly session lasts an hour and a half. In the first few sessions, I usually discuss with the group the various ways in which Jews have tried to express their religious beliefs, using examples from Torah, Midrash, and medieval and modern Jewish philosophy. In addition, I discuss with them how Jews traditionally have approached texts, and how our lives themselves have a textual quality, containing many layers of meaning. I explain that our objective will be to "read" our lives in an attempt to see how our deepest beliefs were shaped.

We explore a bit the difference between autobiography and spiritual autobiography. Prior to the first session, I have them read the first four chapters of *The Story of Your Life: Writing a Spiritual Autobiography* by Dan Wakefield (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), which serves as the text for the course. At this juncture I usually argue that the only difference lies in one's approach to the material; a seemingly secular or profane experience may in fact have shaped significantly one's religious outlook.

I explain to the group that ultimately my hope is that once they begin to arrive at a clearer understanding of their own religious outlook, they will also be able to see ways in which they might relate their personal religiosity to their identity as Jews. I usually have them read one or more examples of short Jewish autobiographical pieces to illustrate. The best of these, to my mind, is "To Catch a Breath," Dr. Arthur Waskow's deeply moving account of his mother's illness and death in the April 1986 issue of *Moment* magazine. Waskow's memoir is a magnificent weaving of universal, personal experience with Jewish imagery and symbolism which never fails to touch and inspire the group. Often someone reads it aloud to the rest of the group, and then we discuss it, rather than having participants read it in advance of the session. Discussion often spills over into the next session.

---

<sup>1</sup>An expanded version of this article can be found in the Spring 1996 issue of *The Reconstructionist*. The article as presented here originally appeared as part of *Gesher Vekesher*, the JRF education newsletter.

There is usually a one-month break after these first sessions, during which the participants write their pieces and send them to me. I explicitly tell them that the piece can be as long or as short as they wish, and can concern any person, place, or experience from any life-stage which feels significant. I make copies of each piece and distribute them to the rest of the participants, with instructions to keep them confidential and to make notes or underlinings as they read them. Each of the next four sessions is divided into two forty-five minute segments. In each segment, a participant has an opportunity to describe how the writing experience affected him or her; then the other group members respond in turn, describing what struck them about the piece. In our discussions we look for common themes and experiences, trying to identify what it was that led the writer to describe a particular experience as "spiritual."

The experience has been wonderfully clarifying for many of the participants, who come to realize that their sense of religiosity is much broader than they might have expected. Participants write about relationships, family, births, deaths, divorces, losses, intense moments of connection with and disconnection from other people. They begin to view these as spiritual experiences requiring a religious framework for expression. Often they express interest in the linkage between their personal experiences and a corresponding Jewish holiday or ritual symbolism. By the conclusion of our sessions, the participants, who usually have not known each other well before beginning the group, are strongly attached to each other and seek out ways to continue the group experience, such as by forming havurot and sharing Shabbat meals with their families. The workshop provides them with a true sense of connection with the congregation, and with a safe context in which to share religious feelings and experiences they previously had not been able to articulate or share.

I have tried this year to build upon the sense of connection fostered by the workshop by inviting all previous participants to be involved in a bi-monthly Jewish theology book group, which reads and discusses recent books on Jewish spirituality, such as Dr. Arthur Green's *Seek My Face, Speak My Name*, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner's *God Was In This Place and I, i Did Not Know*, Dr. Judith Plaskow's *Standing Again at Sinai*, and Dr. Neil Gillman's *Sacred Fragments*. Over half of the previous Narrative Theology Workshop participants have joined the book group. In addition, I will encourage them to begin attending a new hour-long Shabbat morning Torah study group we will introduce in my congregation next September. For many of these workshop participants, the ability to articulate and safely share their deepest religious feelings has unlocked the door to involvement in Jewish prayer, study, and action. It is a model which I believe holds great promise for contemporary American Jews, disaffected or not.

## How the Siddur Affected Me<sup>1</sup>

Barbara Stark

Some years ago, when my husband was getting older and sicker, after I had raised my daughter, I began to consider joining a synagogue. Up to that time, I had never been affiliated with a synagogue. I decided that in view of my husband's illness, we were going to need a community, so I'd better find a synagogue. But where? How?

Of course, I knew all the synagogues in the neighborhood, and I remembered the Reform synagogue I grew up in, not with much pleasure, and the many rabbis I had encountered who were not appropriate for me. Mainly I remembered not feeling that anyone cared about what I as an individual felt, needed, or wanted as a Jew, and as a woman. Still, I did remember the feeling of family and belonging I experienced as a young adult at the High Holy Day services. I yearned deeply for that connection.

My husband's connection to synagogues was mainly through cantorial music, so every year, as the High Holy Days approached, our search would begin for a cantor, and for that connection for him. We'd go to sample services, sometimes together, and sometimes Gene would go alone. Always it seemed that at that particular time of the year, a time when I wanted so much to be connected to the Jewish world, to its ethics, its stories, its knowledge, and its warmth, I found myself feeling more lonely than ever. We did always go to see my father- and mother-in-law at the little *shul* they attended in our neighborhood, but it was **his** place—not mine, not ours.

In 1986, I accidentally met a woman with whom I eventually became friends and bemoaned to her my search for a synagogue while telling her all the things I couldn't tolerate in synagogues as I knew them. Through her I learned of a new little synagogue that her friend had joined and was enjoying very much. "Why don't you try it?" she asked, and we did. I had found my community!

When I went to services there (which I did every Friday night and every Saturday morning), I was looking for a way to connect to Judaism, to the meaning I could derive from it for the answer to my yearnings and fears. My fears were for my life, and for that of my husband and our daughter. His health was failing, and I was losing the only person in my life who loved me unconditionally. I needed to be assured that there was something **more**, that I had a place in the universe, a connection to something beyond myself. I wanted a place to learn of the history and spirituality of the Jewish people. After all, in my mind I was always Jewish before I was anything else—whether it was as a woman, wife, mother, or, recently, grandmother!

---

<sup>1</sup>The genesis of this article was a letter that Barbara Stark wrote to the Prayer Book Commission, telling of her response to the new siddur, *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*. She agreed to expand upon the letter for this volume.



In my new community I found friends who shared their feelings, beliefs and practices with me. From some I observed, through the way they lived, their deep personal pleasure in being Jewish. From some of my friends sharing their rituals with me, I developed my own. From other friends I learned an appreciation of the cultural values of secular Judaism in its historical, literary and linguistic dimensions, including its understanding of the meaning of its religious heritage. Another friend showed me that friendship and love are inspired by the pleasure of a candid expression of a shared ideal. Yet another friend contributes to my pleasure every time we are at services together because his voice in song becomes part of my liturgy. From a congregant's daughter becoming bat mitzvah I learned there is a future in our young people, and that we are raising Jews who care about themselves and the world, and who learn about the choices to make through the Torah. From others I learned you must care about the kind of Judaism you practice.

I wanted my own voice in a larger context. We frequently say that we were Reconstructionists in our hearts before we knew the term, and the more I look back at my developing Jewish life the more I see that it is indeed true for me.

When I was a very young woman, a very dear family friend, whom I considered my second father, died very suddenly, and I was devastated. My father and I made all the arrangements for his funeral, just the two of us, and during that time I asked my father if I could say Kaddish for Ray. I knew that women didn't say Kaddish, or if they did, it didn't count, but I knew if I said it for Ray it would count. Maybe I only said it once but right there, out went the convention I knew, and there was my Reconstructionist heart living, with a name it did not know it had. (Imagine asking my father about saying Kaddish! My father, whose own father had prohibited him from saying it for him. If only my grandfather had known about Marge Piercy's "Kaddish," which speaks of praising the One who asks us to choose life out of—and despite—our anguish and our pain; which speaks of being joined together in a web, of loving the life we are lent, passing through us in the body of Israel and our own bodies; which speaks of time passing through us and continuing through our children; which speaks of blessing—thanking, if blessing is too troublesome a word, although for me it no longer is—the earth, the life we are lent, the ones who teach us and recognizes the unnamable glory that shines through us and continues *ad infinitum*; which closes with a blessing and thankfulness for peace that bears joy and bears the fruits of knowledge on strong branches. That last would have been especially meaningful to my grandfather, who ruled over the house where my father was told at age ten, "If Uncle Hymie reads *Quo Vadis*, it's good enough for you to read!")

You see, all we have to do is find the language that leads us to our heart's core. And **that** I have found through Reconstructionism, and the new prayerbook. From my mother and father I learned a love of language, and from Reconstructionism and in *Kol Haneshamah* I have found the language of my Jewish heart. At first it was the talks and the readings, and then it was the prayerbook, until one Friday night I found myself saying, "These words are enough for me."

When my husband died recently, we had the freedom, through Reconstructionism, to be Jewish in our own way. When our rabbi came to my husband's bedside and asked if he wanted to say

the traditional prayer before dying, my husband said no, as I knew he would. I, however, was able to sit on his bed, hold his hand, and recite the Shema over and over again as a mantra, and was comforted, and did not feel alone. In the prayerbook under the line of the Shema is an explanation of some of the Hebrew. It explains that the heart (*levaveka*—your heart) was seen as the source of emotions and intellect. Feelings and reason are complementary partners, not conflicting parts, of the human psyche. It goes on to explain that the double *vav* teaches that a love of God must contain all dualities (i.e., the good and bad in a person). I knew as I sat on that hospital bed holding the hand of my dying, consummately Jewish husband, I was one with him, with God, and with my people, and that neither he, nor I, nor the generations we had made would ever be alone, nor would we ever not be. Because all words at their face value are not for all people, the new prayerbook has been a blessing to me. From the insight I gain from the readings included in it, and the *kavanot* (intentions), and the commentaries, I have a direct path into the heart of my Jewish soul. I am constantly renewed by *Kol Haneshamah*. There are times that I just sit down with it and read through it randomly.

One of the most telling Jewish acts of my husband was the way he folded his *tallis* at the end of services. This was a man who thought combing the back of his hair was a detail, and yet he folded his *tallis* (he used the “s” as do I, to authenticate the reference) so carefully that every corner and side matched, every fold was even. When I read the *Ahavah Rabah* (and those words are absolutely enough for me) my eye is led to the *kavanah* of gathering together the corners of the *tallis* with its emphasis on unity and uniting the disparate elements of our lives, uniting with the oneness that links all that is. I am brought immediately to the poetry that was my husband. His essence is validated in such a simple act as folding his *tallis* with care and love, and I would have never had that particular, were it not for the beauty of the universal truth of Judaism as I continually find it in *Kol Haneshamah*.

We were able to have a funeral that expressed our deepest personal feelings. We read “The Peace of Wild Things” by Wendell Barry from *Kol Haneshamah* (page 765) instead of the traditional *Kri’a*. The *Kri’a* was so painful both to my daughter and me that independently we told our rabbi that we could never include that in a service. And yet the poem we read brought us to the ultimate truth of the funeral service and death. At the funeral service I was able to read an adaptation of a prayer that a fellow congregant had written, a teacher of the graduating post-bar/bat mitzvah class, to my daughter and her husband, a piece in which she adapted part of the *Pesah* service, the *Dayenu*. I could be at the graveside, not as a passive widow, but as a woman bereft of the deepest love in her life, who could—because of her particular religious affiliation—confidently ask her rabbi to inform the others there of the reasons behind what we were doing, so that we would truly be there together in mournful respect, and knowledgeable about the Jewish way. Many of us, Jew and non-Jew, could not stop shoveling, we were so personally involved in the ceremony and its meaning.

The first Shabbat after my husband’s death we were reading Deuteronomy and the portion addressed the behavior of living in a new land. Miriam’s song was included in the service, and I read it, not crying, but strengthened and validated by it and the Torah portion. And then I

turned a page in the prayerbook and found the *derash* for the Song of Miriam (page 291). In speaking of *tzur Yisra'el* we are told that we cannot ask God to rise up to help Israel unless we have first done so ourselves. There again was the Jewish clue to my individual life, found in the whole of Jewish life, which I read, comforted by the prayer of my community.

Some years ago I spent one Friday evening observing Sabbath with Bill Moyers and some poets on his program. There, I heard a poet talk about the dilemma that "what I live for I can hardly believe in." I think that speaks for me as a woman growing up where I did, with whom I did, and, as a Jewish woman "cut off from the strings" connecting me to the Jewish life I wanted. Many of the values I live by were there, in my childhood home and synagogues; there was just too much in the way of my recognizing them. I wanted to find the individual (the particular) in what I believed, so that I could believe in the universal. I remember one Yom Kippur when I was that terrible age of 16 or so, my father had to literally put his hand over my mouth to keep me quiet while the rabbi told us about all those sins we had committed. You see, I didn't relate to any of them, and, more importantly, I resented someone telling me what I ought to feel. I wanted to know what I could feel, where my feelings, my thoughts, fit in. They had been telling me all the "oughts" all my life, and I wanted something else from my synagogue, from prayer, from Judaism. I never found the individual in Judaism, all I ever saw was the didacticism and the demand for conformity. If only my father had been able to explain my responsibility to Judaism and Judaism's responsibility to me. I loved being Jewish, but I wanted to be able to ask the questions, know the reasons, find the answers, and not be labeled the *Bren* at Passover. There were two sides to those seders; my questions and the trouble they brought me by asking them, and the charm and delight of my mother and her sisters playing with one another, teasing about who was getting drunker this year. I loved knowing that all Jews were at their *seder* when I was at mine. I wanted to know the fun of my religion and enjoy the exploration.

Growing up I was left with the feeling that being Jewish was the best, but I didn't know there was a place for me, Barbara, in it. I knew there were good causes Jews were involved with, I knew my parents valued learning, and I knew my parents cared about other people.

Some years later, when I moved to New York, I formed my own family, and joined another family—my husband's. There I learned about another kind of Judaism. My mother-in-law was a very pious woman, loving and devoted to her family and her God. Her husband was a Talmudic scholar, friend to the great cantors, a collector of money for Jews perishing in Europe, and the president of every little *shul* he could get his hands on. We used to visit him at his little *shul* and I would see him in his *kittel* on Yom Kippur. I had never seen a *kittel* before, but if that was what Jews like Papa wore, OK—I just had no personal connection to it. Years later, I used to wear my own *kittel*, a long white dress I loved. It became my clean slate, my *tabula rasa*, my new chance to be the best I could be—the new beginning which was the protector of the quality of the rest of life.

My real connection to Judaism was the humanity, intellectualism and the music of Jews. We never belonged to a synagogue, my husband and I, but looking out my window every Saturday

morning I saw Jews going to synagogue, the little kids dressed up, the daddies holding their hands, the women walking together. In the afternoon I'd see them coming home from *shul*, the women in their hats walking with the men. I'd picture them at home eating their Shabbat meal and discussing important ideas (I hoped). For me it was always a communal scene, not necessarily a religious one, although the community stemmed from the religion. I knew the women prepared the meals; I knew they sat separated from the men in synagogue. I perceived a second class citizenship about it all, yet I yearned for a place like they had. I gave myself a lot of mixed messages. I think the truth is I've always been connected to Judaism, but I always viewed it through someone else's values, and therefore it was unacceptable to me. However, there was a part of me that was always looking for a way to make Judaism my own.

Initially, that connection, that sense of awe, was corroborated by the poetry that the rabbi would incorporate into our services at my new-found synagogue. If the language of the prayerbook did not touch my soul, the poetry did, and it became a pathway for me into the liturgy. Of course, the discussion about the Torah portion, if not the portion itself, gave me insight into the mentality of Judaism. There I was able to learn about ethics, morality, human need for other humans and for a greater One. That oneness is what I wanted. I needed the poetry of life. I had the poetry of loving and living through my husband and his gift for love, and the joy of our child, but beyond us I wanted something—a universal connection that our love was part of and existed as an expression of.

So often the *kavanah*, the intent behind the prayer, the feeling aimed for, becomes for me the prayer. It ties together the meaning of what we're doing in synagogue. So many of us find trouble with the words, with the meaning of God and prayer, that it becomes too easy to say that this prayer doesn't mean anything to me. For me, understanding the intent of the prayer, the times in which it was written, the circumstances of life, becomes a way for me to feel joy and awe and magnificence in being alive and being Jewish and being who I am, which is not like, although may be similar to, others.

I've never really been able to feel very comfortable with the Amidah, but when I read one of the alternative *Amidot* in the prayerbook, I know where I am, what my purpose in being at this part of the service is in any synagogue.

Imagine the joy of ending a Shabbat service with *Adon Olam* when I can think of the *kavanah* expressed by Mordecai Kaplan: "God is that aspect of reality which elicits from us the best that is in us and enables us to bear the worst that can befall us." There is such a source of strength in that for me that when I sing the words of the prayer I am of all Jews, with all Jews, for all of time, and am validated.

What I love most about the prayerbook is that it brings me to my own sense of power, while helping me maintain the awe and majesty that is God, that is life. When I read the interpretive version of *Ahavat Olam*, I know that there is no end to the possibility of life, and of my ability to find peace and strength and God in every aspect of life, and in my own being.

The generation that follows me is both a challenge and a source of deep pleasure. I am a twin to a male and have the inexplicable pleasure of watching my daughter raise her children—a boy and a girl who are twins! My daughter is married to a man who not only is not Jewish, but angry at all religion! They have agreed that the children will be raised as Jews. I feel, however, that my daughter is somewhat defensive about practicing Judaism in “too religious” a way (I finally figured out she means observant). She seems torn between her feelings for her husband and her heritage, and struggles with how to instill that heritage in her family and practice it in their lives in a way that is acceptable to her and comfortable for them all. My way has moved from intensity and crying at services conducted in our home where they are guests, to a hallah every Friday night for her family, and recently, to my grandchildren coming to me for “Shabbat Shalom” where they each put their own candles in the candelabra and attempt to repeat the Hebrew of each prayer with me (including the moving of our hands to bring the light and peace of Shabbat to me and for them, doing what “Gaba” does), and then making french toast together from the hallah, to *Pesach* this year, when my daughter told me this was the best *seder* ever—a service that I culled from one my friends have used, incorporating some things I’ve taken from the new prayerbook, to express my own point of view, and the children’s *seder* storybook I learned of from my cantor. So, from the tradition I have the philosophy. I’ve learned, in my book, and transformed my home services.

My desire is to have Shabbat at Gaba’s be part of my grandchildren’s lives, but my problem has been how not to alienate my daughter from my practices and yet accommodate all of our needs. Even though she says the prayer for lighting the candles with me sometimes, I know if she examined the meaning of the language, it would be foreign to her thinking. In the new prayer book I found *Nevareh et eyn hahayim* (Let us bless the source of life), which will be a new beginning for us all at Shabbat.

And then I found included an excerpt from Hannah Szenes (page 4):

Blessed is the match that’s consumed in kindling a flame, Blessed is the flame that burns  
in the secret depths of the heart.

Right under it appears a passage from the Shas Tkhines:

Almighty God,  
Grant me and all my loved ones  
A chance to truly rest on this Shabbat  
May the light of the candles drive out from among us  
The spirit of anger, the spirit of harm  
Send your blessings to my children,  
That they may walk in the ways of your Torah, your light.

Everywhere I look, there is something, a place for me, for mine, for our different needs and understanding.

Some years ago our rabbi included a poem from Rilke at the end of our Shabbat service, which speaks to me of the beauty and inherent personal power in Judaism:

Just as the winged energy of delight  
carried you over many chasms early on,  
now raise the daringly imagined arch  
holding up the astounding bridges.

Miracle doesn't live only in the amazing  
living through and defeat of danger;  
miracles become miracles in the clear  
achievement that is earned.

To work with things is not hubris  
when building the Association beyond words;  
denser and denser the pattern becomes—  
being carried along is not enough.

Take your well-disciplined strengths  
and stretch them between two  
opposing poles. Because inside human beings  
is where God learns.

Rilke, Muzot



## My Experience as a Member of the Prayerbook Commission

Lillian Kaplan

When the Prayerbook Commission was re-activated, I was president of FRCH (now JRF) and so became an *ex-officio* member of the Commission. I realized early on that the task was very important for me—not only because I had the obligation to represent the lay arm of the movement, but also because on a very personal level, I had a stake in the outcome.

I consider myself a “classical Reconstructionist,” though I realize that this can mean different things to different people. To me, of the three “B’s” used by Ira Eisenstein to describe Reconstructionism, **belonging** and **behaving** come before **believing**, but each of these three “B’s” is not simply an entity in itself. To show that we belong to the Jewish people and to behave like Jews means doing what our people have done over the millennia, and what we continue to do. This involves, among a host of other practices, attending the synagogue of our choice. For as long as I can remember, however, I have had problems with the siddur used in both Conservative and Reform congregations. I have not been able to mouth the words extolling an all-powerful, supernatural God who not only causes the rain to fall, but controls people’s lives. Nor could I ever conceive of a messiah from the House of David who would appear to save the world. I could not pray for the rebuilding of the Temple so that we might return to worship as in days of old, and so on. I recognized that the 1945 Reconstructionist siddur, took a giant step (for its time) in the right direction, but was desperately in need of updating. A siddur for our time was long overdue.

The approach of the Prayerbook Commission is what made the project initially attractive to me, and continues to do so. Actually, it is more than an approach, it is a basic characteristic of our movement and extremely important to many of us; it is the respect for the lay member. (Equality of women and men has long been our hallmark.) From its very beginning, the Commission was composed of an approximately equal number of men and women, lay and rabbinic, who made decisions on the democratic basis of one person, one vote. Moreover, we decided at the start to issue the first Shabbat Eve edition in an experimental form and ask for feedback from users before final printing. As a result the “fraction” format,

YAH

Attribute for God

which most of us on the Commission thought was so great, was rejected. In no other movement do we find such regard for the lay members.

I was also intrigued by the plan to make this siddur “user-friendly”; to depart from the usual, rather archaic translations from the Hebrew and move to interpretive, poetic renditions; to include commentary, notes and *kavanot* to help the user understand the text and put it into context; to add calligraphy and art work to break the monotony of page after page of text, and to present additional material to enhance or to substitute for traditional material. For me, and surely for



others, all of this would help to make the service more relevant, meaningful and interesting and demonstrate our respect for the diversity that exists among us.

Work on *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*, then *Kol Haneshamah: Limot Hol*, and now on the High Holiday *mahzor* requires a commitment of time, not only to attend meetings in Wyncote for two to three days a couple of times a year, but also to carefully examine beforehand the material to be covered in the meetings. We come to our sessions prepared to discuss, sometimes to edit or rewrite, sometimes to compromise and then to accept or reject. I find these sessions most rewarding; the give-and-take is always a learning experience, a test of patience and tolerance, and mind-stimulating. While we may not always agree, those of us who have been working on the *Kol Haneshamah* series have all become good friends and enjoy working together. The fruit of our labor has been well received and we have a great sense of pride in what we have accomplished, but I must add that it's the professionals who really do the bulk of the work, who don't seem to need much sleep, who are remarkably good humored, and deserve our sincere thanks. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to serve as a lay member on the Prayerbook Commission.

### III. Teaching and Learning the Siddur





## Nurturing Students' Spirituality and Prayerfulness<sup>1</sup>

Roberta Louis Goodman

I flew in an airplane for the first time when I was fourteen years old. Since that time, on every take-off and landing I recite the Shema. Admittedly, the one time that I was in an emergency landing, I recited the Shema continuously for my well-being. My recitation of the Shema is not generally out of a concern for my safety, but rather in awe of the miracle of human beings flying like a bird swiftly and smoothly to so many faraway places. Since that first flight, I have been introduced to *tefilat hadereh*, the prayer in our tradition for a safe voyage on journeying to strange lands. I keep of a copy of that prayer in my wallet along with my airline frequent flier card. Today I struggle with finding a more suitable *berahah* that expresses the wonder that I feel for the creativity and ingenuity that went into this human invention and the access that it gives me to so many distant lands.

I tell this personal story to make two points about nurturing spirituality in general and the teaching of prayer in particular. First, people are innately spiritual and prayerful. My initial reaction to this new experience of flying was to utter a prayer. While the novelty and anticipation of those early flights have worn off, I continue to express my appreciation and marvel by reciting a prayer. Speaking words of thanksgiving, petition, and blessing to God is a natural human response. As many a politician has been noted to say: "As long as you have tests, you will have prayer in schools."

Second, our tradition can inform, strengthen, and deepen a person's sense of spirituality and prayerfulness. To me it is interesting that my response to flying was to utter the Shema, one of the few prayers that I knew when I was fourteen, rather than use my own words. I connected that experience of flying to something transcendent in our tradition, a prayer that I learned in religious school. Learning about *tefilat hadereh* was quite comforting since it served to affirm that others felt that voyaging was an occasion worthy of a prayer. Learning about *tefilat hadereh* has increased my awareness and appreciation of the themes presented in that prayer. I am happy every time I return home safely, most times enriched, sometimes hassled, by all that happens on a voyage. Yet, I realize that some friends, family members, and others have not been so fortunate on their travels. Increasing one's knowledge about a prayer does not automatically lead to a change in practice, since in my case, I continue to recite the Shema. What has changed, grown, and flourished is my grappling with the ideas and concerns expressed in the prayer and my flight experiences. This continued need and desire to respond to life's situations has perpetuated my prayerful utterances to God sometimes in praise of creating the human mind and ambition and other times in thanks for a safe voyage.

These two foundational views about the spiritual and prayerful nature of human beings and the role of Jewish education in nurturing that spirituality and prayerfulness underlie this chapter. One significant implication of considering these two views together is that a major role of Jewish

---

<sup>1</sup>Portions of this article draw upon previously-written documents by this author, "Faith Development: A Jewish View" and "God and Prayer and Faith Development." Complete bibliographic citations for these published materials are listed at the end of this article.

education involves deepening, enriching, and perhaps uncovering the spirituality and prayerfulness that is already found in our students. Our tradition's prayers address human emotions and longings. Our students do not come to prayer as empty vessels. At any age, they come filled with experiences, feelings, ideas, hopes, and aspirations that can be enriched by our tradition's prayers as well as enrich our understanding of those prayers. The task becomes one of interweaving the prayers and modes of praying from our tradition with the person's spiritual orientation and life experiences.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on nurturing children's spirituality and prayerfulness. I do this by looking at James Fowler's work on Faith Development Theory. I present 1) a description of faith development theory; 2) the characteristics of a stage theory; 3) a description of the three stages of faith that cover all children and the implications of these stages on nurturing spirituality and prayerfulness; and 4) an important ingredient in nurturing spirituality and prayerfulness at all stages.

### **FAITH DEVELOPMENT: A DESCRIPTION**

The analysis of my prayer story and my approach to nurturing a student's spirituality and prayerfulness is guided by James Fowler's Faith Development Theory. Faith development is a theory that incorporates people's spirituality and religiosity as part of their human development. "Faith or 'faithing' is the process by which a person finds and makes meaning out of life's significant questions, adheres to this meaning, and acts it out in his or her life span." (*A Test of Faith*, Roberta Louis, page 1). Making meaning out of our lives is the basic quest that characterizes human existence.

Fowler sees each person's faith as developing in relation to shared centers of value and power. Individuals commit themselves to that which they perceive as valuable: "We value that which seems of transcendent worth and in relation to which our lives have worth." (Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, page 18). A person might value community, family, money, God, truth, justice, freedom, order, honor, a job, sports, the arts. In the next section, I present the stages of faith and explore their implications on the task of nurturing students' spirituality and prayerfulness.

### **THE STAGES OF FAITH: CHARACTERISTICS OF A STAGE THEORY**

Faith Development is a stage theory as are the theories of Piaget and Kohlberg. Fowler identifies one pre-stage and six "stages of faith" which he verified empirically. These stages are sequential and hierarchical, meaning that a person passes through them in order. People do not skip stages, or jump around from one stage to another.

The stages of faith explain how people structure their meaning-making processes. The structural orientation of the faith stages gives them a universal quality of being applicable to all people regardless of religious affiliation. A stage-four Jew, Catholic, and Muslim share a way of conceptualizing, expressing, and understanding their meaning-making processes. In a similar way, a formal operational thinker from the States and one from China would share a way of thinking about science problems and concepts like gravity and human anatomy.

While a stage-four Jew, Catholic and Muslim would structure their meaning-making processes similarly, the substance of their faith would be quite different. Each person's faith is filled with particular beliefs, ideas, stories, practices, symbols, and rituals.

Stages are not equated with particular ages. Yet, some relationship does exist between age and stage. Most people go through stages one and two during their childhood. Still, some adults remain in stage two for their entire lives. Most people get to stages three and four in Fowler's scheme as adults. Some achieve stage five, and only a few individuals reach stage six. One can live a purposeful and fulfilling life at any of these stages.

Moving to the next stage requires a change in the structure of one's meaning-making process and not a change in content. For example, someone who converts from Christianity to Judaism is changing the content of his or her faith but not the structure. Hence the Jew by choice's stage of faith is likely to remain the same through the conversion process. This change in structure is not automatic upon reaching a certain age or phase in one's life. Development must occur. For example, a stage two individual who begins to turn to his or her peer group for direction and not just his or her parents is showing signs of transitioning into stage three.

### **STAGES OF FAITH: IMPLICATIONS FOR NURTURING SPIRITUALITY AND PRAYERFULNESS**

This section discusses the first three stages of faith and their implications for nurturing the spirituality and prayerfulness of the children in our schools and programs. As this chapter focuses on children's development, I describe each of the stages for **children** at those stages since a stage-two adult, for example, looks somewhat different from a stage-two child.

#### **STAGE ONE: INTUITIVE PROJECTIVE FAITH**

This stage is generally associated with ages two through six. The ability to communicate in a recognized language signals the onset of this stage.

Children at this stage are emotive. They make known their desires. They openly express their feelings, whether they be of fear and sorrow or security and happiness. Stage-one children have a great sense of mystery and awe about the world which informs their views of God and attracts them to symbols and rituals. So much is new and wonderful for them. They like to mimic and master language, tasks, and chores.

The stage-one child is not always able to distinguish between reality and fantasy. The ability to think logically is absent. Stage-one children respond to the concrete. They are highly imaginative. Life is episodic and not always predictable. Stage-one individuals are egocentric. They view the world as revolving around them. They understand things from their perspective.

Their obedience comes from a desire to avoid punishment. They rely on others to help set boundaries for their behavior and bring order to their lives.

### **Nurturing Spirituality and Prayerfulness: Implications for Stage One**

This is the stage of awe. Stage-one children are spiritually adept. They are open to the mystery and majesty of life. They respond with great fervor. The major task at this stage is to give them a Jewish framework that matches the pleasure that they find in exploring the universe. This framework comes from introducing them to the array of Jewish symbols, rituals, prayers, songs, dances, stories, and concepts that make up celebrations of Shabbat, holidays, and life cycle events as well as those that help make our daily lives *kadosh*, holy.

Rituals and routines help bring order and security to the lives of stage-one children. The child at this stage has a ritual for just about everything from eating, sleeping, getting dressed, bathing, playing and leaving home. This is a wonderful time to introduce *berachot* and songs for many of these moments such as saying the Shema when one sleeps or reciting the *Motzi* at meal time.

At this stage, children love to imitate. They will play at preparing for Shabbat, being a *hazan*, or whatever Jewish behaviors are modeled for them. They learn by doing. While too often criticized for their short attention spans, they can practice performing a ritual or act over and over again until they get it right. They like repetition. They thrive on accomplishing and learning the smallest of tasks. They are eager to learn new things.

Stage-one children can learn a Hebrew name for something just as easily as an English one. They enjoy singing songs and blessings. They are capable of memorizing a multitude of prayers and tunes. They are concrete, five sense learners. They need to see, touch, taste, hear, and sniff the symbols.

### **STAGE TWO: MYTHICAL LITERAL FAITH**

This stage emerges around ages five, six or seven. It often lasts through one's early teens. Stage-two children are generally in elementary school.

The onset of concrete operational thinking precipitates the transition to stage two. At this point, children are able to distinguish between reality and fantasy. No longer so egocentric, stage-two individuals are able to take the perspective of another. Peers become important to them.

Life becomes linear and predictable. Events have a cause-and-effect relationship. The good should be rewarded and the bad punished. Justice is based on reciprocal fairness. All should be treated the same.

Children at this stage are aware of what it means to be a good and bad child. Stage-two children take their behavioral cues from recognized authority figures like parents and teachers. God appears to be like a consistent, fair, and caring ruler or parent.

Role models as exemplars of a people are important at this stage. Stories of heroes and heroines provide models of people's behavior and accomplishments to follow and emulate. These role models give the stage-two individual the sense of hope that personal difficulties can be overcome and goals achieved.

Stories of "my people" help the individual identify who he or she is and what he or she wants to become. Stories are taken literally. Meaning is both carried and trapped in the narrative.

Symbols are one-dimensional. Stage-two individuals take pride in participating and helping in the celebration of holidays and life cycle events, or in performing acts, as with *mitzvot*.

A self-righteousness can appear at this stage. Prejudice emerges at this stage.

### **Nurturing Spirituality and Prayerfulness: Implications for Stage Two**

At this stage, children are the great learners of information. Whereas at stage one they are highly emotive, at stage two they are rationalists and realists. They want to know the what and whys of prayers and praying. The what that they seek is every bit of information, the more novel the better, about a prayer or practice. The why explanation that this stage seeks is: why do Jews do this? An acceptable answer comes in presenting the tradition or by using an authoritative source. For example, explaining that we light two candles on Shabbat because the Torah has two commandments about Shabbat, observing and remembering, would be the type of explanation that would satisfy individuals at this stage.

The how of prayer can play an important role. They like to display their competency at doing things, performing acts. At stage two, students respond positively to having roles in prayer services. It is important to give them increasingly challenging roles as they mature. Whereas the six year old can open the ark or at least *parohet* (curtain), the ten year old can lead parts of the prayer service in Hebrew or English. The ten to twelve year olds are good candidates for renewing and expanding the concept of *shamash*, the synagogue guardian. I recommend forming a corps of individuals who would take responsibility for preparing, cleaning, and organizing the ritual objects found in the *beyt keneset*. They could polish the silver ritual objects, set the Torah, straighten the *siddurim* and *humashim*, check the *ner tamid* (eternal light), and the like. Just as importantly, this could be adapted to one's home as well.

Seeing parents, teachers, and family friends participate in home rituals and synagogue prayer services is important for this stage. They respond to what adults expect of them. They learn what adults expect and value by watching the adults. Spending time with educators and rabbis discussing



significant issues like prayer and praying is important. By getting to know and hear educators and rabbis, these leaders become some of those authority figures who shape their ideas. These sessions can have a profound influence on their views and lives. This link to our Jewish leaders can serve them well both in the present and later in their lives.

### **STAGE THREE: SYNTHETIC-CONVENTIONAL FAITH**

The emergence of stage three often corresponds to adolescence. The ability to think abstractly and to see oneself from another person's perspective often signal the move into stage three.

The stage-three adolescent is overly conscious of how others perceive him or her. Approval and acceptance is sought from others. This often results in their following the crowd as seen in their dressing like one another, their reluctance to tattle on one another, and their hesitancy to express views unpopular with their peers. Whereas peers are important to the stage-two individual, the peer group becomes critical at stage three.

Authority remains external and expands beyond parents. The stage-three individual selects these sources of authority, either groups—athletic teams, youth groups, special interest groups, peer groups, friends—or individuals—a coach, youth leader, aunt or uncle, rabbi, director of education, teacher, cult leader, or gang leader. The stage-three individual is vulnerable to the loss of self, even to the point of self-destruction, to groups as is the case with gangs, or to an authority figure as is the case with cult leaders. On a positive side, this group orientation makes the stage-three individual an ardent supporter and advocate of a team, club, or institution.

Identity is a function of an adolescent's roles and relationships. God is understood mainly in interpersonal terms: God as Friend, the One who cares about me and appreciates me.

Symbols evoke strong emotions. They can be used to demonstrate the adolescent's identity or group affiliation as is the case with wearing a ring with one's Hebrew name or a *mezuzah* on a necklace.

Along with the ability to think abstractly comes a grappling with and often apprehension about one's future. This concern about the future brings on an awareness of death.

Views, relationships, values and beliefs are held tacitly. They are not examined critically or reflectively. While strongly held, these ideas and convictions are often fleeting and piecemeal, unsystematic. Sometimes individuals at this stage get caught seeing the world and themselves in one way; they fail to perceive alternatives.

### **Nurturing Spirituality and Prayerfulness: Implications for Stage Three**

The onset of this stage in adolescence is filled with emotion, grappling, and searching. Adolescents have a rich and deep inner life. They are thinking about life and death issues, many theological in

orientation, ranging from love and friendship to suicide and life after death. Most enjoy having conversations with people generally other than their parents about many life issues and their futures. For others, their inner thoughts and feelings rarely bubble up unless a probe is sent out such as a journal assignment. Creative writing or other artistic forms of expression can render some thoughtful, deep, and compelling views on prayer and spirituality.

The range of emotions and life concerns of stage-three adolescents is as vast and rich as the range of responses for which Jewish prayers were created. A prayer curriculum for this stage should explore the types of prayers, the occasions for uttering a *berahah* to God and the rationale for uttering these prayers. A sample lesson might include: looking at prayers and *berahot* that mark passages in our life time; identifying passages in their life time; picking or writing a prayer that reflects a particular life passage.

Whereas stage-two individuals heed authority figures, adolescents at stage three are prone to rebellion. They are deeply questioning all that they have been told, who they are, and what they are going to become. Ideas about God and one's Judaism can be the subject of that questioning. They are not necessarily rejecting as much as they are exploring what they are going to claim as their views. Fowler suggests that when an adolescent tells you: "I no longer believe in God," the reply is: "Which God is it that you no longer believe in?" They need to hear that Jews have many different views of God. In general, they can get stuck in a particular view without being able to imagine alternatives. They can say the most outrageous things and be unwilling to back off from their strongly-held view for the day. Equally prevalent, can be an unwillingness to take a stand publically, as they are overly concerned about looking foolish in the eyes of their peers. These problems can be overcome by examining the work of some person, such as a Jewish thinker, whom they do not know. This can be done either by having them argue against the person's ideas, or by role playing, placing them in the position of having to defend the person's ideas. If the scholar's view is torn to shreds, no one in the class loses face. These stage-three individuals get to try out different ideas, without having to reveal their own uncertainty and inclinations.

### AN ELEMENT FOR NURTURING SPIRITUALITY AND PRAYERFULNESS AT ALL STAGES

The stages of faith are helpful in suggesting areas of emphasis for nurturing spirituality and prayerfulness for children of different stages. Any approach to interweaving the prayers and modes of praying from our tradition with the person's spiritual orientation and life experiences should share certain similarities across stages. I focus on the importance of teaching the values or concepts found in our tradition's prayers at all stages.

While children only begin to think abstractly generally somewhere in the transition from stage two to stage three, children of all ages think conceptually. For example, any two year old understands the concept of coveting, a behavior for which many an *al het* prayer has been recited on Yom Kippur. More importantly, our daily lives are filled with situations that touch upon the values and concepts like healing, love, justice, thanksgiving, redemption, and petition. As explained earlier in this chapter,

throughout our lives, Fowler points out, we commit ourselves to those shared centers of value and power that we find as having worth. These values give our lives direction. Our lives could benefit from guidance in our earthly strivings. The siddur is a repository of Jewish values about what makes for a good, fulfilling, and ethical life. The siddur presents a world view that can guide our behavior and relationships. The values or concepts in the siddur can be used as a springboard to exploring these concerns in greater depth and to helping interweave Jewish values into our lives.

### A FINAL THOUGHT

Everyone who reads this will in some capacity have responsibility for nurturing children's spirituality and prayerfulness as a parent, teacher, or community member. When you approach that task, you should strive to combine the wisdom that Fowler's structural theory presents for all children; the names, faces, spiritual journeys and life histories of each child; and the depth, richness, and wisdom of Judaism's prayers and approaches to praying. When nurturing a person's spirituality or prayerfulness, we will not always know what impact that education will have upon them. We must at least create the climate that acknowledges the importance of spirituality and prayer and the learning environment that seeks to connect a Jewish framework with the learners' lives. In Fowler's terms, the task is to help nurture the child as fully as possible at each stage rather than to move them from one stage to another. We do this by assisting each child to make connections between Judaism and his or her own life. The next time you fly, what prayer will you recite?

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Fowler, James W. *Stages of Faith*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981.

Goodman, Roberta Louis. "Faith Development: A Jewish View," found in *The New Jewish Teachers Handbook*, Audrey Friedman Marcus and Raymond A. Zwerin, editors. Denver: Alternatives in Religious Education, 1994.

Goodman, Roberta Louis. "God and Prayer and Faith Development" in *The Jewish Preschool Teachers Handbook*, Sandy Furfine Wolf and Nancy Cohen Nowak. Denver: Alternatives in Religious Education, 1991.

Goodman, Roberta Louis. *A Test of Faith: An Instant Lesson on Faith Development*. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1985.

## **Actors in the Drama of Prayer and Spirituality: The Teacher**

Lifsa Schachter

Teachers of prayer are challenged by changing concepts regarding the image and roles of all teachers. Where teachers were once thought of as professionals who provide learners with new knowledge and skills, it is now accepted that teaching requires more than this. Teachers must also model the way skilled experts function in given fields. For teachers of prayer this means that providing students with the skills to participate in a prayer service and an understanding of what prayers mean is insufficient. Teachers must also communicate what it means to be prayerful and the place of prayer in personal life and in community. This challenge occurs concomitant with three significant changes: prayer as a subject within the Jewish supplementary school curriculum is growing; children come to school with fewer experiences in Jewish prayer; and the teachers are often less engaged in prayer themselves.

At one time the study of prayer in Jewish religious schools was entirely devoted to teaching the mechanics of reciting prayers and the choreography of a prayer service. Instruction in prayer has expanded to include the structure, meaning and origin of the liturgy. New and innovative curricula also encourage the exploration of the phenomenology of prayer and the ways prayer can be personally meaningful in the life of the students.

Paradoxically, as the area included under the subject "prayer" has expanded, the resources that the typical student brings to its study have narrowed. It is rare to find children in today's supplementary school who experience parents or other family members regularly engaged in prayer, who are familiar with the prayer service from regular family visits to the synagogue, or who have warm personal associations with the words and melodies of the service and the ambiance of the synagogue.

Teachers of prayer often share similar backgrounds. I have frequently encountered teachers who lack the Hebrew language skills and the personal experience necessary for fluent and meaningful participation in a Hebrew prayer service. Their limited repertoires preclude their being able to nurture spiritual growth—especially in the context of Jewish liturgy. Many teachers never enter a synagogue if not required to be there, and when they are present for a prayer service they are frequently disengaged. They lack personal involvement with issues of theology and they are not thoughtful about the relationship between their personal belief systems and prayer. All this limits their ability to teach prayer in meaningful ways.

Teachers disengaged from prayer find it difficult to teach even the rudimentary skills of prayer successfully because children unerringly seem to know the mind/faith set of their teachers and they reject inauthentic messages. Consequently, when a teacher without any personal connections to prayer teaches prayer, children often learn something not intended. The official curriculum may be about learning prayer, but the hidden curriculum teaches children how to not take prayer seriously. I contend that the difficulty some students have learning prayers stems not so much from the cognitive difficulty of the task, but because of the discomfort of the adult teacher of prayer and his/her inability to model what is being taught.

Two opposite vignettes come to mind. In one school, the teacher in charge of prayer attempts to engage the students of the middle school in a prayer service while the classroom teachers either slip away or gather in the back of the sanctuary to talk (not so quietly) among themselves. In another school, each teacher, not only the one in charge of the service, seems to be deeply engrossed in his/her own prayer. While modeling appropriate prayer behaviors they are simultaneously subtly communicating to their students images of engagement in prayer.

We have learned that just as a teacher who never writes cannot successfully teach writing, so too, a teacher who does not engage in prayer cannot successfully teach prayer. The teacher may help students acquire limited specific prayer skills, but cannot succeed at what is most important, fostering the kind of spiritual atmosphere in which true prayer takes place. Nor can such teachers encourage in their students a desire to engage in prayer. Even the lowest level mechanical skills are acquired with unnecessary difficulty.

Given this reality, it may be more useful to reformulate the challenge to teachers of prayer: Can teachers be encouraged to deal with their own prayer-related issues in ways that will make them more successful at initiating students into the world of Jewish prayer? The problems for the teacher of prayer may appear daunting, but there are things that educators and rabbis can do to bring about change. Most important of all is the opening up of the topic of prayer and the difficulties surrounding it to honest examination. Change will take place only after teachers are opened up to the reality of the problem and are encouraged to reflect on their values and to try to deepen their engagement with prayer. What follows is a somewhat random set of suggestions from which staff development activities can be selected as appropriate to different settings and groups of teachers.

1. Incorporate prayer into the regular activities of teachers when they get together for meetings of various kinds.
2. Schedule "learner's *minyanim*" for faculty to be followed by explorations of the prayer experience.
3. Develop a "teaching prayer" section of the teachers' bulletin. Feature a prayer of the month with material that includes background information and teaching ideas.
4. Stock the teachers' reference shelf with rich resources on the background and development of prayer, with spiritual autobiographies, and with reflections on experiencing prayer and dealing with prayer issues.
5. Develop creative contexts for faculty to explore prayer together. Workshops developing synectics, movement, and creative arts can be designed to enhance the experience and meaning of prayer.
6. Display the creative products of prayer workshops prominently.

7. Encourage teachers to keep prayer journals and invite them to share their entries.
8. Engage teachers in the design of creative worship services and prayerbooks for their students.
9. Plan a staff retreat which will allow for more extensive prayer experience and exploration.
10. Link specific prayers with experience in the world of nature, in the family, and in personal struggles and triumphs.
11. Encourage faculty to share their growing connections to the world of Jewish prayer with their students.

If the staff and faculty of a religious school engage in a collaborative deliberation with the issues surrounding teaching prayer, the impact on the way that prayer is taught will be enormous. It must be emphasized that this engagement with prayer issues is not only for those who are novices at prayer. Those among us who are at home in the liturgy and who pray with some regularity also experience the challenges involved in prayer. True moments of prayer are ephemeral. The difference between the activity of reciting prayers and authentic prayer is all too real. Taking prayer seriously is a struggle for those who pray frequently as well as for those who pray infrequently. This is an important message for all teachers.

It is important to communicate to teachers that engaging in meaningful prayer requires personal struggle—that without this struggle prayer cannot be taught effectively. Teachers will be encouraged when rabbis, principals and other education leaders disclose their personal struggles and prayer journeys. Teachers who engage in a personal struggle with prayer will find ways to foster a spiritual environment in which prayer is emotionally meaningful and satisfying to others. Through their personal journeys teachers will learn how to talk about prayer to young children and to adolescents in ways that are intellectually and emotionally honest. Through their prayer journeys teachers will be empowered to find ways to teach the mechanical and Hebrew language skills of Jewish prayer in ways that do not bore children nor alienate those who acquire skills more slowly. And perhaps most important, through personal journeys teachers will develop empathy with the rich world of spontaneous prayer that characterizes the inner lives of children, helping them to find the crucial connections between children's spontaneous experiences of prayer and the formal liturgy of the synagogue.



## **Making a *Shiduk*: Text as a Vehicle for Dialogue Between Student and Teacher**

Jeffrey L. Schein

The preceding articles by Goodman and Schachter suggest that a student's commencing a spiritual quest reflects the relationship between the teacher and the student. For a strict Buberian—though perhaps not Martin Buber himself—no further comment is necessary since, in Buber's terms, the raw materials for the encounter between an I and a Thou (teacher and student) are already present. However, Buber himself understood that the world of education is a world of mediation. Thus, in Judaism, we must consider the role of Jewish texts as a participant in this spiritual conversation among student, teacher, and tradition.

It is critical that the teacher have an awareness of the role of texts in the life of the Jew and the Jewish community. Otherwise, when asked why teach a particular verse from the Torah or line from the *siddur*, the teacher will answer the question haltingly. Teachers will jump from word to word and verse to verse in ways that are confusing rather than compelling.

A more engaging way to convey the spiritual richness and potential of Jewish texts (especially Jewish prayer texts) is to present the words and verses as:

1. part of a narrative in which the Jewish story (and its many chapters or sub-stories) unfolds;
2. the embodiment of an underlying Jewish value or set of values;
3. the source of one's own spirituality.

Each of these functions of prayer is valid and important. But each requires a different relationship between the student and teacher as well as a different pedagogic strategy if its potential is to be realized. The following sections detail the unique potential of each use of text by exploring the role of the most frequently recurring character in these texts, God.

### **NARRATIVE**

Our first strategy is to allow the story itself to take the lead. We should not dwell on the particulars of God's being. Rather, we should allow God to play His/Her role as written, because our overall goal is to enable children and adults to identify with and share in the story of the Jewish people.

### **JEWISH VALUES**

Secondly, we view God as the anchor of a Jewish values complex, and we ought to treat God as such. In this mode, God is a shorthand for everything we treasure in life. *Midrash* (creative rabbinic interpretation of Torah) is one of our best sources for completing this task—precisely because it contains numerous creative accounts which show God serving in this capacity.



## SPIRITUALITY

The third educational goal is to present God as the source of our spirituality. We need to ask the sharpest and most penetrating questions of ourselves and our students concerning God's role in our personal lives and in our community. Particularly in a Reconstructionist context, we must reconcile our human experience with the God-language embedded in our traditional texts.

Each of these three categories carries a pedagogic task and directs us toward a particular set of resources. The key educational challenge in perpetuating the "story" is to find engaging and creative ways of recreating the story. When we treat God as the *ikar* (essence) of our values we inevitably must match traditional and creative *midrashim* with the best pedagogic strategies we have for questioning, stretching, and probing a text. When we think of God in relationship to our own spirituality, we turn to pedagogic methods such as dialogue, role-play, and journal-keeping.

The following paragraphs exemplify classroom application of these ideas.

### EXAMPLE #1: *MI HAMOHA*

#### NARRATIVE MODE

When teaching *Mi Hamoha* using the narrative mode, the challenge—as indicated above—is to tell the story while facilitating the drama and delving into the meaning contained in the story. When working with groups, I have found it very helpful to ask each group to take a verse from *Shirat Hayam* (the Song at the Sea) and create its own *midrash* in the way Jo Milgrom suggests in her book *Handmade Midrash* (Jewish Publication Society, 1992). Participants create visual commentary on the verse by tearing paper and composing the pictures that the verse evokes. This process can recapture the swelling of praise that moves through the poem.

#### JEWISH VALUES MODE

Understanding God as the anchor for the entire system of Jewish values within the Exodus story brings up the tension between the role of God and the role of humans. It seems inconceivable that humans were not even partial agents for what happened at the sea. One way to explore this division is to tell the famous *midrashic* story which portrays Nahshon taking the first courageous step into the ocean. This shows the value of human responsibility in our own redemption. The human step, however small, is critical.

The skilled teacher will move beyond Nahshon and intentionally heighten the tension by asking incisive questions. Do we/ought we see God as providing the spiritual and physical force for splitting the sea? Are we more or less comfortable with this interpretation than the "naturalistic" understanding that a flash flood struck the Sea of Reeds while the Egyptians were passing through? Beyond the Exodus, what does each understanding say about relationships between God and human beings? This kind of inquiry and maintenance of such tensions sustain the evolution of Jewish values.

### SPIRITUAL EXPLORATION MODE

The third domain of teaching a text is the recognition by both the student and the teacher that the text is not only a great and sacred story and a commentary on Jewish values; it is also an invitation to explore one's own spirituality. One can notice that wonder and awe reside in the Israelites' exclamation, "*Mi hamoha!*" after crossing the sea. This is not an objective account of the event. This perspective opens the doorway for extended discussions on what sorts of things in one's own life are full of wonder and awe.

Harold Kushner's "The Idea of God in the Jewish Classroom" found in *Creative Jewish Education* (Rossel Books, 1985) provides a useful example of helping children to identify these experiences.

### EXAMPLE #2: YOTZER OR

Finding a context for understanding a particular prayer text is one of our most challenging tasks. One useful resource for exploring the meaning of *Yotzer Or* is the videotape of the Ray Bradbury story "All Summer in a Day."

In the narrative mode, the setting of the story on a dark planet gives new meaning to the *Yotzer Or* prayer, which praises the creation of light. On this unnamed planet—which is not earth—unremitting gray and rain is interrupted every several years by a brief period of sunlight.<sup>2</sup> The early scenes in the movie show ten year olds standing under sun lamps to receive their daily dose of artificial light. Images such as these help children to begin to appreciate that prayer is about making problematic what one normally takes for granted and responding to that problem with a burst of appreciation.

Poetic midrash then explodes in the movie. During a brief period of sunlight, flowers blossom and children play in fields lit up by the sun. The contrast of this spontaneity with the normal drabness of the children's lives sets up a context for analyzing another phrase from *Yotzer Or*, "*betuvo mehadash behol yom tamid ma'aseh bereshit.*" This can be interpreted as, "God daily renews the miracle of creation." This reading of *Yotzer Or* begins an exploration of the Jewish values of constancy and renewal.

There is also a *teshuvah* (repentance) theme in the film played out in the drama between the protagonist, Margaret, and antagonist, Billy. Margaret is an earthling from Ohio who has seen the sun before. None of her friends believes that it will shine on him or her. Particularly cynical is Billy, who takes the lead in locking Margaret into a closet as the debate about whether the sun will ever shine unfolds. Before Margaret's friends or Billy can let her out they get caught up in the excitement that the sun actually has appeared. Thus, Margaret, who most passionately believed in the sun's appearance and wanted most to re-experience light, is the one deprived of the opportunity to enjoy the sun.

---

<sup>2</sup>Selections from *Birkat Bahamah*, the once every twenty-eight year celebration of the solar orbit, also fit in this teaching mode.

When the rain resumes, other friends help Margaret out of the closet, but she has missed the light; rain and gray have reappeared. Billy is repentant and approaches her on two different occasions to ask for her forgiveness. Here, a discussion of the tensions between Margaret and Billy could lead into an exploration of the most spiritual themes of the high holidays—repentance and forgiveness.

In this narrative, light becomes a metaphor for forgiveness and God's graciousness (*a la* Rav Kook). Does this mean that Margaret is obligated to accept Billy's request for forgiveness? What does *halakah* (Jewish law) teach us about forgiveness and *teshuvah* in these and other circumstances?

## CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

As teachers we have a responsibility to strive towards an educational *shlemut* (fullness) in which we teach prayer as a mode for experiencing Jewish narrative, values, and spirituality. We can only do this, however, if we are simultaneously striving for insights into ourselves and our own understandings of Judaism.

Rabbi Ira Eisenstein believed that there were indeed different ways that one could approach teaching about God, Torah, and Israel—naturalistic, transnaturalistic, and supernaturalistic. Rabbi Eisenstein's approach suggests that teaching about spiritual matters is only effective when the concept of God presented is congruent with the presentation of the narrative. We might call this a "theory of congruence." For example, a supernatural god is congruent with the notion of a divinely revealed Torah and a chosen people. An equally congruent example from a transnatural perspective is that of a people, Israel, who searched for the Divine and developed Torah out of that search. Using this theory in combination with sound pedagogical principles, you have a good shot at teaching about spiritual matters in an effective way. But when the metaphors are mixed, the teaching becomes ambiguous and insipid.

Self-knowledge, in this case, becomes paramount. You may be familiar with the story "Aaron and the Wrath of God" (*Windows on the Jewish Soul*, JRF, 1994). The story is humorous and profound, because it portrays a father's unwitting crossing of goals as he attempts to teach his son informally about God and the Shema. In the story, Aaron's father starts out by treating the second paragraph of the Shema as narrative for a bedtime story. He simply wants to relay the paragraph as part of the Jewish experience.

Ninety-nine nights out of a hundred, Aaron, the seven-year-old son, simply would have processed *vehaya im shamoa* as part of the Jewish story as well. But on this night, Aaron processes God in this paragraph with his more intimate and vulnerable sense of spirituality. Aaron's dad must then sort through the different modes of experiencing God in order to teach his son. Since his son has perceived God in the narrative and spiritual modes, the father moves the story into the mode of seeking God as the divine support behind the values of compassion and justice.

We learn from this story that much good and insight can come out of our naivete about teaching God if we:

1. roll with the punches as lovingly and openly as does Aaron's father.
2. distinguish between "primary" and "secondary naivete" in our teaching. ("Primary naivete" is the result of not having confronted the rational contradictions in our own understanding of prayer. "Secondary naivete" is a commitment to openness and surprise after such examination has taken place.)

On the whole, we should set our goal on helping instructors to be self-aware as they teach in each of the three modes and seek ways to use the modes concurrently as a three-part approach to prayer.



## **Reconstructionist Objectives for Teaching Prayer and Spirituality<sup>1</sup>**

JRF Education Commission

**In cycles of learning that integrate the Jewish learning needs and abilities of children and families, we aim to provide the following for our Jewish Reconstructionist communities:**

1. Ability to recite fluently critical prayers in Hebrew. Such prayers include: Kaddish, Shabbat *berachot*, Torah blessings, other lifecycle/holiday prayers and blessings.
2. Understanding of the meaning of those critical prayers; the use of prayer to explore traditional and Reconstructionist understandings of God—and the use of Reconstructionist understandings of God to explore prayer.
3. Sufficient knowledge of the order of the service to participate in prayer experience; some level of comfort in leading communal prayer.
4. Understanding and application of key concepts related to prayer (*keva*, *kavanah*, *matbe 'ah*—both traditional and Reconstructionist).

---

<sup>1</sup>These objectives for teaching prayer and spirituality are excerpted from the Objectives for Reconstructionist Curriculum found in the *Reconstructionist Curriculum Resource Guide* (JRF, 1996).



### A. The Siddur as Text







## B. Children and the Siddur





### C. The Shema





## D. The Amidah





## Notes on Using the Interpretive Amidah

Sherry Lee Linkon

Marcia Falk's "Interpretive Amidah"<sup>1</sup> offers a thought-provoking and inspiring alternative to the familiar, traditional prayers. I like using it because the different language, in both Hebrew and English, requires that we pay closer attention to what we're saying and what the words represent than we might with the more standard version. One of my goals any time I lead a service is to encourage people to think in a new way about the familiar rituals and to connect the sometimes abstract or even formulaic language of prayer to our everyday lives and experiences. By rewriting traditional themes in new language and by revisioning the content of some sections of the Amidah, Falk offers a rich opportunity for fresh thinking and making connections.

Falk's Amidah follows the same format and themes as the traditional version, but her commentaries and the accompanying readings invite us to think about these themes in new ways. Some of the prayers shift the focus of the traditional version significantly, while others stay quite close to the original. So, for example, instead of thinking about the *Avot* in terms of individuals who have come before us, we are asked to consider our connections as individuals with the fabric of Jewish tradition. I appreciate the revisions in part because they focus more on human experience than on addressing God.

The 33-page section (page 150-183, *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Eve*) offers a rich combination of readings to accompany the prayers, and the prayers and readings can be combined in a variety of ways depending on the preferences and habits of the community. For the Cleveland group, which has an informal style and only a few members with strong Hebrew skills (and I am not one of them, I should note), I set up a three-part responsive reading, with one person reading the Hebrew, the congregation reading the English translation, I, myself, reading the English commentary (in italics beneath the gray boxes for each prayer), and then another individual reading a selected piece in English (I talked with members as they arrived and handed out notes with reading assignments).

For the fourth section, "Hallowing the Sabbath," we began with the box on page 168, reading the Hebrew, the English translation, and then the italicized commentary. Then someone read the poem, "Light a Candle," in English, on page 169. We concluded this section by reading the italicized commentary and then the prayer in the box on page 171. In one case, for the final prayer on peace, I substituted one of the poems in the Readings section, "The Peace of Wild Things" (page 196) for the readings in Falk's version, and using this kind of substitution would

---

<sup>1</sup>The "Interpretive Amidah" by Marcia Falk was included in the *Shabbat Eve* volume of *Kol Haneshamah*, but does not appear in the *Shabbat Vehagim* volume. *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Eve* available for purchase. Contact the JRF office for information.



add even more variety to the potential already available in Falk's version. The Amidah meditations that follow the Falk section (ppage 179-183) might also work as alternatives to the readings in the "Interpretive Amidah."

While many participants will find the "Interpretive Amidah" a refreshing change, some may not be comfortable with Falk's language. It seems to me that ritual has its own spiritual force, and one of the strengths of Reconstructionism is its ability to accommodate a variety of practices and habits. Given this, it's probably important to invite those who prefer the traditional version to read that section individually if they wish, while the congregation reads the alternative section.

[illegible]



## **“Prayer for the Perplexed” as a Tool for Faculty Development**

Jeffrey L. Schein

The following selection from Elliot Dorff's *Knowing God: Jewish Journeys to the Unknowable* (Aronson Publishers, 1993) is a valuable tool for faculty development. The selection lays out the complexity of the prayer experience. As Lifsa Schachter has indicated, the very opportunity to wrestle with their own spiritual questions is a gift for educators who too often are asked to teach what they themselves don't understand or have not come to emotional, intellectual and spiritual terms with.

This article lends itself to a three-part faculty in-service training series on prayer. The first session should be devoted to an open-ended discussion of the article in terms of the teachers' own spirituality and practice of prayer.

A critical second session should focus on Dorff's understanding of the skills needed to engage in Jewish prayer (summarized at the end of his article). Dorff provides a heuristic tool for teachers by extending the notion of "skills" to include the learning needed for a student to attain competence and comfort with the siddur.

The faculty ought to be encouraged to reflect on these skills from the perspective of their own teaching. They should be encouraged to share openly those areas in which they feel most competent and those teaching areas in which they characteristically flounder.

A third session should march under the rubric of the Yiddish folk saying, "God sends the cure before the disease." The rabbi or educator ought to assemble from this guide the kind of teaching resources that seem to address the most frequently articulated challenge of their faculty.

I have prepared the following Skills Analysis Outline For Faculty to help facilitate this process.

## SKILLS ANALYSIS OUTLINE FOR FACULTY

### I. Mechanical

- A. Hebrew decoding
- B. Traditional modes of verbal expression (*nusah*)
- C. Traditional modes of non-verbal expression (body language and choreography of the service)

### II. Layers of Traditional Meaning

- A. Sources of prayer in Bible and other Jewish resources
- B. Siddur as an organic whole
  - 1. Relationship of prayers to one another
  - 2. *Mahzor* and other Jewish prayerbooks

### III. Layers of Personal/Spiritual Meaning

(The skills in this area lead to an ability to extract from prayer a sense of the following:)

- A. Perspective, appreciation, and meaning
- B. Communal and historical roots
- C. Cognitive knowledge
- D. Emotional effectiveness
- E. Morals/values
- F. Fulfilling a *mitzvah* and coming into contact with God

### IV. Problems and Dilemma

- A. Hebrew
- B. *Keva* and *kavanah*
- C. Theological underpinnings of prayer

## Prayer for the Perplexed<sup>1</sup>

Elliot N. Dorff

Many modern Jews avoid prayer. They lack the skills of prayer, and that makes prayer strange and unfamiliar. Yet they feel that they should be able to pray, and so prayer is also threatening and humiliating.

The mechanical difficulties are compounded by a more basic issue. Most Jews do not know why they should pray. Aside from the sociological fact that most of their friends rarely pray, and so the peer pressure is clearly against praying, they have deep problems with prayer. Is there a God who hears prayer? After the Holocaust the evidence seems, at best, ambiguous. Even if there is a listening God, why does He need our prayers? After all, if He is the omniscient God He is supposed to be, He should know our needs and thoughts without our voicing them. We certainly should not have to repeat them to Him over and over again, as the liturgy bids us do. Moreover, how do we know whether a prayer of petition has been successful? God can presumably say "No!"—and there are occasions when He probably should. For all these reasons and more, Jews do not pray.

And yet prayer is at the root of Judaism. In Biblical times the primary form of worship was animal sacrifice, but the Bible records verbal prayers that accompanied sacrifices (e. g. Deuteronomy 26:1-11) and the performance of other commandments (e.g. *ibid.* verses 12-15), some personal prayers (e.g. I Samuel 2:1-10), and, of course, the entire book of Psalms, which was probably used in a variety of liturgical settings. The destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E. and the resulting inability to sacrifice animals undoubtedly spurred the development of verbal prayers, but we do not hear of a formalized liturgy until after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. By the time the *Mishnah* was edited a century and a half later, though, the basic structure and many of the fundamental elements of our present prayerbook were already set. The Rabbis also provided a theological rationale for the substitution of prayer for sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> Consequently prayer has been the primary way Jews have worshiped God for almost two thousand years.

Moreover it is all-pervasive. Synagogues schedule services every day of the year, and Jewish life cycle events are surrounded by prayer. Even daily activities like rising in the morning and eating are occasions for Jewish prayer. Thus prayer is at the root of Judaism both historically and phenomenologically.

---

<sup>1</sup>This article was originally published as a monograph entitled, "A Guide to the Prayerfully Perplexed" by the University of Judaism (1982). It now appears in edited form in *Knowing God: Jewish Journeys to the Unknowable* (Aronson Publishers, 1993)

<sup>2</sup>*Berachot* 32b; cf. also *Ta'anit* 2b and *Pesikta* 165b.

Jews know this. They know that a Jew who is really at home with Judaism finds prayer both natural and meaningful. They know that their grandparents prayed often and that prayer was an integral part of what made them Jews. Even if modern Jews know very little about prayer, they correctly sense one crucial theological truth about it: Judaism is impossible without prayer.

How, then, can a modern Jew pray?

### A. THE SKILLS INVOLVED IN PRAYER

Let us begin with some of the more obvious, mechanical problems and then move on to some of the deeper, philosophical issues.

The first step in dissolving some of the discomfort involved in prayer is to correct a common misconception. Many Jews feel that prayer is something that one should be able to do automatically, like breathing, and when they find that they cannot pray they are disconcerted and annoyed. It should be comforting, then, to note at the outset that prayer is not a natural and spontaneous human activity but is rather a skill. Actually, it is a number of skills. It will be helpful to spell out some of these both to reassure those who have been perplexed by their inability to pray without training and also to describe some of the features that make Jewish prayer rich.

Some of the required skills are evident. One of them is the ability to read Hebrew. An active, conversational knowledge of the language is not required, but it certainly helps to be able to understand written Hebrew, at least the paragraphs of the siddur, the Jewish prayerbook. Translations are available, of course; some recent ones are in contemporary American English, and a few even manage to capture some of the literary flair of the original Hebrew. Nevertheless, without Hebrew one is always a step removed from the vital spirit of Jewish prayer.

There are other mechanical skills to be learned. Jewish prayer is not only spoken: much of it is chanted. The Jewish heritage of liturgical music is one of the oldest and richest in the world. It is easy to see how this makes Jewish prayer beautiful, but the music does more: it contributes immeasurably to the depth of feeling in Jewish prayer and to its very meaning. We communicate, after all, not only in what we say but in how we say it. Consequently, one has to learn the various modes that are used on specific occasions for chanting both the services and the scrolls in addition to the particular melodies sung in a given congregation. However difficult this is, it is worth the effort because the music of the liturgy is a reservoir of beauty and expression.

Jews not only say and sing their prayers: they move with them. There are times when it is proper to stand, to sit, to bow, to bend the knees and to take steps forward and backward, and people familiar with the liturgy often sway back and forth ("shuckle"). We communicate with our bodies as much as we do with our words, and so this liturgical choreography enhances the experience of prayer.

So do the clothes that we wear. Here again, though, there are a number of skills to be mastered. When and how is the *tallit* (prayer shawl) worn? When and why are its fringes kissed? How does

one put on *tefillin* (phylacteries) and take them off? Is head covering necessary? If so, why? Why do some people wear white gowns and sneakers on Yom Kippur? And are any of these symbols required of women—or available to them?

There are skills and areas of knowledge involved in Jewish prayer which are less obvious than those mentioned so far. One of these is the ability to discern the multiple levels of meaning which the words have. Much of Jewish liturgy is based on material from Biblical and Rabbinic sources. To one who knows these sources, the lines of the liturgy reverberate with allusions and associations which enrich the cognitive and emotional meaning of the prayers. The prayerbook is, then, not just a staid, official regimen; it is an artistic weaving of the sources of the Jewish tradition to express the mind, the heart, and the soul of the Jew.

There is yet more to be learned. The meaning of Jewish prayer does not stem from the individual prayers alone, however sophisticated one's understanding of their content, sources, and allusions may be. Much of the impact of the prayers is a product of their order, and so one must learn the structure of the prayerbook as well. The prayerbook is what its Hebrew name says, a *siddur*, an ordered liturgy. The prayers are arranged with the intent to create a veritable symphony of prayer, with emotional highs and lows. By following the course of the set liturgy the Jew is taught and reminded of some of the primary values and tenets of Judaism in the context of emotionally inspirational words and music. The words and music motivate thought and action in accordance with Jewish beliefs and ideals, but they can have their full effect only if the Jew resonates to the order of the liturgy as well as to its individual parts.

The most difficult skills involved in prayer are those which touch its very heart. Prayer, after all, concerns a person's beliefs, values, conscience, historical associations, emotions, and hopes. To pray, we must cultivate the ability to think in abstract terms and deal with the non-concrete, or "spiritual," side of our lives. Developing physical skills is difficult enough; learning to handle and foster our spiritual natures is harder still. It should thus be clear that if the chances of hitting a home run the first time at bat are slim, the chances of doing the equivalent in prayer are even less.

## **B. THE LEVELS OF PRAYER**

The skills involved in prayer may seem overwhelming, but they will not be so if two other misconceptions are recognized as such and dispelled. Many Jews assume that prayer is one type of experience, and one either has it or does not. Both clauses of the last sentence are false; prayer is a multi-faceted experience that exists in a variety of forms and on many different levels. Some types and levels of prayer are more fulfilling than others, but all have value. Consequently, a Jew who is not fully competent in the skills described above should not despair; he or she can have important, meaningful experiences of prayer while acquiring the skills to deepen and broaden them. Such people should take comfort in the fact that even those who are highly skilled in prayer have their on-days and their off-days, and they should recognize that a person may "succeed" in prayer in many different ways.



Since we are talking about people's experiences in prayer, let me speak personally. Some mornings I am not at all in a frame of mind to pray. I was up late the night before, I am worried about something that I have to do that day, or I am simply in a rush. I put on the *tefillin* and recite the prayers. While there may be moments when I manage to pay some attention to a line or two of the liturgy, much of the time my mind is distracted and my recitation is mechanical. The whole thing is over in ten or fifteen minutes.

And yet I persist in doing at least that on those mornings. Why? In part, I suppose, it is simply force of habit. A more important reason is a feeling of obligation as a Jew: the tradition commands us to pray several times each day. But part of it is because I gain something experientially even on those blurry-eyed mornings. At the least I become more familiar with the words of the liturgy. This, of course, is most important at the beginning of one's training in prayer, but even at later stages there is often something to be learned. Mechanical praying, in other words, minimally serves to hone liturgical skills even if it does not succeed as prayer itself.

But it is generally more than that. When I am reciting the prayers, albeit mechanically, I am consciously identifying myself with my people and its history, especially if I am praying as part of a community, and I am at least subconsciously aware that these prayers bespeak commitments which I must act upon daily, even if that day I do not have the presence of mind to think clearly about them. Because of these residual benefits I rarely feel that I have totally wasted my time in prayer, even if I have not had a deeply moving experience.

On some days I am more prepared to engage in meaningful prayer. A particular prayer may express exactly what I want to say that morning or give me the comfort or strength I need to face a problem I have. I may appreciate literary aspects of a section of the liturgy which I notice for the first time, or I may find other elements of the service aesthetically pleasing. If I am praying with a community I may enjoy the social ambiance that is created or the music by which the prayers are chanted, or I may gain something intellectual or practical from the lesson that is taught in the context of the Torah reading. One or several of these experiences—and many others like them—constitute a higher level of prayer, in which parts of the service are meaningful in some way (even if parts are not). When that happens I consider myself lucky because I have had an enriching human experience.

### C. THE SPIRITUAL CONTENT OF PRAYER

But how is prayer enriching? Not, as one might expect, in the acquisition of things. Prayers of petition may be the type of prayer most commonly thought of when the subject of prayer is mentioned, but such prayers raise some of the thorniest of theological problems. I indicated a few of these at the outset. The rabbis of the *Mishnah* were more sanguine about the appropriateness and effectiveness of petitionary prayer than modern Jews living in a scientific, post-Holocaust age, but even they thought that some types of petitionary prayer are not fitting. They forbade prayers of petition to change events that already had occurred or had been determined—e.g., that a fire which

we see from a distance not be in our house or that the sex of an expected baby be a chosen gender.<sup>3</sup> Such prayers clearly call God's knowledge and providence into question and were therefore forbidden.

Moreover, most prayers of petition that were incorporated into the liturgy are both general and communal: they ask for knowledge, health, agricultural prosperity, and the like rather than for specific objects, and they do so in the name of the community ("Bless us with . . .") rather than the individual. Personal petitions may certainly be offered, but they occupy a very small segment of the liturgy and are not required.

The bulk of the liturgy bids us engage in very different types of praying. These types develop many aspects of the spiritual side of our being, and indeed Jewish communal prayer and study are the major repositories of Jewish spirituality (in contrast to the frenzy of the cults and the solitary meditation of some of the Oriental religions). As I describe some of these spiritual facets of Jewish prayer, consider the fact that much of what I describe is important for human growth and well-being even if prayers of petition do not produce the desired result and even, in some cases, if there is no God to listen to prayer at all. This does not mean that belief in God is unimportant to prayer—we shall return to that in Section D below—but it does mean that prayer can contribute meaningfully to life even if the person praying has not settled all the theological issues involved in prayer.

Consider also the behavioral implications of these spiritual contributions. What we know and feel is not necessarily what we do, but many times it is, for there is a clear link between the state of our spirit and our behavior. Consequently when prayer contributes to our spiritual being in the ways explained below, it is often improving our conduct as well. Prayer, then can succeed in any or all of the following ways:

### 1. PERSPECTIVE, APPRECIATION AND MEANING

The traditional prayerbook has a large number of expressions of praise and thanksgiving to God. To the uninitiated this is a puzzling and often unattractive feature. The praise of God seems to be excessive, making the person using the prayerbook obsequious.

The fact, however, is that prayers of praise are vitally needed by all of us, and the extent to which they appear in the siddur is not excessive at all. We inevitably must view everything from our own perspective (sometimes called "our egocentric predicament"), and this philosophical fact is often coupled with the psychological fact that we are concerned most for ourselves. Praise of God gets us out of ourselves. We are helped to see the world as God sees it, to take a "Grand Canyon" look at life.

---

<sup>3</sup>Mishnah *Berachot* 9:3; B.T. *Berachot* 54a, 60a; *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of Blessings." 10:22, 26; *Shulhan Arukh*, *Orah Hayim*, 230:1.

This is important philosophically because it restores proper perspective to our vision of the world. I am not the center of everything, despite my individual vantage point, and I must recognize that fact if I am going to have an adequate understanding of the truth.

Prayers of praise are also important psychologically in helping me realize that I am not the source of all value. They force me to thank God for all sorts of things that I otherwise would not notice and would take for granted.

Prayers of praise and thanksgiving thus sensitize me to the religious dimensions of life, to God's vision of the world, and they make me appreciative of it. In light of our epistemological and psychological egocentrism, this is a hard thing to do, so hard that the many prayers of praise and thanksgiving are all badly needed. When they work, when I really become reoriented to the world to see it and appreciate it as God's creation rather than as merely a vehicle for my satisfaction, then I have gained a great deal from prayer.

There is another advantage in appropriating and reinforcing the perspective that prayer affords: our lives become meaningful. An act is meaningful if it is related to a larger goal. So, for example, two students who study biology in high school may do equally well, but if one knows that he wants to enter some aspect of the biological sciences and the other does not, the course will be much more important to the former student than to the latter, since it is directly tied to his long-term aims. The content of Jewish liturgy helps us identify proper goals for our lives, and the timing of Jewish prayer assures that our awareness of those goals will not be occasional and fleeting but rather repeated and enduring. By stopping our busy lives to regain the perspective of the liturgy, prayer helps us put our lives together so that we can perceive a direction to them. This enables us to evaluate our individual acts in terms of that perspective and thereby imparts significance to those acts. We are not just flailing about haphazardly in life with no sense of why we do what we do; we act instead out of a sense of meaning and purpose. If prayer functions in this way alone, it is worthwhile.

## 2. COMMUNAL AND HISTORICAL ROOTS

Our inescapable egocentrism also presents another problem: we are separate and lonely. We must form our own individual personalities to be psychologically healthy, but we must also create many ties to others.

Jewish worship, perhaps more than any other liturgy, is specifically designed to do that. Almost all of the prayers are phrased in the first person plural (even the confessionals), and the clear preference in Jewish law is that one pray as part of a *minyan*, a community of ten or more. This not only increases the impressiveness of the service to the greater glory of God ("The glory of the King is in a multitude of the people"—Proverbs 14:28),<sup>4</sup> but also produces a natural, non-threatening opportunity

---

<sup>4</sup>This verse from Proverbs is used by the Rabbis to make specifically this point, i.e. that a large group adds to the glory of God achieved by the prayers; cf. *Rosh Hashanah* 32b; cf. also *Berachot* 53a, *Pesachim* 64b, *Sukkah* 52b, etc. For the obligation to pray as part of a *minyan* if at all possible

for people to meet and share a Jewish experience. Jewish worship, in fact, is one of the most potent mechanisms for creating a real sense of community among Jews.

The text of the prayers expands this sense. It recalls the Exodus from Egypt, thereby tying the individual to the People Israel of the past as well as the present. It also identifies God as the Lord of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thus indicating that God is not new and unknown but enduring and familiar. That helps the individual feel a kinship with God as well as with the Jewish people; we need not forge a new relationship with God since we can rely on the long-standing relationship that God has had with our extended family. All these features help to overcome the separateness and loneliness that we all feel at times by linking us with a contemporary, local community, an extended community of the People Israel in other places and times, and indeed with Godself.

### 3. COGNITIVE KNOWLEDGE

Sometimes prayer is effective because it teaches us something about our heritage. This may seem peculiar at first, because we commonly dissociate prayer from learning. The Jewish tradition, however, makes study a part of worship and even considers it to be a form of worship.<sup>5</sup> This is most apparent in the formal, educational parts of the service. Jewish worship includes a Torah reading four times a week and a reading of a section from the Prophets (a *Haftarah*) on Sabbaths and Festivals. Although this is merely a ceremonial act in many synagogues, it is intended to be a communal study session. Learning also takes place in the form of a homily or sermon, and some synagogues conduct open discussions on Saturday morning or afternoon in order to teach the Torah or other aspects of Judaism.

But the education which Jewish worship affords also takes place in a more pervasive and subtle way through the liturgy itself. Since the siddur includes many selections from the Bible, the Jew who prays inevitably becomes familiar with large sections of Biblical literature as well as a few passages from Rabbinic literature (from approximately the second to sixth centuries C.E.)

It is not just Jewish literature that one comes to know: it is Judaism itself. By following the daily regimen of reciting the Shema, the blessings that surround it, and the Amidah, the Jew is informed and reminded of some of Judaism's central tenets and values. This is because the siddur was intended to be the book of theology for the Jews as a whole; since everyone is supposed to pray daily, the rabbis used the opportunity to expose all Jews to some of the most important Jewish beliefs and values on a daily basis through the siddur. Indeed the siddur is the closest thing that we Jews have

---

cf. B.T. *Berachot* 8a; *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Prayer 8:1.

<sup>5</sup>So, for example, in the command to "love the Lord your God and serve Him" (Deut. 11:13), "to serve" was understood to mean the study of Torah (*Sifre Deut.*, par. 30a. Cf. A. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc. 1949), pages 135-141 and Israel M. Goldman, *Lifelong Learning Among Jews* (New York: KTAV, 1975), Ch. 2, for nice summaries of the Rabbinic attitude toward study.

to a creed, and serious study of it is probably the best way to know what traditional Judaism stands for. Jewish prayer, based upon the siddur, is thus nothing less than a continual renewal of one's Jewish orientation and commitment.

#### 4. EMOTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Because the worship of God is an important matter, Jews strive to make it beautiful. They pay attention to the physical setting of the worship to ensure that it is attractive and clean. While customs vary in regard to proper attire for services, the general principle is that it should be reasonably modest and clean. The one chosen to lead the prayers must know both the words and proper melodies and have a pleasant voice. Consequently, synagogues often engage professional cantors. Sometimes choirs and instruments are used. All of these steps are taken to enhance the aesthetics of the service, and a service may succeed for people merely because it is beautiful.

At other times the emotional effect of worship is more active. Much of the liturgy is not written in emotionally neutral, matter-of-fact sentences but in exclamatory, emotionally charged ones, for one of its functions is to help people express how they feel, what they fear, and what they hope for. Prayer functions in this way most noticeably at the turning points of life like birth, marriage, and death, but it can be a vehicle for self-expression any day of the year.

People associate prayer with emotional expression and judge a service solely on the basis of that. This is a mistake, because prayer can succeed in any of the ways that I am describing in this section. Moreover, as Heschel reminds us, we dare not forget that the purpose of prayer is at least as much to learn how God feels about things (prayers of empathy) as it is to give voice to our own feelings (prayers of expression).<sup>6</sup> But prayer clearly succeeds in one of its goals if it enables us to express our emotions.

#### 5. MORAL EFFECTS

Prayer can also affect the morality of our thoughts and actions. For one thing, it reminds us of the full gamut of Jewish values. Since values are not physical and concrete, we forget them easily. Prayer—and ritual objects and acts of all sorts—helps us remember our commitments so that we have a better chance to make them a part of our lives. This purpose of prayer and ritual is clearly enunciated in a paragraph of the Bible about the fringes on the *tallit*, which is both a ritual object and an integral part of prayer. The paragraph (Numbers 15:37-41) is used as the third section of the Shema, an indication of how seriously the tradition takes this memory-jarring function of ritual and prayer:

---

<sup>6</sup>Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest for God* (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1954), pages 27-46; selections of that are reprinted in his *Between God and Man*, Fritz A. Rothschild, ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers 1959), Ch. 35.

The Lord spoke to Moses saying: Speak to the Israelite people and instruct them to make for themselves fringes on the corners of their garments throughout the generations; let them attach a cord of blue to the fringe at each corner. That shall be your fringe: look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord and observe them so that you do not follow your heart and eyes in your lustful urge. Thus you shall be reminded to observe all of My commandments and to be holy to your God. I the Lord am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the Lord your God.

Prayer also serves to atone for the wrong things we do. The meaning of the Hebrew word for prayer, in fact, is “to judge oneself.” We take account of what we have done and express our regret for the sins we have committed. This process is important morally in at least two ways. First, it relieves the guilt that we feel for our wrongs. This is crucial if we are ever to overcome guilt and make a fresh effort to improve. Otherwise we may be morally stymied. Prayer serves to reconcile us with God and with ourselves so that we have the self-confidence and energy to get on with the tasks and opportunities of life. The process of self-evaluation that prayer initiates also enables us to see the good things that we have done and plan for the future in a way that will maximize the good and minimize the bad. Thus the self-evaluation and atonement in prayer help us morally by healing the shame that we feel and clarifying our vision of what we have done and what we should do.

Jewish worship can also help us morally by making us aware of moral issues and giving us insights on problems that we face. The Torah reading may function in this way, and the homily or sermon is often specifically designed to perform this function.

Finally, prayer can stimulate us to act as we should. The exhortative sections of the liturgy, Torah readings, and sermons can motivate us to correct the bad, and the inspirational aspects of prayer can arouse us to strive for the ideal. The regimen of prayer forces us to stop our normal activities and take a serious look at life, and that alone may enable us to strengthen our moral resolve.

## 6. FULFILLING A MITZVAH AND COMING INTO CONTACT WITH GOD

Those who adopt a traditional view of God—and many of those who do not—experience a distinctly theological element in their prayers. However awake and aware they may be when they pray, they fulfill the obligation of prayer as long as they move their lips with the words of the liturgy and concentrate on the first sentence of the Shema and the first blessing of the Amidah.<sup>7</sup> Many who pray mechanically do so out of this sense of obligation since it is God’s command that we pray whether we feel like praying or not.

---

<sup>7</sup> For the minimal requirements of *kavanah* (intention), cf. *Berachot* 13b, 34b; *Mishneh Torah*, “Laws of the Shema,” 2:1; “Laws of Prayer,” 10:1, both of which are translated and included below. Cf. also *Shulhan Aruh*, *Orach Hayim* 60:5, 3 and 63:4, 101:1. It is sufficient to frame the words with the lips without using one’s voice: cf. *Berachot* 31a; M.T. *Laws of Prayers* 5:9; *Shulhan Aruh*, *Orach Hayim* 101:2.

On occasions when people can get more involved in their prayers, this theological element is transformed into a real link between God and the person praying. The covenantal relationship between God and the people of Israel, and the individual's part of that relationship, are renewed and reinvigorated through prayer. That is the type of living communication with God which most of us imagine prayer to be. I have tried to demonstrate that there is important, meaningful prayer without it, but it is certainly a crowning glory of the experience of prayer.

The experiences delineated above are some of the ways in which prayer can be beneficial and successful but by no means the only ways. Prayer is one of the most complex human experiences known, and each individual experiences it differently. Consequently some people may find prayer effective for reasons very different from those I have described. In any case, prayer can add immeasurably to our lives, making them significantly richer and more satisfying. It is not the plea of the weak, as is commonly supposed; it is rather the expression of the strong, integrated personality of a person and community who face life more actively and more thoughtfully because they pray.

#### **D. THREE PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS WITH JEWISH PRAYER**

There are several aspects of Jewish prayer that often are troublesome for ideological reasons. These concern the language of Jewish prayer, its fixed form, and its theological underpinnings.

##### **1. HEBREW**

Probably the most formidable obstacle to Jews who want to learn how to pray is the language of Jewish prayer, Hebrew. Why is it important to learn how to pray in Hebrew?

In one sense it is not important. According to Jewish law one's obligations to pray can be fulfilled in any language.<sup>8</sup> And yet Jews have prayed in Hebrew throughout the centuries, and most of that time Hebrew was not their native tongue. Why this insistence on Hebrew?

Part of the answer lies in problems with the meaning of words. English, for example, is a Christian language. Most of the people who speak it are Christian, and historically it developed among Christians. Consequently it should not be surprising that English words relating to religion have Christian connotations. "Salvation," for example, is understood by most English speakers in terms of the Christian concept, and when one thinks of "holy" the image that comes to mind is the Holy Ghost or other-worldly, ascetic people like Catholic monks. One wonders whether anyone can say "Messiah" in English without thinking of Jesus, and even the word for the subject of this essay, "prayer," is misleading because it emphasizes petitionary prayer over all other forms, contrary to Judaism's approach to the subject. Each of these words is the direct translation of a Hebrew word, but the meaning is seriously distorted in the process of translation.

---

<sup>8</sup>*Mishnah Sotah* 7:1; B.T. *Berachot* 13a, 40b; *Sotah* 32b-33a; *Shevuot* 39a; *Mishneh Torah*, "Laws of the Shema," 2:10; *Shulhan Arukh*, *Orach Hayim*, 62:2; 101:4.

Since the liturgy uses poetry and many other literary forms and not just simple, declarative prose, this problem becomes even more serious. The connotations of the liturgical words, and sometimes their very meaning, can be totally lost or misunderstood. Certainly the flavor of the prayer experience is erroneously conveyed by the stilted, Elizabethan English that is often used for translation (God did not speak in “Thee’s” and “Thou’s”). New translations of the siddur into modern, American English are helpful, but nothing can replace the Hebrew liturgy for capturing the meaning and spirit of Jewish prayer. As Bialik put it, “Whoever knows Judaism through translation is like a person who kisses his mother through a handkerchief.”<sup>9</sup>

Another reason that Jews have historically insisted upon Hebrew for worship is that Hebrew connects us to our roots. It may not be our native tongue or that of most of our ancestors, but it is the language of the Bible, the *Mishnah*, and the Siddur. These texts are at the heart of Jewish civilization both in time and in content, and consequently Hebrew was always the second language that a Jew learned, if not the first. Praying in Hebrew thus renews and strengthens our ties to the roots of our culture and to its perpetuation throughout our people’s history. It is a link to the ideological core of Judaism and to our people’s interaction with it throughout the ages.

It is also a link to the rest of the contemporary Jewish community. When we enter a synagogue anywhere in the world and find that we can join in the words (and often even the melodies) of prayer, we have the most powerful evidence of what it means to be part of a universal Jewish community. We may not understand the spoken language of the people we are visiting, but if we can pray in Hebrew, doors are quickly unlocked between us and those around us.<sup>10</sup> We immediately recognize each other as kin even if our backgrounds and practices are widely at variance. This feeling affects praying at home too, for we sense that our people for centuries and all over the world join us in these hallowed Hebrew words. Hebrew prayer thus forms an incredibly strong bond between us and our people.

## 2. KEVA AND KAVANAH: A FIXED LITURGY VS. EXPRESSIVE PRAYER

For many Jews the fixed aspects of Jewish prayer are very troubling. Why does Judaism treat prayer as an obligation which Jews must perform? Prayer should be more spontaneous than that. And why does it establish a set liturgy? Prayer should be more individuated and flexible than that.

To some it may come as a surprise that prayer is obligatory at all. It is. Specifically, Jewish law demands that a Jew recite the three paragraphs of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:15-21; and

---

<sup>9</sup>Hayyim Nahman Bialik, *Essays*, cited in Reuven Alcalay, *Words of the Wise* (Jerusalem and Ramat Gan: Masada Press, 1970), page 495, #4757. The saying is often mistakenly cited as referring to kissing a girl through a veil, and that might be an even stronger image, but it is not Bialik’s!

<sup>10</sup>Elie Wiesel describes such a scene eloquently when he explains how “the prince of prayer” enabled him to break through the barriers of suspicion of his Russian Jewish hosts; cf. *Jews of Silence* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston Inc., 1996), pages 30-34.



Numbers 15:37-41) twice daily, once in the morning and once in the evening, each time with specific, accompanying blessings before and after it. Jewish law also requires that one recite the Amidah, also known as the *Shemoneh Esreh* ("Eighteen" but now nineteen blessings) in place of each of the communal sacrifices in the Temple of yore—the morning sacrifice (*Shaharit*), the afternoon one (*Minhah*), and the additional one (*Musaf*) following *Shaharit* on Sabbaths, Festivals, the High Holy Days, and New Moons. (On days other than weekdays the Amidah consists of seven blessings, and there are nine in the *Musaf* of Rosh Hashanah.) For at least the last thousand years it has also been customary to recite *Shemoneh Esreh* after Shema during the evening service even though there was no evening sacrifice.

Clearly Judaism would prefer the ideal in prayer—i.e. that people pray regularly and with feeling. The Hebrew word for the fixed, regular aspect of the service is *keva* (set, established); the Hebrew word for fulfilling a commandment with the proper intention is *kavanah* (purpose) from the root meaning "to direct (one's mind, emotions, will)." One strain of thought in the tradition requires that prayer be done with *kavanah* in order to be counted as prayer. The law, however, recognized that it is difficult, if not impossible, for people to control their inner thoughts at all times, and it is even harder for the law to regulate that. Consequently Jewish law concentrates on the act of prayer rather than the intention, because the act can be more controlled and regulated, but it does require the proper intention at several crucial parts of the service. The tension between the desire to require proper intention and the realization that it cannot be legally required is evident in these paragraphs from Maimonides' *Mishnah Torah*:

#### **Laws of Reading the Shema 2:1:**

One who reads the Shema and does not direct his heart (to what he is reading) in the first verse, i.e. "Hear O' Israel," does not fulfill his obligation (to read the Shema) thereby; but in regard to the rest (of the Shema), he fulfills his obligation (by simply saying the words) even if he did not direct his heart (to what he was saying). . . .

#### **Laws of Prayer 10:1**

Anyone who prays and does not direct his heart (to his words) must go back (to the beginning) and pray with the proper intention. But if he directed his heart (to what he was saying) while reciting the first blessing (of the *Shemoneh Esreh*), he does not need to go back to the beginning again (if he does not pay proper attention to the rest—cf. also 4:15-16).

Why are there obligatory, set times for prayer and required, fixed prayers at all? In other words, why is *keva* in both the time and content of prayer important?

Perhaps we should start with the reverse question: why are there any objections to fixed, required prayer? In all honesty it must be said that many who object do so as a way to avoid prayer. It is easy to say that we pray only when the spirit moves us and then find that it never does. Even those who are completely sincere in maintaining that they want to pray but only when they are in the mood will

usually find that they pray very little. To remedy that is one of the functions of *keva* in this sense, for setting a required time for prayer ensures that we do pray, that our commitment to prayer is expressed in action and not just in words, however honest and aboveboard. Like most other things in life, prayer will happen only if it becomes part of our schedules.

By making prayer a frequent activity, Jewish law guarantees that we learn the liturgy. *Keva* is important, especially in the early stages of one's experience with prayer, for learning liturgical skills so that we can call upon them when we really want to pray.

*Keva* also affords us a community for prayer. The day and time that one person is in the mood to pray is not likely to be the day and time that many others want to pray. Setting a fixed time for prayer provides a community for those in the mood and those who are not, thereby enhancing the prayer experience of both. As the Talmud says, "One who has a synagogue in his city and does not pray in it with the community is called a bad neighbor."<sup>11</sup>

There is another beneficial result of setting a fixed time for prayer which is often overlooked. Life gains meaning when we have goals and are conscious of them, as we have discussed, but it also gains meaning by having a rhythm. Your grandmother and mine may not have not been able to articulate goals for their lives, but they knew that there were weekdays and Shabbat; Rosh Hashanah, Hanukkah, Passover, and Tisha B'Av; birth, bar/bat mitzvah, marriage, and death—and, each day, *Shaharit*, *Minhah*, and *Ma'ariv*. Conversely, many of us find life meaningless because it is unmarked and therefore unnoticed as it passes us by. The fixed times for prayer are one of the ways in which Judaism imparts a rhythm to life, thereby making it meaningful.

*Keva*, perceived as a fixed liturgy, is more often the bone of contention. People feel constrained, put upon, and sometimes simply bewildered by the formal, bound prayerbook that they are handed in the synagogue.

Their objections might be at least partially dispelled if they knew that the required parts of the service are actually very short. Most of the contents of the prayerbook are embellishments of the required sections, prose and poetry on the same theme that became popular over the centuries. So, for example, the morning service, which is the longest daily service, requires only two, one-sentence blessings before the Shema, the three paragraphs of the Shema, one blessing after it, the nineteen, one-sentence blessings of *Shemoneh Esreh*, and the two paragraphs of *Aleynu*. (On Mondays and Thursdays a brief Torah reading is also required.) Reciting the required prayers would take about ten or fifteen minutes.

But that only mitigates the problem. Why is there a fixed prayer in the first place? In essence it exists so that prayer can accomplish its goals. Some of the experiences described in Section C above are more directly dependent upon a fixed liturgy than are others, but all six spiritual objectives mentioned there benefit from it. It is almost impossible to get out of ourselves sufficiently to gain the perspective

---

<sup>11</sup>*Berachot* 8a.

that prayer can afford without a fixed liturgy; lacking it, our prayers would likely be exclusively prayers of expression with no prayers of empathy. The liturgy makes it possible for us to have communal prayer; without it, we would not have a common language of prayer and might not even be able to pray together, let alone evoke and reinforce our ties to our people in the past and present. The liturgy exposes us to our literature and our values and reminds us of them; individually created texts generally are much less successful in these tasks. Much of the emotional impact of prayer stems from the words and melodies that resonate through us; even the most articulate among us can seldom express themselves more fully—especially at the very moment that they want to pray. The liturgy gives us a vehicle for emotional expression, it makes our dumb mouths sing. And finally, while there is much more latitude for changing the liturgy than is usually realized, some elements of it are required by Jewish law. The fixed liturgy therefore enables us to fulfill some of our obligations to God as formulated in Jewish law, as it infuses the entire divine perspective into our lives.

### 3. THE THEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF PRAYER

The central philosophical problems with prayer center around God, and I have waited to the end to deal with them because they are the most difficult and the most far-reaching. Many Jews are professed agnostics or atheists, and most of those who believe in God have moments of doubt, sometimes lasting for long periods of time and penetrating to the core of their beings. How can one engage in prayer without a firm, fairly specific belief in God when both the act and texts of Jewish prayer seem to assume that belief?

Part of the answer is based on the fact that prayer is a multi-faceted phenomenon, as I have described above in part, and some of its features are less directly tied to its underlying theology than others are. One can clearly reaffirm communal and historical roots without a belief in God, and one can also learn about the tradition and its texts without that belief. Even some of the moral and emotional effects of prayer are independent of the belief in God.

But it goes deeper than that. Prayer is not primarily a philosophical statement; it is a religious act, and, like many acts, its significance is felt in the doing much more than can be captured in any verbal formulation. In other words, in this case as in many others the experiential and educational order is the reverse of the logical order. Prayer may be easiest to understand and explain in the context of a traditional belief which a person accepts first, but in practice we discover and probe our beliefs through our actions. The philosophical structures that we create are motivated and tested by the experiences we have both as observers and as actors.

That is true of prayer as it is of many other parts of our lives. As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>12</sup> prayer is one of the ways in which we gain knowledge of God. Therefore Jews who do not have a firm belief

---

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Elliot N. Dorff, "Two Ways to Approach God" *Conservative Judaism*, Vol. XXX, No. 2 (Winter, 1976) pages 58-67; and, in more detail, "Applying Analytic Philosophy to Judaism," soon to be published by the National Jewish Resource Center and the Center for Judaic Studies of the University of Denver.

can still pray without any logical difficulties whatsoever if they simply keep the philosophical questions in abeyance, understanding that the resolution of those problems is partially dependent upon their openness to the experience of prayer in the first place. Conversely, those who do not pray may well become atheists because they are closing themselves off from one of the primary experiences of God that justifies belief. Their abandonment of prayer is as much a cause of their atheism as a result of it.

Another reason that prayer is possible even outside the context of theistic belief is that Judaism has historically tolerated it. Jewish views of God have ranged over a broad spectrum. Most Jewish philosophers and rabbis believe in a supernatural God, but some identify God with nature—or come close to doing so. Their approaches to God have varied widely too, ranging from thorough-going rationalists like Maimonides to mystics like Moses de Leon, the author of the *Zohar*.

All these people have prayed in some way, often using the traditional prayerbook. They have been able to do this because Judaism gives great latitude to the process of interpretation, known as *Midrash*. There is even evidence that some sections of the service were consciously formulated as they are to accommodate varying beliefs.<sup>13</sup>

Periodically, especially in the last two centuries, people such as the early leaders of Reform Judaism and Reconstructionism have revised sections of the traditional liturgy to reflect their specific ideologies, but more often the necessary flexibility has been attained through interpretation without revision. That explains why all Jewish prayerbooks are not alike. Jews have responded to modern questions by ignoring them and leaving the traditional liturgy as is, by revising it extensively, or, most commonly, by reinterpreting it.

The liturgy is thus the record of the struggles of the Jewish people to use God-language accurately and meaningfully, and it has served as the touchstone for new theological interpretations throughout Jewish history.

I do not want to overstate the point. It is clearly easiest to pray with the traditional prayerbook if one believes in some version of rabbinic theology, and it may well be that one can feel the full effect of Jewish prayer only in the context of such belief. Jewish liturgy, after all, was largely written by people who held that belief, and consequently using that liturgy while believing in something else always seems, at best, a little unnatural and sometimes downright jarring. It is nevertheless possible to pray with the traditional prayerbook and understand it differently, as many of our ancestors have done.

---

<sup>13</sup>Cf. for example, Louis Finkelstein, *The Pharisees* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1966), Vol. I, pages 145-159 (esp. pages 158-159) and Vol II, pp. 742-751 (esp. pages 750-751) in regard to the second blessing of *Shemoneh Esreh*, "*Mehayeh Hametim*."

One other feature of Jewish prayer should make it acceptable, and even helpful, to the philosophically undecided or skeptical. Judaism tolerates not only varying theologies, but undetermined theology as well.<sup>14</sup> Our tradition was wise enough to recognize openly and honestly that there are serious limits to human knowledge of God. Consequently lists of doctrines never fared well in the history of the Jewish religion. In contrast, the liturgy, which has endured, strikingly proclaims the conflicts in our theological perceptions. God is portrayed in one prayer as the universal Creator, and in the very next prayer as the particularistic giver of the Torah and the lover of Israel. God is just, but merciful. Human beings are nothing, but everything. God decides on Yom Kippur who shall live and who shall die, but we have free will and therefore repentance, prayer, and good deeds can avert the severe decree.

By stating these contradictions in juxtaposed sentences and paragraphs the liturgy condones and even encourages a degree of indeterminacy in our belief. It is saying that we should not be too definite and self-assured about our beliefs but rather open to the complexity of life and of God. In that way the liturgy is making a powerful, anti-fundamentalist statement: one cannot proclaim dogmas about God as if they were clear, certain, and unqualified; one must rather assert the truths about God that we know in the context of recognizing the conflicts in our conceptions. God, after all, is beyond human understanding according to the Jewish tradition; thus any attempt to capture God's essence in any fixed formula is both inaccurate and un-Jewish.

The remarkable philosophical sophistication, openness, honesty, and sheer wisdom involved in this approach of the liturgy and of the Jewish tradition generally are among the most attractive aspects of Judaism to a philosophical skeptic like me, and they enable me to pray. Through Jewish prayer I can assert the theological truths that my tradition has discerned without pretending that everything about my conception of God is settled and clear. In fact I gain theological solace from the liturgy because it confirms both the points of clarity and obscurity of belief in God. Prayer therefore becomes both possible and beneficial: it helps me recognize the true, the good and the beautiful in life, and it motivates me to pursue them while alerting me to the complexities involved. Prayer is thus not intellectually difficult to accept; on the contrary, it is an important cognitive aid because it helps me see the manifold nature of reality and discern what is important in it.

A Hasidic saying nicely illustrates the two philosophical points of the last several paragraphs which help me deal with the theological problems of prayer (the broad scope of Jewish theology and its indeterminacy). A rabbi was asked why the opening words of the *Shemoneh Esreh* identify God as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" instead of the simpler formulation, "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." He answered that in important ways the God of Abraham was different from the God of Isaac and different again from the God of Jacob—not that God was different, but that each man's concept of God and relationship to God was unique.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>I am indebted to Dr. David Gordis for this point.

<sup>15</sup>The Baal Shem Tov's insight as retold by Martin Buber; *Tales of the Hasidim* (New York: Schocken Books. 1947. 1961), Vol. I, page 48.

Some conceptions of God are clearly easier to fit into the traditional liturgy than others, but our people have had a long history of understanding that liturgy in many different ways. We have also learned to accept the limits of our knowledge of God and of life generally, and that has enabled us to think, to act, and to pray in committed but intellectually honest ways. That does not mean that we cannot take a stand on intellectual or moral issues; but it does mean that, within limits, we must recognize that other intelligent and sensitive people will settle the issues for themselves in ways other than those we have chosen and that, indeed, we ourselves may vary our conceptions from one point in time to another. Since Jewish prayer calls our attention to significant aspects of life, and since it is open to interpretation and indeterminacy, modern Jews may well find it congenial to their thinking and important for their lives.

### E. HOW SHOULD ONE BEGIN TO PRAY?

As with any new activity, the real problem is getting started. How does one begin to pray?

In a very real sense, one begins by beginning. Reading theoretical statements about prayer like this one or "how to" books can be helpful to a point, but nothing can replace the actual experience of prayer. One may feel awkward at the start, but such feelings must be overcome; nobody learns a new skill who is not willing to stumble a little at the outset. As Hillel said, "The bashful cannot learn."<sup>16</sup>

One must learn "prayerbook Hebrew" (enough Hebrew to read the words, together with some practice in reading at least the central prayers). Most synagogues offer classes in this, and it is not hard. Rabbis and teachers are consistently happy to help with putting on *tefillin*, as is almost anyone at a daily morning service. One may want to enroll in the synagogue classes often given by cantors to learn the melodies of the prayers. Knowing the music makes it easier to learn the words, and more interesting and attractive too.

Probably the most important thing is to pray regularly. Like developing any new skill, learning how to pray requires a lot of practice. In fact, the easiest way to learn how to pray is to participate in services and ask questions. That, after all, is how our people have done it for centuries.

The modern Jew will find that it is worth whatever effort it takes. For prayer is not just another skill; it is one of the most enriching and humanizing experiences open to human beings.

---

<sup>16</sup>*Pirkey Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 2:6.*

As Rabbi Louis Jacobs put it:

By setting aside a place in which to worship, by returning there frequently to replenish his spiritual powers, by learning there what his faith has to teach about life and its meaning, and by meeting there with like-minded fellows to encourage him and to strengthen him in his resolves, the Jew "ascends the mount of the Lord" (Psalms 24:3). He comes into contact with a world of elevated values, and though he may soon come down to earth again, he is better for having been on the heights.<sup>17</sup>

Or, as the Psalmist summarized it in Psalm 92:2,

It is good to give thanks unto the Lord  
And to sing praises unto Your name. O Most High.

---

<sup>17</sup> Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Prayer* (London: Jewish Chronicle Publications, 1962), page 61.

## Teaching *Tefilah*

Steven C. Segar

As Hebrew school subjects go, *tefilah* is probably the most commonly taught, and ironically, it is considered by many teachers to be the most difficult to make interesting and compelling for their students. Last year, I spent an entire semester in a class devoted to this issue, and I would like to share some of what I learned there with the rest of the Jewish education community.

I had the good fortune to study with Dr. Saul Wachs of Gratz College in Philadelphia, who is an internationally-known consultant in this area. He has three basic assumptions under which he operates when thinking about teaching prayer. The first is that the desire and ability to pray is something that comes naturally to all human beings. To the extent that people do not experience themselves in this way, it is because this natural ability and inclination has been repressed under the influence of cultural norms, both within and outside of the Jewish community. Therefore, as teachers of *tefilah*, we are engaged in no less a task than helping our students to recover a lost and very valuable part of themselves, which can contribute to their ability to make meaning out of their lives and to feel at home in the world.

Dr. Wachs' second assumption is that each person is "obligated to discover the unique meaning of his or her own life"; it is literally a mitzvah to "work on oneself" towards the end of self-actualization. Because this is a very difficult and painful thing to do (as it involves the most honest intrapersonal scrutiny), most people need the support of a regular structure if they are to be successful. Dr. Wachs sees *tefilah* as such a structure. More specifically, each of the three traditional categories of Jewish prayer—praise, petition, and thanksgiving—has an important contribution to make in this process of self-development. The purpose of praise is to teach us that which is worthy of our imitation and emulation. Petition sensitizes us to discover which of our needs it is truly important to satisfy, and thanksgiving is an antidote for the common human problem of focusing on what one lacks and what is wrong, and thus "instills a sense of perspective in the individual."

The third assumption is one of educational philosophy. It is that no one who has not grappled with the issues involved in prayer themselves can possibly teach in a way that will be meaningful to other people, especially if those students happen to be below the age of eighteen. This does not mean that every *tefilah* instructor must have a personal commitment to daily prayer. On the contrary, some of the best teachers are those who have the most difficulty with such commitments. It does mean that to teach prayer, one has to care deeply about the process of struggling.

With these three assumptions under our belts, we moved on to comparing the merits of formulaic versus spontaneous types of prayer—the issue of *kevah* versus *kavanah*. Building on the insights of scholar Max Kiddushin, we examined the "ethicizing" function of the rabbinic *berakah* formula (as compared to a spontaneous utterance of gratitude) by way of the value concepts embedded in that formula. We found the formula to express the following value concepts: the world belongs to God, the world is a miracle, there is an element of wonder in ordinary experience, there is an awareness of ourselves as components of the infinite dimensions of time and space (*melekh ha'olam*), there is an



awareness of and gratitude for what we have, and an awareness of a shared situation with all human beings and with all creatures as being dependent on God, and there is a responsibility for other people and creatures as a result of our shared situation. The presence of such value concepts was the main justification offered for structured over spontaneous prayer.

In a more *tachlis* vein, we divided the goals of teaching *tefilah* into three broad categories: skills, the cognitive, and the affective. During the course of our class, we concentrated mostly on the areas of the cognitive and the affective goals, as these seem to be where many students and teachers run into difficulty; however, it was also stated that training competent Hebrew readers was essential to developing healthy attitudes towards Jewish prayer experience.

It was the cognitive domain on which we spent most of our time, which made sense because Dr. Wachs' dissertation topic had been the application of the inquiry model of education to the teaching of the siddur. This was a method that I had seen used in Bible lessons, but never with *tefilah*. It involves having the students analyze a *tefilah* text from the perspective of form and structure, and in the process "discover" the subtleties and complexities of the Rabbinic mindset. For example, in the prayer of thanksgiving for the body, *Asher Yatzar*, we looked at changes in tense, in person, subject and theme, and then we attempted to divide the prayer into sections according to those changes. Another method is to give students a list of concepts and ask them which ones are not dealt with and which ones are opposed by the content of the prayer. In all cases, the students must argue their point of view from the basis of the text. A third possibility is to ask students how a concept from a particular prayer gets expressed in other parts of Jewish tradition. Let's use *Asher Yatzar* as an example once again. If this prayer represents a positive attitude toward the body and the physical world in general, where else in Jewish tradition can we find such a concept expressed? Are there texts or rituals which express the opposite concept?

Once the students have a grasp of the meaning and structure of a particular prayer, more affective exercises can be employed. A method that can be used with any individual text is to ask the questions: "What would it mean in my life if I took these words seriously? How would it affect my day-to-day existence?" A more general kind of exercise, which does not have to do with a particular prayer but with one's more global struggles with meaning, would be to set up a "fish bowl" in the classroom, i.e., an inner and outer circle of students. The students in the outer circle must simply listen, while each student in the inner circle is allowed to complete the statements: "I believe . . . ; I doubt . . . ; I wonder . . ." It is important that everyone understand that no one is allowed to respond to the person who is talking, so that the speakers will feel safe enough to answer honestly. A similar type of exercise can be done using content around the issue of Jewish identity: "I felt Jewish when . . . ; I was proud to be Jewish when . . . ; It did not feel safe to be Jewish when . . ."

It seems to me that if we can enrich our students' Jewish education with approaches like those described above, they will get the message that the Jewish community is a place where they can explore the most profound and challenging aspects of their lives, and this is as it should be.

## **The Matbe'ah: Keva vs. Kavanah**

Steven C. Segar and Eric Traiger

*The introduction to this unit, as well as the "Explanation for Implicit Kavanah within Birhot Hashema" provide information for the teacher. They should be read and discussed with a colleague, the Rabbi, or Director of Education before doing the lessons with the students.*

In traditional Jewish prayer, there is always a tension between the elements which are "fixed," e.g., the language of the prayer text and/or the time at which it is recited (this is referred to as *keva* in Rabbinic parlance) and the need for authentic religious devotion and meaning during the act of prayer. (This is traditionally called *kavanah*) On the one hand, we need both elements to achieve a complete prayer experience, but on the other hand, their demands often come into conflict with each other, even to the point of feeling mutually exclusive. Ever since the time of the early rabbis, and perhaps prior to that, Jews have struggled with the problem and challenge of how to maintain a fixed liturgy while at the same time being able to pray that fixed liturgy with enough devotion to make the liturgy meaningful to the one praying. But this struggle is not one that only our ancestors fought; we in the late twentieth century share in that struggle. Jews have sought ways to make the prayer experience meaningful while using the words written by our rabbinic forbears. To do this one must understand: A) how and why the prayer service is structured as it is and B) underlying concepts and themes found within the prayers themselves. One must also be able to make connections between the texts of the prayers and one's own life in the contemporary world.

This unit is geared towards the upper elementary/post *b'ney mitzvah*-aged student (students in grades six, seven and eight). The purpose of this unit is to introduce the student to the tension of *keva* (fixed prayer) and *kavanah* (spontaneous prayer, or directed intentionality) found within Jewish prayer. The student will also be able to identify those portions of the *Matbe'ah Shel Tefilah*, that begin with the *Barehu* and end with the *Ge'ulah* prayer preceeding the Amidah. A final goal will be to help the student to appreciate the contributions and innovations of the Reconstructionist siddur *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*.

### **LESSON 1**

The purpose of this lesson is to help the students identify issues of *keva* and *kavanah* within their own life experience.

**Set Induction:** Teacher asks, "How many of you have complete freedom to do whatever you want, whenever you want, however you want?" Hopefully not too many hands will go up. Next question: "What is getting in the way of your having this kind of 'freedom'?" Possible answers include parents, school, lack of financial resources, etc. Finally, ask: "How many of you would prefer to live in this way if it were possible?" Most if not all hands should go up.

Break into small groups of three to four and have each group brainstorm images of what kind of world it would be if everyone had the kind of complete freedom described above.

Reassemble into a large group. Ask representatives from each small group to share some of what they came up with. Evaluate the various images that are put forward now. Really push the students to be honest about what is attractive and unattractive about the idea of living in such a world. Conclude the lesson by making a list of ways in which structure is important to our lives (order, predictability, familiarity) and ways in which structure causes us problems (boredom, restriction).

**Homework assignment:** Each student is to create an outline of his/her life and identify which aspects are most highly structured and which are least structured. For example, how much control of their own do they have over bedtime, what to eat for meals, when and what to watch on TV, cleaning their bedroom, seeing the doctor, etc. Where is the structure helpful and where problematic?

## LESSON 2

Ask students to share a bit from their written homework assignment. Were they surprised by anything they discovered? The teacher explains that just as in every other aspect of life there needs to be a balance of structure and spontaneity, so too in the world of prayer. Brainstorm how these categories could be applied to the prayer context. Example: Structure in prayer can give someone a sense of rootedness; they can develop a relationship over time with the text; through structure they can connect with other Jews all over the world. Negatively, it can lead to boredom, a lack of motivation, etc.

## LESSON 3: KAVANAH WITHIN KEVA

Students receive photocopied pages of selected sections of *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*. Pages 262 (*Yotzer Or*), 272 (*Ahavah Rabah*), and 290 (*Mi Hamolah*) are suggested. These are taken from the three blessings of the Shema. (Be sure that the page numbers and below-the-line commentary are not visible on the copies. Lesson four will involve matching these prayers with the appropriate commentary). Give them the following list of several concepts. The students could once again be broken up into small groups and asked to match the concepts with the English blessings of the Shema.

### SAMPLE MATCHING THEMES FOR LESSON 3

God's love for us	Peace
God as a teacher	Justice
Nature/Creation	Compassion
God as healer	Freedom
Forgiveness	God's Power
Redemption	Order
God's uniqueness	Torah and knowledge

For the next activity, the students, still in small groups, will put the readings in an order that makes sense to them. They will then return to a large group format and compare answers to the first exercise with one another and with the teacher's explanation (found at the end of this unit). They will then compare their respective ordering of the texts with one another as well as with the actual ordering in the prayerbook. This discussion should lead to an understanding of how the order of prayer offers implicit *kavanah*, and how changing the order would alter the built-in *kavanah*.

This same series of activities may be repeated for the Amidah, or alternatively, each of the small groups could be given one set of texts to focus on after which they would teach each other what they had learned.

### LESSON 4: THE ROLE OF COMMENTARY

The next lesson should focus on the specific Reconstructionist contributions to the problem of finding *kavanah* in *keva*. The teacher gives an introduction to the various categories of "below the line" text (see pages xxi-xxii of the Introduction to *Shabbat Vehagim*) and then hands out sheets to the students which contain examples of prayer texts as well as sample *kavanot* and commentaries which must be matched up with one another. Once again different groups could focus on different sections of the *matbe'ah*, or all groups could do each of the sections together.

Similarly, each of the students could be assigned a specific *tefilah* and then directed to the readings section of the prayerbook to look for the most appropriate counterpart to his or her particular *tefilah*. For a more creative take on this activity, students could be assigned a *hatimah* (closing line or ending, beginning with *Baruh Atah Adonay . . .*) and then asked to write their own *kavanah* to go with the *hatimah*. These *kavanot* could then be incorporated into the student siddurim found in a later section of this volume.

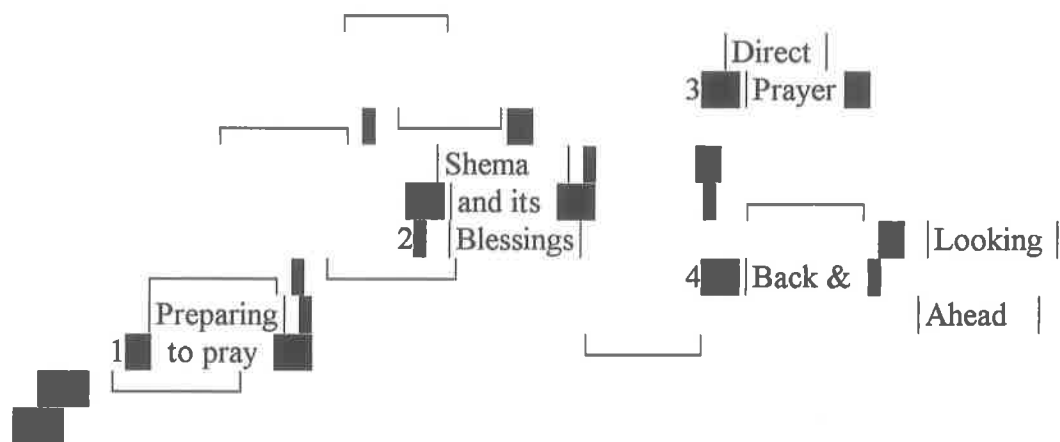
The students could also be given multiple *kavanot* for a particular *tefilah* and then choose which *kavanah* they like best and explain why. This lesson could close with a discussion of how effective the students think the *kavanot* in the Siddur are in making *tefilah* more meaningful and interesting, either to themselves or to adults that they know.

### TEACHER'S EXPLANATION FOR IMPLICIT *KAVANAH* WITHIN ORDER OF *BIRHOT HASHEMA*

The three blessings (two before and one after) recapitulate three basic Judaic theological categories: Creation, Revelation and Redemption. These three categories are epitomized in the tradition by the stories of the creation of the world in chapter one of Genesis, the Exodus from Egypt, and the Revelation of the Torah on Mt. Sinai respectively. What is interesting to begin with is that these blessings are out of chronological order if we go according to the order in which the stories appear in the Torah. In that case, we would have creation followed by redemption, and revelation would come last. However, the siddur is probably the most carefully edited Jewish text ever, so we can be certain that the reversal of order that occurs here is meaningful in some way. In fact, there have been many attempts to "decipher" the structure of the siddur throughout history, none of which have been decisive, so I will present a couple of options while at the same time encouraging you to explore the structure for your own meaning. One traditional explanation is that religiously it makes most sense for redemption to appear last because that is the goal that people strive and hope for. If we were to experience an ultimate redemption, revelation would presumably be unnecessary. Furthermore, we need revelation to get us from where we are to the state of redemption. Creation comes first since that sets the context in which the drama of redemption is played out. Another way to look at these blessings is that there is a movement from the general (the ordered universe) to the particular (God's love for and teaching of Israel), and then on to redemption. The implication here is that we must experience ourselves first as creatures of the cosmos, and then as members of a tribe in order to move forward to a better world. Similarly, the first two blessings could represent the realms of both nature and history in which we must discover the Divine in order to achieve redemption.

Two resources that are accessible and helpful for teachers are *Be 'hol Levaveha* by Harvey Fields, and *Service of the Heart* by Evelyn Garfiel.

## ORDER OF THE SERVICE



### 1. Preparing to Pray

Morning Blessings  
Song from the Psalms

### 2. The Shema and its Blessings

Opening Call to Prayer  
First Blessing Before the Shema  
Second Blessing Before the Shema  
Surrender: Meditation and Shema  
First Blessing After the Shema  
Closing: *Kavanah* for the Individual Pray-er

### 3. Direct Prayer

Individual Prayer  
A word of Torah

### 4. Looking Back and Ahead

Aleynu  
Mourner's Kaddish  
*Tikkun* for students, faculty, and staff  
Closing



## The One-Page Amidah: A Teaching Tool

David Sulomm Stein

In the January-February, 1988, issue of *The Reconstructionist*, Rabbi Steven G. Sager suggested a format for the Sabbath *Amidah* that hearkened back to the more fluid form of the *Amidah* of 1800 years ago. His format was intended to strike a better balance between the vessel of tradition and the creative, spontaneous prayer that our hearts may wish to pour into it.

Due to limited graphical illustration capabilities, *The Reconstructionist* was not able to do justice to Rabbi Sager's concept when it published his article. Since that time, two changes have taken place: the advent of desktop publishing and the appearance of the prayer book series *Kol Haneshamah*. Now, using my desktop computer, I have more clearly laid out Rabbi Sager's approach on a single page, while adapting it to the wording and appearance of *Kol Haneshamah*, which has become a standard for the Reconstructionist movement.

The key idea behind this "one-page *Amidah*" is to provide an opening rubric and a closing *berahah* for each of the seven Shabbat benedictions; this framework presents the reader with themes and with points of entry that can trigger prayerful thoughts. The grey region in the middle of each benediction means, "Fill in your own reflections on this theme now." (For a fuller explanation, I refer the reader to the original article.)

Rabbi Sager intended his approach for actual use in prayer, yet I can also report that I have found the "one-page *Amidah*" to be a help in **teaching** liturgy. This format makes it easy to spotlight the structure of the traditional *Amidah*. It prompts discussion of how structure can amplify spirituality in the contemporary pray-er. Best of all, it helps me convey to worshipers that Jewish liturgy intends for them to value their own inner voices.



## עֲמִידָה AMIDAH

אֲדֹנָי שְׁפֹרֵי חַסְדֶּיךָ וְכִי יִגִּיד חַדְלֹנְךָ:  
*Open my lips, DEAR ONE, and let my mouth declare your praise!*

Psalm 51:17

### עֲבֹדָה 5 WORSHIP

We ponder how to link our destiny  
 to the land and people of Israel,  
 for your presence is manifest  
 in this solidarity...

יְיָ בָרוּךְ אַתָּה יי  
 הַמְבִיאוֹתֵנוּ שְׂכָרְךָ  
 לְצִיּוֹן: home to Zion!

### תּוֹרָאָה 6 THANKS

We recount life's blessings,  
 for we meet your presence  
 in our recognition of what is good...

יְיָ בָרוּךְ אַתָּה יי  
 הַפֶּלֶח שְׁכָרְךָ  
 גִּדְּךָ לָאֵל לְהוֹדוֹת: to whom all thanks are due!

### קְדוּשַׁת הַיּוֹם 4 THE DAY'S HOLINESS

We commit to being fully present and joyful  
 on this Sabbath,  
 for your presence is manifest  
 in our reintegration on this day...

יְיָ בָרוּךְ אַתָּה יי  
 מְקוֹשֵׁשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת: source of Sabbath holiness!

### אֲבוֹת 1 ANCESTORS

We call to mind  
 your love for all our forebears,  
 for your presence is manifest  
 as we connect with them...

יְיָ בָרוּךְ אַתָּה יי  
 מָגֵן אַבְרָהָם  
 וְעֻזְרַת שָׂרָה: shield of Abraham  
 and help of Sarah!

### גְּבוּרָת 2 DIVINE POWER

We welcome this opportunity  
 to ponder life and death,  
 for your presence is manifest  
 in the mystery of being...

יְיָ בָרוּךְ אַתָּה יי  
 מְחַיֶּה הַמֵּתִים: Blessed are you, REVIVER,  
 who gives and renews life!

### קְדוּשַׁת הַשֵּׁם 3 NAMING THE HOLY

We hereby renew  
 our state of wonder,  
 for we perceive your presence  
 whenever we discover holiness...

יְיָ בָרוּךְ אַתָּה יי  
 הָאֵל הַקָּדוֹשׁ: Blessed are you, AWESOME ONE,  
 the holy God!

### בְּרַכַּת הַשְּׁלָמִים 7 PEACE BLESSING

We ask ourselves how we will  
 increase harmony in our world,  
 for your presence is manifest  
 when we reconcile conflict with others...

יְיָ בָרוּךְ אַתָּה יי  
 עוֹשֵׂה הַשְּׁלָמִים: Blessed are you, HARMONY,  
 maker of peace!

יְיָ לִדְבַר אֲמִירָתְךָ  
 יִי אֲדֹנָי הַנִּשְׁאָל:

*May my words of prayer and my heart's meditation be seen favorably,  
 BELOVED ONE, my rock and my redeemer.*

Psalms 139:15

## Evoking the Indefinable: Spirituality in the Classroom

Barbara Carr

"*Kol haneshamah te halel Yah*" (Let every soul praise God) is the charge and the challenge to any Jewish educator. We study, we celebrate, we perform *mitzvot*, we distribute *zedakah*, and through it all our souls are, hopefully, praising God. We walk into our classrooms and look at the faces in front of us, no matter what their age or level of knowledge, and each of us wants that outcome. We want this because inevitably, with sincere soulful praise of God, comes that magical, indefinable thing called spirituality.

This is written for Reconstructionist educators who seek that outcome with every lesson. I write with admiration and awareness of your efforts, because I teach as well as administer a school. My words are designed to trigger your natural skills and gifts, not to program your classes. My approach is non-traditional with infinite respect for the tradition. For example, the traditional Hebrew blessing "*La'asok be'divray Torah*" can precede this interpretive translation. I hope you find something here that works for you.

### I. PRAYER MOMENTS TEACHING CHILDREN HOW TO "BRING PRAYERS HOME"

Goal: To develop a regular prayer experience that is part of the student's everyday life.

Time: Ten minutes at the start of each class.

Age: Any age but proven successful with third, fourth, and fifth graders as well as their parents.

Each class opens with a fixed language prayer which I wrote when I began teaching. It is: "Blessed are you, God, who has brought us here today to learn, to pray, and to grow together. We give you thanks, Amen." The children memorize this quickly and it is both a ritual and a mantra. We then move into what I call "Prayer Moments."

At the beginning of the year we discuss why we pray. We analyze the purpose of prayer (help, strength, thanks, etc.) as well as the more abstract idea of having a conversation with an Other.

I then ask the students to think of something that has occurred in their lives the past week that they might want to acknowledge in a prayer moment. It can be very simple such as being grateful for getting an A on a spelling test, or heartbreaking, such as expressing grief over the loss of a favorite pet. The one requirement is that they think it through and really believe it is a "prayer moment."

As the year goes on and our concepts about prayer become more sophisticated, I require a global prayer as well as a personal one. This is much tougher for the students but moves them closer to communal prayer. I almost never criticize the prayer content, but we sometimes work as a group on rephrasing a prayer idea.

As a teacher, your task becomes one of shaping. You are introducing two parallel concepts of prayer. Personal prayer, which requires very little shaping, and communal prayer, which requires a little more. You can be helpful in terms of language. If a prayer moment is giving thanks for beating the tar out of an opposing soccer team, you can reframe the prayer for the student by suggesting they give thanks for having the strength and the good fortune to come out ahead on that particular day. Communal prayer can be reinforced by language, but also by having the class recite the communal prayer together. The student who has created the prayer says his/her first line, and then the rest of the class repeats it. This is a powerful editing tool, since the rest of the class will not hesitate to express their feelings if they don't think the prayer fills its task of being "global."

As your students get more comfortable with this concept, they start to have some ownership of the prayer process. Again and again I have had parents report that their children bring this activity home, and the door becomes open for a whole new level of spirituality in their lives.

## II. PRAYING IN COMMUNITY—A PARENT-CHILD EXPERIENCE

Goal: To analyze our traditional prayers and develop a comfort level with communal prayer.

Time: Two hours.

Age: Fourth grade and older.

Many families are uncomfortable with liturgical prayer. The purpose of this parent-child class is to take a look at both traditional and non-traditional prayers, most of which were taken from *Kol Haneshamah*, and to establish a level of comfort and understanding with the whole idea of Jewish prayer. The class includes guided exercises and a lengthy resource guide which I compiled both from the prayerbook and from sources as diverse as Danny Siegel and Chief Seattle. You should put your own resource materials together that reflect your individual congregation and its place on the traditional/non-traditional spectrum.

Each family grouping (often both parents attend) is given some ground rules and then sent off on their own to pursue their task. I have included just a few of the exercises to give you a flavor of the experience. As with all our congregation's parent-child experiences, the goal was a new level of spiritual communication between parent and student.

The entire class takes about two hours, with an introduction by the teacher and closure by the teacher. The real work is done by the families after you have set the stage.

Here are some examples of the exercises the parents and students go through together:

Adult: Tell the child how you feel about being told exactly what to do. Give examples of when you like it and when you don't.

Child: Tell the adult how it feels to be told what to do without being told why you have to do it. Say something more than it feels crummy. Explain, if you can, when it's o.k. to be told exactly what to do. Does it ever make you feel safe?

Adult: Recite the following words to the child: "*'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe: All mimsy were the borogoves, and the mome raths outgrabe.*" (Thank you, Lewis Carroll.) How did that make you feel?

Child: Recite the following words to the adult: "*David Meleh Yisra'el, Hay, Hay, Vikayam.*" Now, how do you feel? Like singing? **Together:** Talk about language for a minute. Talk about it's power. Does language make you feel like you have more power? Do you know what each of you just said? Even if you don't know what either of the sentences mean, did one feel better than the other? Why do you think that is?

Child: Why do you think all *berachot* begin the same way? Do you think the blessings would be better if they were different every time?

Adult: Do the introductory words of the blessings matter to you? If you were raised as a Jew is there a comfort level in the Hebrew words? Can you explain that to your partner? If you were raised in the Christian tradition, can you talk a little bit about litany and how that feels? If you were raised with no religious background, try and imagine how these things would feel, and respond.

Adult: Why do you think that community is important for prayer? Try and come up with an example of when you needed people around you.

Child: When do you most want to share something with people? When do you need people? Give some personal examples.

The family units then go on to write their own communal prayers. They are often breathtakingly powerful. We read them aloud, communally, and the classroom becomes a sanctuary. I have also used the prayers for Shabbat services, with the students leading the congregation. It's a spiritual experience that leaves everyone moved.

### III. FRAMING QUESTIONS—OPENING YOUR STUDENTS' SOULS

Goal: To empower students to accept that they have religious ethics and ideas.

Time: 10 minutes / intermittent classes.

Age: First grade and up.

We have a great advantage over secular school teachers. We are supposed to talk about big questions and have some big answers. The reality is that the big questions are easier to come by than the

answers. Small children respond very well to big questions and give you an opportunity to have them start feeling like a spiritual path is open to them. They also often have the big answers that escape the jaded adult in us.

There are dozens of opportunities in the course of teaching Judaism to veer into areas that are spiritual. Little children love the story of Samson, and questions about what is really strength can take you to wonderful places. David and Goliath open the door to whether size is as important as people may think. The wonderful book *Does God Have a Big Toe?* by Marc Gellman and Oscar de Mejo is a huge classroom favorite and grounds for endless discussion.

The real key to opening up small children to their own spirituality is to just point them in the right direction and take them seriously. I have listened to a four-year-old child discuss the Ten Commandments with a seriousness worthy of a *yeshiva buher*. We just have to let ourselves, as their teachers, acknowledge their capacity to be religious beings.

#### **IV. BRINGING GOD INTO THE CLASSROOM WHAT CAN BE MORE SPIRITUAL THAN THAT?**

Goal: To open up discussion of God's presence with a Reconstructionist spin.

Time: Two one-hour classes.

Age: Fourth grade and up.

Children love to talk about God. As Reconstructionist educators we are forced to confront the many facets of God and have that make sense to our students. Since scholars are still debating this one, you need to be sure you're able to talk about your own beliefs before opening up to your students. It doesn't matter if you don't know for sure, but you must be comfortable sharing your uncertainty with the students. This is an impossible topic to discuss insincerely. One way to begin exploring who, what and when is God is to give students the opportunity to explore sources that speak about God.

The Creation God: If the student comes into the classroom with one clear image of God, it is this one. The God of Creation is a universal image, and we as teachers have to acknowledge and accept that image and then build on it. Our task is to introduce the evolving God through quotes from the *Tanah*, ancient tales and modern stories. If we do this well, our students become open to endless spiritual possibilities.

We can begin this process, after acknowledging the Creator-myth with the wonderful quote of Jacob's: "Surely the Lord is present in this place, and I did not know it!" (Genesis 28:17) We then can go on to Jacob's renaming in Genesis 32:29 and play with the idea of "wrestling with God." Through all of this we can talk about listening for the "still small voice" (and the derivation of Jiminy Cricket!) as well as Harold Kushner's wonderful image of "when is God" as opposed to "what is God."

As the God idea continues to evolve in our discussions we can utilize the rich Hasidic tradition. My students respond strongly to the Hasidic tale about the child of a Rabbi who wandered in the woods so often the child's father became worried. When asked why the child always went into the woods, the child replied that he went there to find God. The father reasonably responded that God was the same everywhere, but the child countered with the absolute clincher, "But father, I am not."

We then are ready to explore the myriad facets of God as portrayed in *Kol Haneshamah*. This God ranges from the presence evoked by the powerful words of the Shema to Rabindranath Tagore's words that God is found "in the merry shouts of children at play,/ In the lullaby the mother sings, rocking her baby to sleep,/ In the slumber that falls on the infant's eyelids,/ And in the smile that plays on his sleeping lips." That God, that all-encompassing presence that brings meaning to existence, is the God we want our students to meet, to get to know, and to whom they will sing praises.

The siddur can be overwhelming to the students, so I copy prayers and stories down and hand them out for their notebooks with my own margin notes which I try to keep lighthearted. Our students will go anywhere we take them, we just have to be willing to go along.

From this kind of study we are able to demonstrate concretely that the God concept is an evolving concept, that our intellectual development demands a different understanding of God than the God presented by the ancient texts, but that at each step along the way God has met our needs. We must avoid being too analytical, however. As teachers of Judaism, we are also obligated to nourish the wonder, the amazement, and the power, that God evokes. We each enter our classrooms with hopes high. May we never be disappointed.



## Shema *Uvirhoteha* for Ages Eight to Twelve

Judith Kummer

### THE UNIT *AL REGEL AHAT* (AT A GLANCE)

Lesson 1:	An overview of the Shema and Blessing Formulae
Lesson 2:	The <i>Barehu</i> , <i>Yotzer</i> , and <i>El Adon</i> Blessings and Their Meanings
Lesson 3:	Shema and Its Meaning
Lesson 4:	<i>Ve 'ahavta</i> and Its Meaning
Lesson 5:	<i>Ge 'ulah</i> and Its Meaning, and Conclusion of the Unit

### LESSON 1

#### I. OVERVIEW

Using Deb Waxman's rhymes describing the different parts of this section of the service (see, *infra*), write each rhyme out on several cards, give one of each (i.e. a whole set) to each group of two or three students and have them race to see who can put them in the correct order first.

Talk a little with the kids about order. Is order a good thing? When is it a good thing? Are there things in your life that have a sense of order that you wouldn't want to have disturbed (a baseball game, a symphony, a favorite song, the way you read a book from beginning to end)?

Look again at the rhymes. Let's pull out the important point of each together.

1. *Barehu*: call to prayer—says to everyone around “stop doing what you were doing on your own. It's time to come together as a group.”
2. *Yotzer*: describes God's presence in the world around us.
3. *Ahavah Rabah*: states that God, who is present in the world all around us, loves us (focuses the emphasis of God's attention on us in particular).
4. *Shema* and *Ve 'ahavta*: a statement of our belief in God, our love for God, and the mitzvot we keep which help us remember our love for God.
5. *Ge 'ulah*: “Look what God has done for us in the past!”

Again, the flow of this section goes: “Come together; Look, God's all around us!; God loves us; We believe in God, and we love God; Look at what God has done for us!”



The focus in this section of the service shifts (from community to the world around us, to God's sentiments, to our own, and then to God's actions in the past). Do you see a single element which remains constant?

("We"—we're acting as a community during this section of the service.)

The sections before this, *Birkhot Hashahar* and *Pesukei Dezimrah*, and the section of the service following, the Amidah, are made up mostly of prayers people say on their own. How does that affect the prayers in this section of the service? (How does this affect your own prayer? What does it feel like to pray alone? In a group? How are the experiences different? Do you pray better alone or in a group?)

In a way, these prayers function as a bridge between the prayers before and after. They also serve as a lens which focuses our attention on ourselves as members of a community and on our relationship with God.

## II. MAKING THE TRADITION OUR OWN—CREATIVE WRITING

One aspect of Reconstructionism which is different from some other streams of Judaism is an emphasis on our prayers coming directly from our own hearts, sometimes in words which are different from the traditional ways of saying prayers.

Look at page 247. Below the line is a section on creating new blessings.

- a) Read the blessing just above the line. Then read the first three options below the line (Roman numeral I) and compare them with the *Yotzer* blessing above the line. What are the differences among them? Which one do you like best?
- b) Read the next three lines (Roman numeral II). Again, find which one is used in the *Yotzer* blessing above. Which one do you like best? Why?
- c) Read the last three lines (Roman numeral III) and find the option used in the *Yotzer* blessing. Which one of these options do you like best?
- d) Make up a blessing of your own, including one of the selections each from Roman numerals I, II and III, and think of an ending: What would you like to say a blessing for at this very moment? Is there something that you want to say thank you to God for right now? Is there something you'd like to ask of God? Write it out in your own words.

## LESSON 2: *BAREHU*

### I. DISCUSSION OF THE FUNCTION OF THE PRAYER

We call the *Barehu* our “call to prayer.” Why do you think we need a call to prayer?

A. To establish order in the community;

**Exercise:** have the kids talk (quietly) among themselves, and give three different kids a turn at trying to get everyone’s attention. (It’s necessary to keep this pretty controlled, or it could turn into mayhem!) **Alternative exercise:** Can you think of any words we use to tell people we’re going to start something? (Like “On your mark, get set, go!” or “Play ball!”) Our set words are a signal to everyone to focus, because we’re going to start something important.

B. because up until now, during *Birhot Hashahar* and *Pesukey Dezimrah*, we’ve been praying on our own, doing prayers which warm up the “praying muscles” in our hearts, and now we come together as a community to begin the formal service.

### II. DISCUSSION OF USE OF THE TEXT ELSEWHERE IN THE SERVICE

Look at the text (the two lines of the *Barehu*) on page 247. Turn to page 399, the Torah blessings, and read the first two lines. What do you notice? (They are the same words.)

Why do you think we use the same words at the beginning of the service and when someone goes up for an aliyah to read the blessings before the Torah is read? (The focus again is on the communal nature of the action we are preparing to take; that is, this says to everyone around, “Hey, look what’s going on!”)

### III. DISCUSSION OF IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRAYER’S FUNCTIONS IN OUR LIVES

The *Barehu* makes us pay attention to the fact that we each are a part of a community, part of something greater than ourselves.

What does it mean that our lives are a part of a larger whole? (Many answers are possible. Suggestion: that we have people to turn to when we need help, that we can’t just behave any way we want to, etc.)

How does it feel to you to think about being part of something larger? Does it make you feel smaller? larger? stronger? weaker? good? bad? (Open-ended question—many answers are possible.)

#### IV. YOTZER

We are taught that God permeates (is in) all living things, and also that God is much bigger than all of these beings. In fact, we can see God's handiwork in nature, which is what the next blessing, the *Yotzer*, is all about.

Look at the blessing on pages 246-7. The traditional blessing gives several examples of seeing God's handiwork in nature. What other examples can you think of where you see God's work in the natural world around us?

(If there's time, have the children read aloud one of the commentaries/*kavanot* on pages 248-9 and ask whether these readings make them think about anything in their own lives. There are wonderful images here, such as God as "cosmic housekeeper" pulling up the windowshades to let in the morning light, and the power of the image of light, and the sense of our dependence on God's continual act of creation.)

#### V. EL ADON

(List the English alphabet on the board, with a word-length space next to each letter.)

You all know many names for God (*Adonay*, *Elohim*, God, Creator, Protector, etc.). Each name says something different about God. Let's see if we can think of one for each letter of the English alphabet. (Names may also be attributes, or words descriptive of God, like "Awesome," "Mighty," etc.)

Look at page 252-3. What do you notice about the way this appears on the page? (This is an acrostic—an alphabetical listing of phrases describing God, both in Hebrew and in English.)

Why do you think the people who put together the siddur included a prayer like this, in alphabetical order? What function does it serve? (Orders and provides a framework for our thinking about God, which parallels Jewish thought about order in the universe [see commentary on page 255].)

### LESSON 3: SHEMA

#### I. FAMILIARITY WITH PRAYER AND EXPANDING MEANING

Teach the words of the first line of the Shema, using the **hand symbols/signs** appearing in Appendix A.

Talk with the kids about each of the symbols:

Who is this prayer addressed to? Who are we saying should hear this statement? (We, the Jewish people should hear it.)

Why is the symbol for Israel/the Jewish people a book with fingers walking across it? (We are the people of the Book.) And which book are we talking about? (Torah; you may find that kids' answer is the siddur, given the large number of set prayers we have, or our general love for books.)

The symbol for *ehad* (one) is curious. We hold up one finger for the oneness of God. What does it mean to say that God is one?

We add on this strange symbol for eternity. What does eternity mean? Think of the outer reaches of space—and imagine God filling all of that, and more, since we are taught that God created it; then think of the tiniest creature you can imagine, and of the tiny parts we are all made up of (if the kids know about cells and molecules and atoms, you can speak of these) and of there being a little bit of God in each of them, since they were all created by God.

So by using the word eternity, we're talking about God filling the whole world around us—and beyond—and of God being present even in the tiniest creature we can imagine—and even beyond where our imaginations can carry us.

And in addition to this sense of eternity, of God filling the whole world, we're also talking about God always having existed, since the time before there was a world (strange thought, no?) and always existing in the future (another strange thought!). And we also held up one finger before making the symbol for eternity to show that in spite of all of these different things about God, God is one.

## II. FURTHER EXPANSION OF MEANING

Look at page 276. The words at the top of the page are written just as they appear in the Torah scroll. What do you notice about them? (No vowels, no punctuation, and the *ayin* and *dalet* are larger than the other letters.)

Why do you think these letters are larger than the others?

There are two reasons passed down through our tradition to explain this. The first is that if you were to put these two letters, *ayin* and *dalet*, together, they spell the Hebrew word "*eyd*," which means witness. The central idea of the Shema is to proclaim or announce to the world that God is one, and we are taught through these two large letters that we are supposed to act as witnesses to this fact, of God being one in the world. What do you think it would mean to be a witness in this way?

The second reason deals with the two letters separately. There was once a great rabbi named Maimonides who lived in the twelfth century. He wrote that it is very important that we say the words of the Shema correctly, because if we don't, our statement could mean something we don't want it to mean. The first word, Shema, could be misspelled with an *alef* instead of an *ayin* at the end, changing the emphasis to the first syllable instead of the second, and it would then mean "perhaps" or "lest." How would that change our statement? Is that meaning true to the original meaning of the Shema?

And if the *dalet* were confused with another letter, the *resh*, then instead of speaking of the oneness of God, we would be saying "God is the other." Again, is that meaning true to the original meaning of the Shema?

Maimonides also teaches that since the letters in the Hebrew alphabet all represent numbers (*alef* = 1, *bet* = 2, etc.), the *dalet* (4) represents the four directions on a compass, which symbolize God's presence everywhere in the world.

**Review:** What are some of the reasons that two of the letters are written differently where the Shema appears in the Torah?

## LESSON 4: VE'AHAVTA

### I. DISCUSSION

Read the English words together, or have kids go around class and take turns reading one sentence each.

What does it mean to love God "with one's whole heart, with every breath, with all you have"? And how would that translate into action in our own lives? Are there things we can do to show that we feel this love? (Share the story of Rabbi Akiba and the question it raises about sharing wealth, bringing out that we owe God our wealth, and we share it through our *tzedakah*.)

How do we "teach them intently to our children" (in addition to religious school)? Are there there ethics and values that we pass down from one generation to the next? How do we pass them down? (By example, by living according to the values that are important to us.) And which values are important to be passed down?

What does it mean to "speak them when you sit inside your house or walk upon the road"? (Thinking about our relationship to God at many times during our daily lives, not just when we're at synagogue services. If in fact we can think of God as permeating (being in) everything around us, then it's up to us to be aware of God's presence at all times. In this way we can "bring God into the world"!)

What does it mean to speak of them "when you lie down and when you rise"? (Again, thinking about our relationship to God at many times during our daily lives) Many Jews say the Shema first thing in the morning and before they go to bed at night. What do you think this would do for you if you began and ended your day with reciting the Shema?

What is the prayer talking about when we say "bind them as a sign upon your hand, and keep them visible before your eyes"? (Tefillin. If possible, get a set to show the kids, or open the *First Jewish*

*Catalog* to pages 58-63 to see pictures. Two good resources for teaching Tefillin are the Isaacs and Olitsky book from KTAV Publishing, or Martin I. Sandberg, *Tefillin: and you shall bind them . . .* from United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism Publishing.)

What is the prayer talking about when it says “inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates”? (Mezuzah. If possible, get a mezuzah to show the kids or see pages 12-15 of the *First Jewish Catalog* to see pictures.)

## II. ACTIVITY

Select one of three activities:

- a) Teach children how to lay *tefillin* with the appropriate *berachot* (See *The Jewish Catalog*, pages 58-63, Isaacs and Olitsky, or Sandberg.)
- b) Make *mezuzah* covers, teach about the *klaf* (parchment) that goes inside, and teach how to put it up, with the appropriate *berachah* (see *The Jewish Catalog*, pages 12-15.)
- c) Teach children how to tie *tzitzit* and how to put on a *tallit* (See *The Jewish Catalog*, pages 51-57.)

## LESSON 5: GE'ULAH-REDEMPTION

What does it mean to be redeemed? (It has to do with making it to the place you've dreamed of.)

We talk in Judaism of redeeming slaves: there's a mitzvah from the time that the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and many Jews were taken captive, that if a Jewish slave was brought to a town where other Jews lived, these other Jews should save up their money and *redeem* that slave, buy him or her and set him or her free.

We talk about redemption as coming to the Promised Land, that we were redeemed from slavery in Egypt and moved into freedom in our own land.

There are people who speak of the founding of the state of Israel as a modern-day redemption. Why do you think the founding of the state of Israel might count as a redemption?

Look at the text on page 290-1. This is a prayer called *Ge'ulah*, which means redemption. Redemption is something that we pray for. Why would we pray for it? (Sometimes we need help from outside of us for something important to happen.)

One of the images we have for God is that of *Go'el*, the redeemer. We call God *Ga'al Yisra'el*, one who redeems Israel. What is this particular prayer talking about? Why would it be included in our

liturgy (our set prayers)? (It speaks of a specific time when Israel had just been redeemed from slavery, had just experienced God as redeemer. So we think back also to that time in our people's history when our people had the immediate memory of having just been redeemed, when God had just played that role in our people's experience, and ask that God do so again in this time, for us.)

We reflect on a time in our people's history when they must have felt overjoyed at what had just happened for them, when they had just left slavery in Egypt. Can you think of a time in your life when something wonderful like that happened, something you'd prayed and hoped for that made things much better for you when it happened? (See note below line on page 290.)

The *Ge'ulah* section of the liturgy is a prayer. We ask in it that God redeem us. What would you, personally, pray to be redeemed from, or to be redeemed to?

## Shema *Uvirhoteha* for Ages Twelve to Seventeen

Deborah Waxman

### THE UNIT *AL REGEL AHAT* (AT A GLANCE)

- Lesson 1: Introduction to the Shema and the *Barehu*
- Lesson 2: Exploring Monotheism and Plurality: the Shema and *Yotzer* Blessings
- Lesson 3: The Reconstructionist Approach
- Lesson 4: A Shema Mitzvah Fair
- Lesson 5: *Ge'ulah* and Conclusion of the Unit

### INTRODUCTION

Following the introductory sections of *Birkhot Hashahar* (blessings of the morning) and *Pesukei Dezimrah* (verses of song and praise), the *Shaharit* service formally begins with Shema *Uvirhoteha*, the Shema and its blessings. According to the Mishna, in the morning, the Shema is recited with two blessings before it and one after it (*Berakhot* 1:4). The two introductory blessings are *Yotzer*, praising God as the creator of nature, and *Birkat Hatorah* or *Ahavah Rabah*, thanking God for God's unending love as expressed through the gift of the Torah. The concluding blessing, *Ge'ulah*, speaks of God as redeemer and includes triumphant lines sung by the Israelites at the Red Sea after Pharaoh's army has been drowned: *Mi hamoha ba'elim Adonay?* (Who is like you among the gods?). When a *minyan* is present, the section opens with the *Barehu*, the call to public worship; *Shema uvirhoteha* is followed in the service by the Amidah.

### OUTLINE

- I. *Barehu* (if *minyan* is present)
- II. *Yotzer*
- III. *Ahavah Rabah*
- IV. *Shema*
- V. *Ge'ulah*

### THE SHEMA

The Shema, the core of this unit of prayers, is the most ancient part of the prayerbook. The introductory sentence (Shema) and the first paragraph (*Ve'ahavta*) are taken from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and were recited by the priests in the Temple on a daily basis. From the Second Temple period onward, the traditional three paragraphs of the Shema are known as a whole unit: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (Paragraph 1); Deuteronomy 11:13-21 (Paragraph 2); and Numbers 15:37-41 (Paragraph 3).

The *Shema* appears in the morning and evening service in order to fulfill the command that each individual should study Torah day and night. Since it was impossible to include the entire Torah, certain key passages that address essential themes were selected and inserted into the service. The



first paragraph of the Shema includes the command to love God; according to traditional interpretation, one element of this love includes acceptance of God's kingship. The second paragraph spells out **how** to love God, namely, through the observance of God's commandments. The consequences of obedience and disobedience are also clearly laid out. (This paragraph has been replaced in the Reconstructionist liturgy; see below for further discussion.) The third and final paragraph discusses one specific mitzvah, that of wearing *tzitzit* (fringes on the corners of garments) as a physical reminder of God, God's *mitzvot* and God's actions as the redeemer of Israel from slavery.

### THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST SHEMA

Mordecai Kaplan was deeply troubled by the emphasis on collective punishment for disobedience in the traditional second paragraph of the Shema. Accordingly, in the 1945 Reconstructionist prayerbook, this paragraph was replaced with another passage from the Book of Deuteronomy, 28:1-6 and 30:1-19. In the words of *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim* commentator Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, this selection "begins by encouraging observance in the same language, but concentrates on the positive ways in which observance of *mitzvot* focuses our attention on God's presence as perceived through productivity and the pursuit of abundant life."

### THE BLESSINGS THAT SURROUND THE SHEMA

In the liturgy, blessings precede and follow any passages from the Torah. The blessings that surround the Shema mostly pick up on the themes of the Shema itself. The first blessing, *Yotzer*, is based on lines from the prophet Isaiah (45:7). Appropriately for the morning prayer service, it focuses on the renewal of light as the renewal of creation. The poems that follow this blessing expand on this theme, exploring God's role as creator; included among them are two alphabetical acrostics celebrating God's many qualities. This *berakah* also includes the "sitting" *kedushah*, an account of a heavenly choir of angels proclaiming God's holy kingship.

The second blessing before the Shema, *Ahavah Rabah*, picks up on the theme of love, this time God's love for the people Israel. God's love is eternal and this is attested to by God's gift of the Torah, a guideline by which we can live lives of meaning. The *berakah* closes with a plea to redeem all Jews from bondage from the four corners of the earth and to gather them together in safety in the land of Israel. The plea is acted out on a physical level by gathering of the four *tzitziyot*; it also prepares the *tallit*-wearer for the Shema, which specifically addresses the mitvah of *tzitzit*.

The Shema concludes with a reference to God's redemption of the Israelites from bondage; the blessing that follows it, *Ge'ulah*, immediately takes up this theme of redemption. The *berakah* focuses on the core event of the Exodus, the triumphant crossing of the Red Sea. The readers are asked to imagine themselves at the shores of the sea and to join in with Moses, Miriam and the people as they praise God for saving them from slavery and destruction. It is with this emphasis on God's unity and might that the service moves into the next part, the Amidah.

## LESSON 1

### I. INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW (10 MINUTES)

**Distribute** first set of note cards with key passages of five links of chain in Hebrew and English (suggested passages: *Barehu*—entire blessing; *Yotzer*—first *berahah* [*Yotzer Or*] and closing *berahah* [*Yotzer Hame'orot*]; *Ahavah*—*Veha'er Eyneynu*; *Shema*—*Ve'ahavta*; *Ge'ulah*—*Mi Hamohah*).

**Distribute** second set of note cards with rhymes on them (see below). **Read** cards in small groups (2 - 3 students). **Ask** students to **match** the rhymes to the *berahot* and place in the appropriate order.

#### Rhymes:

(*Barehu*)

Of this chain of blessings, I do start  
That's one of the ways I play my part  
Here I call all to prayer if there are 10 women and men  
But I'm sung to a different tune when to the Torah someone  
comes to stand

(*Yotzer*)

God in nature, I do explore  
Creator, maker, fashioner and more  
The many names of God I do praise  
Like maker of peace and creator of days  
Officially I'm the first *berahah* of this group when we say  
the morning prayer  
Though I come in **second** when the call to worship 10 people  
share

(*Ahavah*)

God loves us and loves us, without cease  
Is the main theme of the third piece  
Because of this love a great gift did God give  
Teachings and laws by which we can live

(*Shema*)

The core  
The point  
I am the central thought  
The prayer that from a young age Jews are taught  
I follow love and precede redemption  
And of the *mitzvot* of *tallit*, *tefillin* and *mezuzah* I make  
mention

(*Ge'ulah*)

Last but not least, I wrap up the chain

God is our champion and redeemer is what I claim

I quote from great moments in our history

Like when the people, Moses and Miriam stood at the Red Sea

### Activity:

Make multiple copies of the two sets of note cards, with the first set containing one of the key passages from the five links in the chain in Hebrew and English and the second set containing the rhymes.

Go over the themes of the *berahot* quickly using the first set of note cards and the open siddur.

Divide students into groups of two to three, and pass out one set of each set of note cards.

Students review *berahot* and rhymes, then match the rhymes to the *berahot* and place them in the appropriate order.

Groups can compete against each other, but all groups should finish the puzzle.

## II. SHEMA IN TORAH (25 MINUTES)<sup>1</sup>

Explain that the chain of *berahot* are called *Shema uvirhoteha* and that the unit will focus on the Shema and the other blessings as well as on core themes that run throughout the whole chain. **Open** Torah scroll to column with Shema. **Ask** students to study column and identify what is different about it.

- Why are things altered?
- What is changed here?
- What stands out? (*ayin* in Shema and *dalet* in *ehad*)
- Why do you think the scribe made them stand out?

**Tell** them the following explanations.

### Explanation one:

There was a rabbi who lived in the 14th century named Abudraham. He had an explanation about why these two letters were highlighted.

---

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from J. Grishaver's *Shema and Company*, Torah Aura .

The two letters “*ayin*” and “*dalet*” form the word *eyd*. *Eyd* means “witness” (like in court). By saying the Shema, every Jew testifies that God is one.

- What does it mean to testify?
- Why was/is it important for Jews to testify that God is one?  
(Affirm God’s monotheism to the Jewish people and to people who worship many gods or different conceptions of God.)

### **Explanation two:**

Maimonides was a very great, very well-known rabbi who lived before Abudraham in the 13th century. He had a different explanation.

When reading the Shema, one should be very careful to pronounce each word exactly. One should be careful to say Shema (emphasizing the “*ayin*”) and not *she-ma* (with an “*alef*”—*she-ma* means “perhaps” or “lest.”)

One should hold onto the “*dalet*” in *ehad* to show that God is the Ruler both in heaven and on earth—in all the four directions a compass points.

- What is the connection between the letter *dalet* and the “four directions a compass points?”  
(*dalet* stands for the number 4 in Hebrew – *alef*=1; *bet*=2; *gimel*=3; *dalet*=4, etc.)
- According to Maimonides, what lesson is taught by the large *dalet*?  
(omnipresence of God)
- What lesson is taught by the large *ayin*?  
(affirmation rather than an opening for doubt)

### **Explanation three:**

If we mispronounce the word, we are changing the meaning. A small mistake, such as reading the last letter as a *resh* instead of a *dalet*, can make a big difference.

Since *ayin* and *alef* sound alike (silent letters), a change from a *dalet* to a *resh* in reading makes what we read “*ahar*” or “*aheyr*” instead of “*ehad*.” *Aheyr* means “other,” and *ahar* means “after.”

- What would it mean to misread the word *ehad* in the Shema?
- What would these mistakes mean in our prayers?
- How would these mistakes change the meaning of the Shema?

### III. *BAREHU* (10 MINUTES)

**Facilitate** a discussion on *Barehu*.

- Why are the words shared with the Torah blessings?  
(communal nature; focusing of attention on important occurrence)
- What part of the service precedes *Barehu/Shema uvirhoteha*?  
(*Birkhot Hashahar, Pesukei Dezimrah*)

**Explain** that the *Barehu* is a shift to a call for worship that is public. **Read** Kaplan's *kavanah* on page 56 with the students.

- How does this *kavanah*/prayer make you feel?
- Do you pay more attention at the *Barehu*?

**Teach** the bow that the prayer leader does at the *Barehu*. **Discuss** with the students whether it works. **Ask** how the students might get everyone's attention in a prayer session.

- What other motions might be possible?

## LESSON 2

### I. AN EXPLORATION OF MONOTHEISM AND PLURALITY— EXPLORING THE SHEMA AND *YOTZER* (25 MINUTES)

**Read** together with the class "Where We Can Find God" on page 755.<sup>2</sup>

- What is the core idea from the Jewish service that explores this chain of blessings?  
(Shema)
- What is the point of the first sentence of the Shema?  
(God is one; monotheism)
- In all the prayers and blessings of this chain, what are some of the descriptions  
(designations) of God or roles played by God?  
(God in nature; God as source of love; God as teacher and lawgiver; God as redeemer)
- The different authors of these prayers and of the introductory reading each saw God in these different ways. Is there something—an event, an experience, a feeling—that makes you think about God?
- How do these many different expressions/ideas fit in with the theme of the Shema? Do they contradict it or go together?

---

<sup>2</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all page numbers listed here refer to *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*.

**Facilitate** a discussion on how the many are contained within God's oneness. Talking points:

- Oneness as an overarching embrace of many manifestations and experiences.
- Multiplicity does not negate monotheism.
- God as the highest ideal with many paths toward reaching/understanding/experiencing God.
- Even if there is only one God, there can still be more than one way to describe, experience and celebrate God.

## II. MAKING THE TRADITION OUR OWN— CONTINUATION OF THEME OF GOD'S MULTIPLICITY (20 MINUTES)

**Review** with the students some of the different descriptions of God. Sometimes they refer to characteristics, sometimes names. **Look** with the students below the line on page 247. **Explain** that this section deals with different ways to say *berakhot*. **Review** traditional formula for *berakhot*. Parse it and have kids devise their own formulas.

- What are some of the names of God on page 247?

**Point out** that these are not the only names. **Turn** to page 253. **Read** this poem about God. **Explain** that it is part of the *Yotzer* link of this chain of *berakhot*.

- What is unusual about this poem?  
(Acrostic—notice Hebrew and English acrostic in translation.)

**Lead** class in making up own acrostic to either Hebrew or English alphabet. (Encourage use of different names of God, including kids' own inventions. Try to incorporate images used in earlier discussions.)

## LESSON 3

### I. REVIEW OF SHEMA (5 MINUTES)

**Read** all the paragraphs aloud in English. (If the class needs to build their Hebrew reading, this may be a good time to read all or some of the paragraphs in Hebrew.) For the review, read the Reconstructionist second paragraph (Biblical Selection I—Deuteronomy 28:1-6; 30:1-19).

### II. The Reconstructionist Challenge to the Shema (40 minutes)

**Read aloud** the traditional second paragraph (Biblical Selection II—Deuteronomy 11:13-21), explaining that this is how most people say the Shema, but that Mordecai Kaplan had so many problems with it that he chose not to include it in the original Reconstructionist prayerbook of 1945. **Divide** the students into pairs and instruct them to go over the paragraph carefully to see if they can

figure out what are the main points of this passage and what are some of the things that Kaplan found challenging. They may use the commentary and the *derashim*.

- What are the themes of the passage?  
(Obedience to *mitzvot* is rewarded; disobedience is punished; agricultural idiom)
- What were Kaplan's problems with it?  
(Emphasis on punishment; nature's obliviousness to good and bad)
- Are they troubling to you?
- Are there other things that you find troubling?
- What do you like about it?

**Turn back** as a class to Biblical Selection I. **Read** it again. **Explain** that this is how Kaplan solved his difficulty, by selecting other passages from Deuteronomy.

- What are the themes of this passage?  
(Blessings; emphasis on positive options)
- Does it work?
- Did Kaplan achieve what he wanted to?
- Does this passage address all your concerns?
- What other themes would you like to see addressed in a core prayer like the Shema?

## LESSON 4

### I. SHEMA MITZVAH FAIR (45 MINUTES)

**Review briefly** the second paragraph of the Shema. The first and third paragraphs touch on a lot of different things, including three specific mitzvot.

- What are they? (*mezuzah, tallit, tefillin*)

**Set up** three stations staffed by educational director, parent, etc., with hands-on articles and take-home handouts. **Divide** class into thirds and send them around the different stations at ten-minute intervals. (Note: This entire fair could be made much larger and could include many more activities, including arts and crafts components. If expanded, it may serve as a good family education program. If you are limited on time, you may select one or two activities to do with whole class.) *The First Jewish Catalog* contains excellent background information on each of these mitzvot.

**A. Tefillin station.** Several sets of *tefillin*, ideally including silver or other fancy covers, a drawing of how to lay *tefillin*, and photocopies of the *berakhot*. Person teaching how to lay should be able to explain when and how *tefillin* is laid. (For a good text, see either Isaacs and Olitsky's textbook on Tefillin, UAHC, or Martin I. Sandberg, *Tefillin: and you shall bind them . . .*, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. See also the article by Judy Kummer, *infra*.)

**B. Tallit station.** Pre-cut string to tie *tzitzit*. Drawing and explanation of how to tie them (take-home). Tying lessons. Ideally, straight back chairs, poles or other tools on which to tie the *tzitzit* (anything that can slipped off—maybe safety pins?)

**C. Mezuzah station.** Several different *mezuzah* covers. Sample of kosher scroll. A hand-out sheet with instructions on how to hang a *mezuzah*, in what rooms, what *berachot*, when to hang them.

## LESSON 5

### I. GE'ULAH (25 MINUTES)

**Review** *Ge'ulah*, especially *Mi Hamohah*.

- What historical event is this prayer about?

**Explain** that some writers have tried to imagine the experience of this event from the perspective of people who were really there. **Look at** two examples in *Kol Haneshamah*, one from the perspective of a leader, the second from two of the Israelites. **Read** Ruth Sohn's poem "I Shall Sing to the Lord a New Song" on page 768. Then **read** Lawrence Kushner's story about redemption on page 800.

- What are the main themes of the two pieces?  
(Sohn-taking risks; Kushner—not even noticing "redemption")

**Explain** that these two pieces imagine the thoughts of Israelites at the shores of the Sea of Reeds. But on Passover, we learn that we should act as if we were all slaves in Egypt and that we were all liberated and crossed over the Sea of Reeds.

- What does freedom mean to you?
- Are there any obligations attached to being a free person?
- How do we treat other people if we ourselves were redeemed from slavery?

### II. KAVANOT/REVIEW/WRAP-UP

**Review** links in this chain of *berachot*. **Explain** that Reuven Hammer describes the act of prayer as a human being's address to God. He thinks of the Shema, this passage from the Torah that begins with the word "Hear!" as an opportunity for human beings to hear words from God.

- What are some of the themes that this chain of *berachot* try to get you to hear?
- What will you think about next time you pray this part of the service?
- Why do you think they are presented as a chain?



**SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR THE TEACHER**

Blake, Toby and Sarah Sigman. *Ve 'ahavta*. Baltimore Board of Jewish Education, 1985.

Garfiel, Evelyn. *Service of the Heart*. New York: National Academy for Adult Jewish Studies, United Synagogue of America, 1958.

Grishaver, Joel Lurie. *Shema and Company*. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1994.

—, *Shema is for Real*. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1991.

Hammer, Reuven. *Entering Jewish Prayer: A Guide to Personal Devotion in the Worship Service*. New York: Schocken Books, 1994.

Ladsay, Jeffrey and Sarah Sigman, *Shema*.

—, *Amudei Tefilah* Series.

Marcus, Audrey Friedman, *The Jewish Teachers Handbook*, (3 Volumes), Denver: A.R.E., 1994.

Siegel, Richard, Michael Strassfeld and Sharon Strassfeld, *The First Jewish Catalog*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973.

## Ten Eytzot For Seven *Berachot*: Background to Teaching the Amidah

Joseph M. Blair

The following contains some information and perspectives that the teacher should bear in mind while teaching this unit.

1. Recall the origin and meaning of the names of this prayer—Amida—standing prayer, *Hatefilah*—the prayer, *Shemoneh Esrey*—the eighteen benedictions. Note the unclear origins of the Amidah. According to the Talmud: “One hundred twenty elders, among whom were many prophets, drew up eighteen blessings.” (*Megilah* 17b). While themes and some phrasing for the *berachot* were developed during the first Temple period, it was not until its destruction that the order of the prayer was set, concluding in the late first century with the addition of the eighteenth blessing, the blessing against Apostates. Simeon Hapakuli and Shmuel Hakatan are said to have established the order of the *berachot* at Yavneh (T.B. *Berachot* 28b). (You will need to fit this into the students’ understanding of the Babylonian exile and Babylonian Jewish society.) But even after this time, the exact wording remained fluid until the creation of the earliest siddurim, centuries later. Note Rabbi Amram and his siddur as the earliest version concerning which we have information. Note that even with the inclusion of the nineteenth berachah, the prayer retained its name, the *Shemoneh Esrey*. The Amidah is often described as **the** central prayer of the service—referred to as “**the** prayer” or “*hatefilah*” in traditional sources.

2. Know that the Amidah is recited traditionally twice aloud each day, during *Shaharit* and at *Minhah*, and once **silently** at *Ma'ariv*, because it was not originally obligatory then. In addition, on Shabbat, in those congregations that recite an additional or *musaf* service, they also recite the Amidah aloud during that additional service. Know the overall structure of each Amidah: it is always in three sections; Praise, Petition or Sanctification, and Acknowledgement. The structure differs between weekday and Shabbat; there is no petitionary prayer on Shabbat—instead we include the sanctification of the day. Examine the categories of Praise, Petition/Sanctification, and Thanks, and look at how the Amidah focuses on each. Prepare diagrams of the differences so students can visualize them. Provide copies, or have the students copy these charts from the board. Note that the first three and last three brachot remain the same on weekdays and Shabbat. (A good chart of the comparative structure of Amidot can be found in *Higher and Higher: Making Jewish Prayer Part of Us*, Steven M. Brown, U.S.C.J., 1980, pg. 112.)

3. Be aware of the *minhag* and *halakah* of prayer, the liturgy, and the choreography of the service; for example, the issue of bowing during the Amidah. The Talmud offers the following guidelines for the *halakah* of when to bow during the Amidah: “Our Rabbis taught: These are the *berachot* during which a person may bow: at the beginning and end of the *Avot* and at the beginning and end of the Thanksgiving (*Modim*). If one wants to bow at the end and the beginning of each *berachah*, we instruct that one does not bow.” (*Berachot* 34a). The rabbis did not want one to show excessive humility, which might be misconstrued as trying to ingratiate oneself with God or the community unnecessarily. Demonstrate the choreography; the correct position for entering into the Amidah (taking three steps forwards—first take three steps backward, if needed, given constraints of space),

and the correct bowing form (bend the knees at *Baruh*, bow at the waist for *Atah*, and straighten up for *Adonay*. Know the customs in your congregation.

4. Be familiar with the categories of *keva* or fixed prayer, and *kavanah*, intention or inner focus, which are in tension, especially in the Amidah. (See the article by Segar and Traiger on the *Matbe'ah*). The fixed form and recitation of set liturgy is juxtaposed to the status of this prayer, the emotional high point of the service for personal communion with God. Recall also that the fixed form is not so firmly fixed: there are optional additional prayers which can be added, and places where personal reflections are suggested. Note the optional Traveler's Prayer—*Tefilat Hadereh*, The Prayer for *Parnasah* (sustenance and well-being), and the healing prayer for one who is ill—*Refu'ah*; all are found in most traditional daily siddurim (also included in *Kol Haneshamah: Limot Hol*).

5. Consider the questions that arise with the very personal nature of the communion that occurs in the Amidah. Note the formal language that is used, such as in addressing a sovereign. Is the personal nature of the prayer in conflict with the formal language for addressing God as a sovereign? Consider why this difference exists and what it says to us.

6. Consider the practical nature of the form of the Amidah—with a repetition aloud in some cases (see pages 294-320), and summarization by a shorter form in another *berakah* in others (see pages 108-109). Use *Magen Avot* (page 110-111) as the focal point of study for the substitute shorter form, and the Reader's repetition (*Hazarat Hashatz*, page 294-320) for the repetition.

7. Be aware of the form and content of the traditional Amidot for Shabbat, and the changes made in *Kol Haneshamah*. (i.e., removal of the concept of resurrection of the dead/*mehayey hametim*). Also, be aware of the differences between the Shabbat and daily Amidah, both in *Kol Haneshamah* and in traditional texts.

8. Give some consideration to incorporating into this unit the definition of what makes up a *berakah*. For background on the minimum requirements of the three parts of a *berakah*, see Babylonian Talmud *Berachot* 40b, in which the three-part formulation of a *berakah* for grace over eating bread is discussed. If possible, learn the melody taught by Rabbi Shefa Gold for singing the *berakah* given there, "*Brih rahamanah malka de'alma marey de hay pita*." And refresh your recollection of the *musah* or mode of chanting/singing the *Amidot*, and at least one of the popular melodies for *Magen Avot*.

9. In light of the historic development of the Amidah, recall that the Amidah is **in place** of the Temple sacrifices. In this light, review the concept of sacrifices in Temple times. Focus on both animal and other types of sacrifices (grain, wine, honey, etc.) in Judaism. Look also at **when** sacrifices were made (Jewish festivals, *tamid* [regularly], for guilt, for *shalem* [peace], for well-being, etc.) and what kinds. Look also to the "hierarchy" of acceptable sacrifices; i.e., if one did not have a bull, one could offer two birds, if one did not have a bird, one could offer grain.

10. Recall the fixed nature of the prayers, as well as the lateness with which that canonization occurred in Jewish history. Use the multiplicity of prayers that were suggested for concluding meditations as the springboard for this discussion. Incorporate information on the history of the written form of the siddur at the time of Rabbi Amram and subsequently. (Note the play by Daniel Brenner on this subject.)



## Amidah Curriculum for Grades Three to Six

Joseph M. Blair

### THE UNIT *AL REGEL AHAT* (AT A GLANCE)

Lesson 1:	Introduction to the Amidah
Lesson 2:	The Contents of the Amidah
Lesson 3:	The Structure of the Amidah: <i>Avot Ve'Imot</i>
Lesson 4:	The Structure of the Amidah: <i>Gevurot</i>
Lesson 5:	The Structure of the Amidah: <i>Kedushat Hashem</i>
Lesson 6:	The Structure of the Amidah: <i>Kedushat Hayom</i>
Lesson 7:	The Structure of the Amidah: <i>Avodah</i> and <i>Hoda'ah</i>
Lesson 8:	The Structure of the Amidah: <i>Birkat Hashalom</i>
Lesson 9:	The Structure of the Amidah: Concluding Meditations
Lesson 10:	The Structure of the Amidah: <i>Magen Avot</i>
Lesson 11:	The Structure of the Amidah: Across the Three Shabbat Services
Lesson 12:	The Structure of the Amidah: Weekday and Shabbat <i>Amidot</i>
Lesson 13:	The Structure of the Amidah: The Reconstructionist Approach
Lesson 14:	In Our Own Lives

### INTRODUCTION

The material in this unit assumes that students have already studied Shabbat in some detail, and that they have some (limited) Reconstructionist theological understanding of the importance of rest and of refraining from creative acts or work on Shabbat. This will help them to understand the structure and contents of the Shabbat Amidah. It is also assumed that they have studied the general structure of the service and the themes incorporated in it. If they do not have this background, the teacher should incorporate that background work at the beginning of the unit.

This unit is intended for grades three through six. Because of the very broad range of abilities and developmental levels included in this categorization, the teacher will have to choose carefully and "customize" the material to the class they are teaching. I have tried to include material and activities that can be adapted for use at the various levels.

The unit draws on two sources which I wish to acknowledge here. First, some of the ideas are adapted or drawn from pages 111-129 of *Higher and Higher: Making Jewish Prayer Part of Us* written by my colleague and friend, Steven M. Brown, and edited by Stephen Garfinkel, available through the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. Secondly, I have drawn many ideas from the materials included in *Windows on the Jewish Soul: Resources for Teaching the Values of Spiritual Peoplehood*, edited by Jeffrey Schein and Joseph Blair, and available from the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation (JRF, formerly the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot, or FRCH).

This unit is based upon the underlying structure of the Reconstructionist Teaching Model, described in "Teacher as Reflective Practitioner," by Jeffrey Schein and Jeffrey Eisenstat in *Tithadesh: Initiating Renewal and Reflection in Jewish Education*.

## LESSON 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE AMIDAH

**Purpose:** To introduce students to general background and usage of the Amidah.

**Questions to be answered/Concepts taught:** What is the Amidah? Where in the service do we find it? Which service(s)? When do we say it? What is the mood or theme of this prayer? How often is it said? How many times does it appear in the siddur? What is the form of this prayer? Is this a spontaneous prayer? How does this relate to *Keva*? To *Kavanah*?

**Activity:** Divide students into pairs or triads and have them come up with a list of information and ideas concerning the Amidah, either from their own knowledge, or by looking at pages 90, 294, 326, 488, and 596.<sup>1</sup> After a few minutes, have the groups call out the items on their lists, and write them randomly on a flip chart or the board. Eliminate duplicates. Save or copy this chart for use later.

**Activity:** Give students a copy of the chart. Using the chart, brainstorm with the class to divide the items listed into categories, groupings or sets of similar concepts.

Give students the names of the Amidah (The Amidah, *Ha-Tefilah*/The Prayer, the *Shemoneh Esrey*/Eighteen Benedictions, the Standing Prayer). Generate a discussion of what it means to have several names. Move on to what each name tells us about the Amidah.

**Activity:** Give copies of a siddur to the students. Ask them to **research** several questions in pairs, looking at pages 90, 294, 326, 488, and 596. (Note that there is no musaf service included in *Kol Haneshamah*. A map of the traditional musaf is found on page 442.) Here are some sample questions, with answers.

1. In which service do we find the Amidah? (All)
2. Where in the service is it located? (Central section)
3. When is it said, based on the service(s) in which we find it? (In the middle of the service, after the Shema is completed in *Shaharit* and *Ma'ariv*. In the central portion of the *Minhah* service, where there is no Shema said.)

---

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all page numbers listed here refer to *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*

4. How often do we say it? (Three times a day, four on Shabbat with *Musaf*. If there are reader's repetitions of the Amidah, the maximum number is seven times on Shabbat, five on weekdays: silently and then aloud in *Shaharit* and *Minhah*, and silently in *Ma'ariv*, with an additional set of silent and aloud recitation in *Musaf* on Shabbat.)
5. How many times does the Amidah appear any place in the siddur? (Five—once in *Ma'ariv*, and twice each in *Shaharit* and *Minhah*; once for regular Shabbatot, and once for Festival Shabbatot.)

**Purpose:** To have students focus on what reasons exist for canonized prayer, even in our own individual conversations with God, since that is essentially what the Amidah is.

Discuss with the class their thoughts about well-planned conversation when speaking to an important person. Why would we want to think first, perhaps even write down first, what we would want to say to someone in an important conversation rather than just speaking whatever first came to mind? Then contrast the well-planned conversation with the importance of really speaking from our heart. Use this story of the Baal Shem Tov (BeShT) and the boy who was illiterate.

One year, at the time for *Ne'ilah*, at the closing moments of the High Holy Days, the BeShT was waiting to hear the right prayer from the congregation, the one prayer that would help him to raise the prayers of the congregation up to pass through the gates of Heaven. He waited and waited. All the pious and learned persons in the congregation prayed more and more fervently, hoping that their prayer would be the one that unlocked the gates. But the BeShT continued to wait. In the congregation there was an illiterate boy, and he stood and recited the *alef bet* over and over. One of the learned men went to him, and asked him what he thought he was doing. The boy became frightened and began to cry, but he answered that he didn't know any prayers, he only knew the *alef bet*, so he was reciting it, and asking in his heart that God would arrange the letters into the right words. The learned man began to scold him, but the BeShT stopped him, saying that this was the prayer that would unlock the gates of Heaven because it truly came right from the boy's heart.

Use these ideas to introduce the creative tensions between the concepts of *keva* and *kavanah*.

**Activity:** Tell the class of the practice of *Niflat Apayim* (falling on one's face) that is discussed in the Talmud (i.e., *Berakhot* 59b). This was a prayer directly from the heart that could not be contained in fixed liturgy. It was considered to be the only form of prayer that would bypass the gates of heaven and ascend directly before God to be heard. This was **spontaneous** prayer; it was not a part of the liturgy. Discuss with the class how there are remnants of this practice in our siddur, such as the recitation of *Tahanun* (see page 424 in *Kol Haneshamah: Limot Hol*). Then, ask the class to consider which type of prayer, spontaneous or fixed, seems to them easier? More open to the divine presence? More respectful? More formal? etc.

**Activity:** Using the theme of a mystery that needs to be solved, ask the class in groups to act as detectives to find the clues and solve the mystery of what is the meaning of the Amidah. The clues are the various paragraphs of the Amidah. Give them the parts of the text without any headings or



identifying information. Have them determine the themes from the texts, look at who is speaking, to whom, and what is being requested or said. They should try to reconstruct the Amidah from the pieces of text and put them in some sort of order. Then they are to “deduce” a meaning for the whole Amidah from the various themes and pieces of information. They should paste up the texts and write in themes and some kind of heading for each paragraph. At the bottom they should write their meaning; their “solution” to the mystery. When they are all done, open a discussion based on the various answers that the different groups come to.

**Activity:** Ask the class to be “teachers.” They are to work in groups, and to come up with a way to teach the Amidah to someone who is blind or deaf, one who doesn’t know Hebrew; someone who can’t read; or a person that otherwise is unable to learn in the usual fashion. Let them develop these ideas and create lesson plans for part or all of the Amidah.

**Activity:** Set up a debate, with one team claiming that the Amidah is the major and most important part of the *Shaharit* service, a second team claiming that it is the Shema, and a third team defending the Torah service.

**Activity:** Have the students look at the Amidah in a variety of siddurim. Ask them to identify the differences among them, and to choose which one they like best. Have them talk about why.

## LESSON 2

### THE CONTENTS OF THE AMIDAH

**Questions/Concepts:** What are the contents of the Amidah? Where in the Amidah do we find Praise? Acknowledgement or Thanks? Petition or Requests? Sanctification? What are the themes of the Amidah? Why is this prayer important to Jews? What does this prayer say to Jews? Why is it in every service?

**Activity:** After the class has read the full Amidah, have them perform a synectics exercise. (For more information on synectics, see Appendix C.) This should be of the form, “The Amidah is like A. It B.” where A is some sort of metaphor, and B is the analogy. For example, they might respond, “The Amidah is like a train. It has a blessing in each car and the Concluding Meditation is the Caboose,” or, “The Amidah is like a string of pearls. It is made from small parts that are tied together.” They can come up with as many analogies as they like. Discuss these analogies, and see which ones work best.

**Activity:** Compare the list generated on the flip chart created in Lesson 1 to the list created here. Discuss what they thought was in the Amidah and what is actually included.

**Activity:** Have the students read the Shabbat *Shaharit* Amidah in Hebrew. Have them pick out key words that they know or that they think are important. Use these key words to play the game of Connect Four. (Connect Four: a six-by-eight or larger grid, with each square being empty. The

playing pieces are 50 markers with two “team” colors—one color on each side of each piece—and vocabulary cards, on one side of which is a Hebrew key word and on the other its translation. For a team to “get” a square they must translate the term—you can choose whether to or from Hebrew. When a term is correctly translated, “drop” a marker with the team color into one of the columns, chosen by the team, on the grid. It falls to the lowest level that is not filled. If they miss translating the term, the card is replaced in the pack to be re-asked and they do not get a square on the grid. The object of the game is to get four in a row, horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, while blocking the opposing team.) I suggest that all the team color playing pieces have stick-on magnets attached on both sides so that you can draw the grid on the blackboard, and use the pieces on it directly—most blackboards and whiteboards are magnetic.

**Activity:** If incorporating the definition of a *berahah* into the lesson, have the students pick out the *berahah* in each paragraph. Discuss the idea of a “chain” of *berahot*, one after another. Also explain the concepts of a “*petihah*” or opening *berahah*, and a “*hatimah*” or concluding *berahah*. Have the students find where the Amidah paragraphs have these or not, and discuss the flow from *berahah* to *berahah*.

**Activity:** Have the students draw a picture that illustrates each theme of the Amidah. Some ideas are: their grandparents and parents for *Avot*, mighty battlers for the oppressed for *Gevurot*, priests in the Temple for *Kedushat Hashem*, a Shabbat picture for *Kedushat Hayom*, a synagogue service for *Avodah*, a wrapped gift package for *Hoda'ah*, and possibly the priest giving the priestly blessing (*Birkat Kohanim*) in the Temple for *Birkat Shalom*.

### LESSON 3

#### THE AVOT VE'IMOT<sup>1</sup>

**Questions/Concepts:** What is in the Amidah? What is the *peshat*?

**Avot Ve'imot:** Read the prayer through with the students. Note that the paragraph begins with the *berahah* formula: *Barukh Atah Adonay* and also ends with that formula.

A) Note that the Amidah begins not with “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rivkah,” etc., but rather, with “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, God of Sarah, God of Rivkah,” etc., because, as an insight from the Baal Shem Tov teaches us, each Patriarch (and Matriarch) served in his or her own way and did not blindly accept the God of the ancestors. This is also a good place to discuss the notion of Reconstructionist egalitarianism: that the prayer is traditionally called *Avot*, “fathers” but that for us it connotes ancestors, and that we, as Reconstructionists, add the names of the *imahot*, the mothers, as well, since we pay homage to the contributions of both our foremothers

---

<sup>1</sup> “*Imahot*” is the modern Hebrew plural form of the word “*ima*” (mother). In *Kol Haneshamah*, the classical Hebrew form “*Imot*” is used, a parallel construction to the masculine “*Avot*.”

and forefathers to our Jewish heritage. Ask students to say what they remember about each of the *avot* and *imahot*. Do a brief review of who each of the mothers, and fathers are, i.e., who was married to whom, and something significant about each of their lives.

B) Discuss the notion of *zechut avot*—merit of the ancestors. Discuss the idea of putting oneself in historical context as a way of introducing oneself. Have each student write down, “I am the son/daughter of . . .” as far back as he or she can go in the family history (i.e., daughter of, granddaughter of, great-granddaughter of, etc.—not a comprehensive family tree). What does placing themselves as part of a long line do for their sense of identity? Is there an ancestor they are particularly proud of, and why? What does it mean to them to be descended from this person? How many ancestors would you need to mention before getting all the way back to Abraham and Sarah?

C) Ask students to generate ideas on the following question: Why would we want to introduce ourselves to God in our Amidah “conversation” by saying who our family is? When would or wouldn’t we want to be judged on just our own merits and why? When would or wouldn’t we want to identify ourselves as part of a family? Introduce the Jewish idea of a Hebrew name containing not only one’s personal name, but *ben* or *bat* (son or daughter of) and one’s parents’ names, and discuss the context in which that name is used: birth, naming, marriage, *aliyah* to the Torah, and burial.

**Activity:** Ask students to choose one of the *avot/imahot* about whom to learn more. Give out different source texts on each biblical character, and have students pair off into *hevruta* (small groups that will work together with the texts), coming up with a composite “character analysis” of that person, as they glean it from the texts they have been given. Have each group report to the class on who their character was: what were his/her strengths, weaknesses, unique characteristics—what can we learn from him/her?

**Activity:** Ask students to identify the “*Avot*” in American history and to explain why each one was chosen.

**Activity:** Have students fill out a family tree at home by talking to their own family (*Avot*). Try to include for each person on the tree something for which the family is proud of that person. (You will very probably see at least some signs of intermarriages in the results of this activity; this is a good place to let these children feel included!)

**Activity:** Have the students find the *petihah* and the *hatimah* of the *berahah*. As an exercise, they might rewrite the *petihah* to match the *hatimah*, where there is one, or vice versa. Have them explain why these are different, and how they are the same.

**Activity:** Ask students to answer the following predicate theology exercise: “I find the quality of the *Avot* in my life when . . . ; I find my own *Avot*-ness when . . .” (Contrast this with the article by Kushner found in *Creative Jewish Education*.)

**Activity:** Discuss the question, "What does *Avot* mean?" Give a thumbnail sketch of three characters, and ask the students to talk about which one exemplifies or embodies *Avot* for them, and why.

**Activity:** Look to the commentary below the line on the pages of *Kol Haneshamah*. Select items for the students to react to, discuss, or think about. For example, on page 294, note the R.M.S. *Derash*, and the L.B. *Kavanah* on 295: these two items could serve as the basis of an exercise on the inclusion of the *imahot*. Adding the note by R.S. on page 297 would make it an interesting set of texts to compare and discuss.

Another example would be to ask students to read the *Derash* by M.M.K. on page 302, or the *Derash* by S.P.W. on page 315, and to ask them if that definition works for them, and if not, what does. Look for other commentary that seems useful or helpful in making points you wish to emphasize and use it in preparing your lesson plans. Look at commentary surrounding each of the *Amidot* in the Siddur; it differs in some cases. You can use the differences as the basis for a comparison activity as well.

**Activity:** Ask the students to read the English translation of the blessing in *Kol Haneshamah*, and then to compare it to the English in the Jules Harlowe siddur, *Sim Shalom*, and the Morris Silverman siddur, *Shabbat and Festival Prayer Book*, and possibly others. Ask them to talk about which one they understand best, which one they think might best express the meaning of the prayer, and which one they like best.

### **Further Activities:**

A) Have students interview their parents and/or grandparents about what some of the family's accomplishments through the generations have been. What does the family pride themselves on? Are there pictures to make some of these family tales come alive? Have students create a collage and/or write a story reflecting their findings.

B) Ask students to place themselves in the situation of being their own grandchildren, and writing about their "grandparents'" lives. How and for what would they like to be remembered by succeeding generations as a foremother or forefather?

C) Create a "family appreciation night" in which students are encouraged to bring family members to school for a class dinner (cooked by the students!) at which parents, and hopefully grandparents, can share family stories with their child's classmates.

D) Invite a genealogist to come in and talk with the students about how family trees are created.

*For Lessons 4 to 10, A skeleton lesson plan is provided. By using Lesson 3 as a template, it will be easy to flesh out these lessons. Many of the activities and the general approach of Lesson 3 are directly transferrable to the following lessons. Where I have developed activities for later lessons that are not easily derived from Lesson 3, I have included them.*

## LESSON 4

### GEVUROT

Read through the text of the prayer. Point out and discuss the summer/winter, rain/dew line of the text, and the idea of being thankful for what happens naturally, in a given season and not hoping for the “unnatural” to occur. Discuss the fact that this dividing of the seasons was based on the climate of *Eretz Yisra'el*/Land of Israel, and that there are distinct rainy and dry periods. This might be a place for a bit of theology about prayer, that prayer does not have to be asking “for” something, but rather, can be an acknowledgement of what blessings we have in the world, and that in this prayer, we are acknowledging the natural processes that allow life to exist.

In the Rabbinic period, this *berakah* had particular power, as people had a direct dependence on agriculture and were very concerned about annual rainfall.

A) Note that *gevurot*/divine power here does not focus on God’s acts of destruction, or the ways in which the God of the Bible showed strength in any conventional human sense. Rather, strength here is defined by acts of lovingkindness: sustaining life, nurturing, healing, freeing captives, faithfulness, saving power. God is portrayed here as life-giver.

B) Ask students to generate ideas of “power” and “strength.” How do their models compare/contrast with the model of God’s power given in this *berakah*? Ask students to comment on role models of strength as they see them in our society (Superman, Batman, the Karate Kid, etc.). How does the model of Divine power presented in this *berakah* compare to these other role models?

**Activity:** Have students create a list of *gevurot*: who would they choose and why? What qualities make one a *gibor*?

### Further Activities:

A) Ask students to look through newspapers and magazines and find examples of people in the news who they feel have acted with true strength (woman lifts bus off toddler, man blows whistle on fraud in government contract). Challenge them to find specific examples of people who have shown strength in the ways strength is attributed to God in the *Gevurot* prayer (page 298) such as sustaining the living, nurturing the life of every living thing, upholding those who fall, etc. (consider physicians, nurses, AIDS buddies, etc.)

B) Celebrate “Mitzvah Heroes” as suggested by Danny Siegel. Invite people or organizations in the community who do acts of *gevurot* to come in and talk with the students about their work. Frame the particular person’s work in a Jewish context, particularly emphasizing the holy nature of such work, based on its similarity to the attributes of Divine *gevurot* in the *berahah*. Suggestions for such visitors might include: representatives from Amnesty International, doctors who work with particularly marginalized populations (such as people with AIDS, or the poor), a representative from Mazon or other such institution which helps to “sustain life”). Discuss the “godly” nature of work of such people—it would be particularly powerful if a representative from a Jewish organization can help connect the lesson to his/her own work via a discussion of Jewish values.

## LESSON 5

### *KEDUSHAT HASHEM*

1. Read through both the Friday night and Saturday morning versions of this prayer, and note the differences. Remind students that this prayer, like some other prayers (*Barehu*, Mourner’s Kaddish) can only be said in a *minyan* (this is a place to explain the concept of *minyan*, if students are unfamiliar with it.) Note that in the weekday Amidah, this is the prayer that directly precedes the petitionary prayers—why? Is this a good order for the prayer to take? Ask students to comment on this.
2. Focus on the Shabbat morning version in this lesson. The idea of *kadosh*—holy—permeates this blessing. Students should focus on what it means for God to be holy. Generate ideas regarding how God is “holy” by Jewish definitions of “holiness”—i.e., set apart, unique, special. What sets God apart from themselves, and from other living things? What, to them, is the main source of God’s holiness?
3. Point out the Biblical passages in the *Kedushah* (Isaiah 6:3 and Ezekiel 6:12) and explain that these recall the specific ways the angels on high in the Biblical text praised God. How might angels saying this prayer say it differently than the way we are reporting them to have said it? (This could be a place, if students and teachers are interested, to discuss the nature of angels in the Jewish tradition, citing various texts on angels—i.e., the angels that came to visit Abraham, the angel of death, the ministering angels in Isaiah’s and Ezekiel’s prophetic visions, etc. Students could discuss their own ideas of angels, and how those may compare/contrast with Jewish views on angels).

**Activity:** Have students discuss what are holy acts. Start with stories they know in the *Tanah*/Bible (the collection of the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings), then move to discussion of things in the historical past, and then in the present. Is there holiness in life in each of these times? Who or what makes *Kedushah*? When have students experienced the holy in their lives?

### **Further Activities:**

A) In the Bible, we are enjoined to “Be holy, because I the Lord your God am Holy.” (Leviticus

19:2). Rabbinic teaching understands this to mean that we must work to do holy things in the world. According to the rabbis, a holy life, filled with doing *mitzvot*, will help us to keep separate, and apart. We can understand this today not as keeping apart from other people, but rather, as keeping us separate from unholy, profane deeds. We can be holy, indeed we can be godly by doing godly work in the world. Explaining this to students can establish a deep framework for doing acts of *tikun olam*, acts of repairing the world, acts of social justice.

**Activity:** Divide students into small groups. Each group is responsible for envisioning, planning, and executing a small social action project. Such projects could include, but are not limited to: setting up recycling projects, writing to government officials to express concern about problematic political policies, working in a soup kitchen, visiting elderly persons in a nursing home for holidays, etc.

## LESSON 6

### *KEDUSHAT HAYOM*

Introduce the *Kedushat Hayom* prayer as the prayer that sanctifies Shabbat, and is said in place of all the middle petitionary blessings. Review the concept of *kadosh/kedushah*. Talk about the idea of “sanctification” as “separateness” or “holiness” in Judaism, and the interrelationship between these terms. Point out other prayers of sanctification in the liturgy—such as the different forms of the Kaddish prayer, as well as the Kiddush.

Ask students to generate lists of ways in which they designate particular places, times, and people in their lives (including their friends, possessions, rooms, activities, events) as *kadosh*. What makes these people/places/things/times holy? Are there any similarities between these holy items? Discuss Judaism’s emphasis on holy time rather than holy space. (For instance, a Jew may pray anywhere; synagogues are not inherently holy).

**Activity:** Have students draw a time that they would consider holy. Ask them to reflect on what made the time holy—was it the objects that they could draw in the picture, or was it more a feeling that was inherent in the time? Have students discuss the representation of holiness of time that they drew. What made it holy? How was it different from other times? Would the same activity have been holy if done on a different day of the week/month/year?

## LESSON 7

### *AVODAH & HODA'AH (WORSHIP AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT/THANKS)*

#### *Avodah (Worship)*

Have students read through the text in English. Discuss the idea of *avodah* as both “work” and “worship” or “sacrifice.” What connection is there between these ideas? Take some time to discuss the idea of sacrifice as ancient worship, and how it evolved into prayer as we know it after the

destruction of the Temple. Make sure students understand this connection, and the organic relationship between sacrifice and our verbal prayers of today. Actual references to sacrifice have been taken out of Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative siddurim. However, it is important that students understand the historical connection, even though it is no longer part of the actual wording of the prayer. Be sensitive to students' possible discomfort with the idea of animal sacrifice, and allow for and guide constructive discussion on this issue.

### ***Hoda'ah* (Acknowledgement/Thanks)**

Read through the text of the prayer in English with the students. Remind them that during the first three words of this prayer is one of the places at which bowing occurs.

Go over the special additions for Hanukah on page 316. Discuss briefly the story of Hanukah, and why this might be a place where additional, special thank-you's to God might be warranted. Do students think other Jewish holidays or events would also be appropriate here to single out for thanksgiving? Should Hanukah warrant special attention?

**Activity:** Ask the students to discuss if they have ever made a sacrifice in their life. How about their family? Is sacrifice good or bad in their opinion?

**Activity:** Discuss with students what a sacrifice can be. Talk about animal versus other forms. Also talk about the use of the animal as food, and the sacrifice of only a part of the animal as the normal practice. Discuss how this might relate to giving thanks.

## **LESSON 8**

### **BIRKAT HASHALOM (BLESSING FOR PEACE)**

Read through the text with the students in English. Then read through the large-type print on page 319. Identify this blessing as the *Birkat Kohanim* (Priestly Blessing—also called the three-fold blessing) and talk about the historical context for the priestly blessing in the Temple.

Review the Commentary by Michael M. Cohen on page 318. This is a good place to discuss the ancient idea of the class structure in Judaism—*Kohen*, *Levi* and *Yisra'el*—and what each of their roles were vis a vis the Temple. You might also talk about the fact that although this is not part of liberal Judaism, *aliyot* were traditionally given according to class, and that this is still seen in Orthodox and some Conservative settings.

**Activity:** Have students wrap each other in *tallitot* (these probably need to be provided by the synagogue) and bless each other with the priestly blessing. Ask students to discuss what it feels like to bless someone else, and to receive a blessing. Does it have power for them? If so, in what do they think that power lies?



## LESSON 9<sup>2</sup>

### CONCLUDING MEDITATIONS

Describe *Ribono Shel Olam* (Master of the World) on page 322 as the private meditation of the fourth century Rabbi Mar bar Rav Rabina. The focus of the prayer is on choosing and using one's words and deeds for good. Discuss why this prayer does/doesn't make sense as a closing to the Amidah (emphasize that it is not formally part of the Amidah). Note that it includes Psalms 60:7 and 19:15.

**Activity:** Compare this meditation with the one on page 106, *Elohay Netzor*. Have the students look at the themes, content, and feeling of each, and ask them why there is a difference. Have them note which service each is associated with, and use that information to arrive at an answer.

**Activity:** Point out on Page 510 that there is no concluding Meditation, and ask the students to discuss why. Be sure that they recall that the evening (*Arvit* or *Ma'ariv*) Amidah is said silently with no repetition.

**Activity:** Have the students compare the Amidah meditations on pages 725-728 with the concluding meditations. Ask them to discuss the differences both in text and in their feelings when reading these different things.

**Activity:** Teach several melodies to *Oseh Shalom*—have students sing as a round.

**Activity:** Look at the suggestions on page 121-122 of *Higher and Higher*. Try the insult survey, exercise 2 on page 122, under Closing Prayer.

**Activity:** Find “signature” verses for students' names, and have the students look up the meaning of their own names. See page 122 of *Higher and Higher*.

## LESSON 10

### MAGEN AVOT

Introduce the *Magen Avot* as a prayer that follows the *Ma'ariv Amidah* on Shabbat. Have the students read through the prayer in English on pages 108-111.

**Activity:** Have the students compare this prayer to the themes of the Amidah paragraphs that they have discussed previously. Discuss the reason for the title before *Magen Avot*—*Me'eyn Sheva* (From the Seven).

---

<sup>2</sup>This lesson is intended for older children. It might be used with advanced sixth graders.

**Activity:** Have the class read *Magen Avot* in Hebrew. Teach the students a popular melody to sing *Magen Avot*. Practice this tune until the class is familiar with it and could lead it in a service.

**Activity:** Compare the *Magen Avot* with the short Amidah on page 730. Have the students discuss which one they feel better represents the sense of the Amidah. Lead the discussion into the issue of creative liturgy; new versus old expressions.

**Activity:** Ask the students to discuss why they think the *Magen Avot* is included in the Service after the Amidah. Share with them the history about the difficulty and danger of travel, and the fact that often people would come late, but that no one wanted to leave late due to robbers and highwaymen on the roads. The *Magen Avot* was a chance for those latecomers to recite (or hear) the core of the Amidah, but not leave after all the others.

### LESSON 11<sup>3</sup>

#### ACROSS SHABBAT SERVICES

**Activity:** Read the *Shaharit*, *Minhah* and *Ma'ariv Amidot* paragraph by paragraph. Ask the students, working in small groups, to find all the differences. Discuss the differences and why they exist.

**Activity:** Teach the different *nusahot* and popular melodies used in your congregation for the Amidah in each of the services.

**Activity:** Ask students to discuss in small groups why they think there are differences in the *Amidot*. Then open the discussion to the whole class.

### LESSON 12<sup>4</sup>

#### WEEKDAY AND SHABBAT AMIDOT

**Activity:** To highlight further the differences pointed out in the previous lesson, give students copies of the weekday *Amidot* texts (preferably pages 98-127, 128-133, 218-247, and 294-322 from *Kol Haneshamah: Limot Hol*). Read the weekday Amidah and discuss its structure. Emphasize the petitionary aspect of the middle *berahot*, and show where they are inserted into the structure of the Amidah prayer, in order to show the different structures of the Shabbat and Weekday Amidah. In this unit, we are concentrating on the Shabbat Amidah, but its structure and what its focus is can be

---

<sup>3</sup>This lesson is intended for older children. It might be used with advanced sixth graders. See Lesson 13 for the sort of analysis I am suggesting here.

<sup>4</sup>Same as above.

well supplemented by showing what it **is not**. (Do not spend too much time on the actual content of the petitionary prayers—that is another unit in itself—but rather, concentrate on the differences between Shabbat and weekday structure in the Amidah, and on placing that within the students' already acquired understanding of Shabbat).

**Activity:** Hand out copies of *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*. Have the students count the number of paragraphs in the Shabbat *Shaharit* Amidah. Then have them count the number of paragraphs in the weekday *Shaharit* Amidah. Ask them to discuss these numbers, and to relate to the name used for the Amidah; “*Shemoneh Esrey*” which means 18, for 18 benedictions. Explain the history of the Amidah, with the splitting of one blessing into two. Ask the students to explain why they think we go from 13 middle *berachot* to one on Shabbat.

**Activity:** Compare the *hatimot* for Shabbat with those for weekdays. What are the differences?

## LESSON 13<sup>5</sup>

### THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH

In this lesson, we will look at the Reconstructionist approach to the Amidah. Give the students copies of a traditional text of the Shabbat *Amidot* (Artscroll, Birnbaum, Rabbinical Assembly, Silverman, Metsudah, or any of dozens of other texts will do.) Include all three services.

**Activity:** Select and read one of the traditional versions of the *Shaharit* Amidah in English and Hebrew. Compare it paragraph by paragraph to the version of the *Shaharit* Amidah found in *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*, page 294. For each paragraph, ask the students to find the differences, analyze them, and then to discuss the reasons for them. (I am including here only the differences for regular *Shabbatot*, not Festivals, so that I am bypassing the inserted text for such occasions as Hanukah, Purim, *Rosh Hodesh*, etc. You may chose to do these as well, depending on time.) For example:

In the *Avot* blessing paragraph:

1. Note the inclusion of the four *imahot*, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel along with the three *avot*.
2. Note the inclusion of *Ezrat Sarah*/Help of Sarah in the *hatimah*, after the shield of Abraham image.

---

<sup>5</sup>This lesson is intended for older children. It might be used with advanced sixth graders. It is probably best if this is used as several lessons. The teacher may want to look at the article, “Examining Changes in the Text,” which appears in this volume, for more details.

and in the *Gevurot* blessing paragraph:

3. Find the change of the “Resurrection of the dead/*Mehayeh metim*” to “All life/*Kol hay*,” and the removal of the words *Mehayeh Metim Atah* from the first line.
4. Note the inclusion of text for both *Tal*/dew and *Geshem*/rain.

They should do this for each blessing/paragraph, and for each of the Amidot (in other words, for all three services).

## LESSON 14

### IN OUR OWN LIVES

We have arrived at the wrap-up. This is the final lesson in this unit. In fact, it may be valuable to stretch it out over several class sessions, or even to do more than one of the activities as reinforcement and to assure mastery by the students.

It is well worthwhile to revisit this unit several times over the period that students are in Hebrew school. Each time they will learn something new, and both deepen and broaden their understanding. This “spiral” approach is both valid and logical. It holds true for adults as well.

**Activity:** Ask students to write their own Amidah, in their own words. They can choose to utilize some or all of the themes in the Amidah itself, but they must make it their own, original prayer. Students should be instructed to make an outline of what themes they want to be sure to cover in their Amidah, and to “flesh it out” into prayer form. Remember, no petitionary prayer on Shabbat! Ask students to consider and discuss how they would write the prayer differently if it were for only their own use, or if it were being written for others’ use as well.

**Activity:** Ask the students to write their own short versions of the Amidah, like *Magen Avot*. Explain that this is a practice that is discussed in the Talmud, in *Berachot* 5b. There is a discussion there that says it is proper for those who can’t say the full Amidah “fluidly,” or who don’t have time for any good reason, not to say the entire Amidah, but rather to say a shorter version.

**Activity:** Students may also choose to write which petitionary prayers they would insert for weekdays, and to put those into a “weekday Amidah.”

**Activity:** For those who have written both a Shabbat and a weekday *Amidah*, it is worthwhile to ask them to compare the two, and to discuss what is different, and why they chose to write the two differently.

**Activity:** Ask students who are willing to share their Amidah with the class. Students who wish to do so should be encouraged to set parts of their prayer to music, and to share it with the class if they wish (one option would be to make a recording to hand out to classmates).

**Activity:** An “offering” to the school or synagogue might be an art project which encompasses the themes of the Amidah. Students could choose to collaborate on the project—for example, a large mural reflecting the themes of the prayer, or a concert incorporating songs which speak to the themes of the Amidah.

**Activity:** Still another “offering” to the whole school or synagogue that students could undertake would be to explain and then lead the Amidah at an assembly, including all the art work and creative representations that they have made in the course of their studies.

**Activity:** Look at the suggested exercises 1 and 2 in Appendix C. Adapt these to the level of your class.

**Activity:** Similar to the idea of exercise 2 in Appendix C, have students work in small groups (pairs, perhaps). They are to be advertising executives, preparing a Madison avenue TV commercial for each of the themes, *hatimot*, or paragraphs of the Amidah. They will have to present their ideas to the class. Tell them that it is okay to be funny and let them be as creative as they want. Prepare a “TV” by cutting out the shape of the screen of a TV in the bottom of a box or a piece of posterboard. Let them be “on TV” by standing behind this prop.

**Activity:** Have the students write a series of short skits to present the themes of the Amidah. Make it more interesting by placing the skits in a framed tale, so that there is a “story” that happens through the skits. (For an example of something like this, see the play by Daniel M. Brenner elsewhere in this volume.) Another variation on this theme is to have them do Charades, silently acting out the themes or words of the parts of the Amidah they have studied.

## Curriculum for Shabbat *Shaharit* Amidah for Upper-Middle Grades/Early High School

Marsha J. Pik-Nathan

### THE UNIT *AL REGEL AHAT* (AT A GLANCE)

- Lesson 1:     **Introduce** idea of fixed prayer.
- Lesson 2:     **Familiarize** students with text of the Shabbat Amidah
- Lesson 3:     **Compare/Contrast** weekday and Shabbat *Amidot*
- Lesson 4:     **Explore** background and structure of the Amidah
- Lessons 5-10: **Analyze** content of each *berahah* of the Shabbat Amidah and Concluding Meditation
- Lesson 11:    **Apply** understanding of each *berahah* to students' own experiences, and contemporary societal values—activities for each *berahah*
- Lesson 12:    **Create** contemporary version of Amidah, expressing individual values and spirituality—creative expression of the concepts and ideas learned

*The material in this unit assumes that students have already studied Shabbat in some detail, and that they have some Reconstructionist theological understanding of the idea /importance of rest and refraining from creative acts/work on Shabbat. This will help them to understand how the Shabbat Amidah excludes petitionary prayer, and focuses on savoring the blessings of the world. If they do not, the lesson on Kedushat Hayom (Lesson 8) is the place to do that work. Please note that there are suggested activities that appear in the structure of this outline as lesson 11. These activities are for you to use and adapt to your class.*

### LESSON 1

Before studying the Amidah, discuss with the class their thoughts about well-planned out conversation when speaking to an important person. Why would we want to think first, perhaps even write down first, what we would want to say to someone in an important conversation rather than just speaking whatever first came to mind?

**Purpose:** To have students focus on what would be the reason for canonized prayer even in our own individual conversations with God, since that is, essentially, what the Amidah is.

**Activity:** If you were composing your own conversation with God, and wanted to include all the elements that were important to you in connecting with the Divine, what would you want to make sure you put into that conversation? Divide your conversation into parts, according to the different topics that you feel are important.

**Activity:** Have the class share the different topics with each other. Write the topics on the board,

and see how many different categories there are. Comment on the range of topics, where they seem to cluster in terms of similarities/differences. Ask students to comment on their own productions. From the list on the board, what seems to be most important to them about what their classmates would say in a conversation with the Divine Presence?

## LESSON 2

**Activity:** Have them read through the entire text of the Shabbat *Shaharit* Amidah in English. Does the Amidah seem to address the things they did in the list generated in the previous lesson? Ask them to name the main themes of the prayer. How are these themes similar to/dissimilar from their list? Within this discussion, it should be pointed out that the Shabbat Amidah is not a time for requests, but rather for praise. Discuss their understanding that on Shabbat, we do not create, or think about creating, but rather, we attempt to “sit” with what we have, and to be thankful for those blessings.

## LESSON 3

**Activity:** To highlight the differences pointed out in the previous activity, give students copies of the weekday Amidah text (preferably from the *Kol Haneshamah: Limot Hol*, for example, beginning on page 98). Read the weekday Amidah and discuss its structure. Emphasize the petitionary aspect of the middle *berachot*, and show where they are inserted into the structure of the Amidah prayer, in order to show the different structures of the Shabbat and Weekday Amidah. In this unit, we are concentrating on the Shabbat Amidah, but its structure and what it is can be well supplemented by showing what it is **not**. (Do not spend too much time on the actual content of the petitionary prayers—that is another unit in itself—but rather, concentrate on the differences between Shabbat and weekday structure in the Amidah, and on placing that within the students’ already acquired understanding of Shabbat).

Describe for students the concept of the “*petihah*” (opening) and “*hatimah*” (conclusion) of a prayer. Use an example from the Amidah, such as *Avot*, where the *petihah* is the opening line, “Blessed are you, **Ancient One**, our God, God of our ancestors, . . .” and the *hatimah* is the line, “Blessed are you, **Kind One**, shield of Abraham and help of Sarah.”

Point out for the students the use of numbers on the English side, and Hebrew letters on the Hebrew side to show the different prayers in the Amidah. Show them that each one of the prayers has a *hatimah*, but that most of them do not have a *petihah*. Explain that the Amidah is a “chain” of blessings, and that in a chain, the opening formula, (in *Avot*, “Blessed are you, **Ancient One**, our God, God of our ancestors...” ) serves as the *petihah* for the whole chain, so the rest of the blessings do not need their own *petihah*.

## LESSON 4

### BACKGROUND

A) The origin of the names of the prayer: Amidah (standing prayer) and *Shemoneh Esrey* (eighteen, standing for eighteen blessings). Discuss the unclear origins of the Amidah. According to the Talmud: “one hundred twenty elders, among whom were many prophets, drew up eighteen blessings.” (*Megilah* 17b). While themes and some phrasing for the *berachot* were developed during the First Temple Period, it was not until its destruction that the order of the prayer was set, concluding in the late 1st century with the addition of the eighteenth blessing, the blessing against Apostates. Simeon Ha-Pakuli and Shmuel Ha-Katan are said to have established the order of the *berachot* at Yavneh (*Berachot* 28b). (Fit this into students’ understanding of the exile and Babylonian Jewish society.) But even after this time, the exact wording remained fluid until the creation of the earliest siddurim, centuries later. Point out that even with the inclusion of the 19th *berachah*, the prayer retained its name. Describe the Amidah as the central prayer of the service—referred to as “the prayer” or “*ha-tefilah*” in traditional sources.

B) Familiarize students with when the Amidah is recited traditionally (twice daily aloud during *Shaharit* and *Minhah*, and once silently at *Ma'ariv*, because it was not originally obligatory), the overall structure of the Amidah, and how it differs in structure between weekday and Shabbat, as discussed previously. This time, draw diagrams of the differences on the board, clearly, so students can visualize the differences. Have them copy these charts on the board. Note that the first three and last three *berachot* remain the same on weekdays and shabbat.

C) Discuss the bowing during the Amidah. The Talmud offers the following guidelines for bowing during the Amidah: “Our Rabbis taught, ‘These are the *berachot* during which a person may bow: at the beginning and end of the *Avot* and at the beginning and end of the Thanksgiving (*Modim*). If one wants to bow at the end and the beginning of each *berachah*, we instruct that one does not bow.’” (*Berachot* 34a). The rabbis did not want one to show excessive humility, which might be misconstrued as trying to ingratiate oneself unnecessarily. Demonstrate the correct position for entering into the Amidah (three steps forwards—take three steps backward first, if necessary, given constraints of space), and the correct bowing form (bend knees, lean forward at the waist).

## LESSON 5

### AVOT VE'IMOT<sup>1</sup>

Read the prayer through with the students. Note that it begins with the *berachah* formula: *Baruh Atah Adonay*, and also ends with a sentence starting with that formula.

---

<sup>1</sup> “*Imahot*” is the modern Hebrew plural form of the word “*ima*” (mother). In *Kol Haneshamah*, the classical Hebrew form “*Imot*” is used, a parallel construction to the masculine “*Avot*.”



A) Note that the Amidah begins not with "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rivkah, etc." but rather, with "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, God of Sarah, God of Rivkah, etc." because, as an insight from the Baal Shem Tov teaches us, each patriarch and matriarch served in his or her own way, and did not blindly accept the God of the ancestors. This is also a good place to discuss the notion of Reconstructionist egalitarianism: that the prayer is traditionally called *Avot*, "fathers," but that for us it connotes ancestors, and that we, as Reconstructionists, add the names of the *imahot*, the mothers, as well, since we pay homage to the contributions of both our foremothers and forefathers to our Jewish heritage. Ask students to say what they remember about each of the *avot* and *imahot*. Do a brief review of who each of the mothers, and fathers are, e.g., who was married to whom, what was something significant about their lives.

B) Discuss the notion of *zechut avot*—merit of ancestors. Discuss the idea of putting oneself in historical context as a way of introducing oneself. Have each student write down, "I am the son/daughter of . . ." as far back as they can go in their family history (i.e., daughter of, granddaughter of, greatgranddaughter of, etc.—not a comprehensive family tree). What does placing themselves as part of a long line do for their sense of identity? Is there an ancestor they are particularly proud of, and why? What does it mean to them to be descended from this person?

C) Ask students to generate ideas on the following question: Why would we want to introduce ourselves to God in our Amidah "conversation" by saying who our family is? Why and when would/wouldn't we want to be judged on just our own merits and when would/wouldn't we want to identify ourselves as part of a family? Introduce the Jewish idea of a Hebrew name containing not only one's personal name, but *ben* or *bat* (son or daughter of) and one's parents' names, and discuss the context in which that name is used: birth, marriage, aliyot to the Torah, burial.

**Activity:** Ask students to choose one of the *avot/imahot* to learn more about. Give out different source texts on each biblical character, and have students pair off into *hevruta* groups with the texts, coming up with a composite "character analysis" of that person, as they glean it from the texts they have. Have each group report to the class on who their character was: what were his/her strengths, weaknesses, unique characteristics—what can we learn from him/her?

**Alternative activity:** Have students present a dramatic monologue, introducing their biblical figure to the class, or do a "who am I?" presentation, and have the class guess.

## LESSON 6

### GEVUROT

Read through the text of the prayer. Point out and discuss the summer/winter, rain/dew line of the text, and the idea of being thankful for what happens naturally, in a given season and hoping for the "unnatural" not to occur. Discuss the fact that this dividing of the seasons was based on the climate of *Eretz Yisra'el*, and that there is a distinct rainy and dry period. This might be a place for a bit of theology about prayer, that prayer does not have to be asking "for" something, but rather can be an

acknowledgement of what blessings we have in the world, and that in this prayer, we are acknowledging the natural processes that allow life to exist.

In the Rabbinic period, this *berakah* had particular power, as people had a direct dependence on agriculture and were very concerned about annual rainfall.

A) Note that *gevurot*/divine power here does not focus on God's acts of destruction, or the ways in which the God of the Bible showed strength in any conventional human sense. Rather, strength here is defined by acts of lovingkindness: sustaining life, nurturing, healing, freeing captives, faithfulness, saving power. God is portrayed here as life-giver.

B) Ask students to generate ideas of "power" and "strength." How do their models compare/contrast with the model of God's power given in this *berakah*? Ask students to comment on models of strength as they see them in our society. How does this model of Divine power presented in this *berakah* compare to these other models?

C) Discuss the historical notion of *mehayey hametim* (the resurrection of the dead) and bring in Maimonides' 13 principles of faith. Discuss the Reconstructionist understanding that God is not a person who intervenes in history nor physically resurrects the dead. Present and discuss the Reconstructionist alternative, "*Mehayey kol hay*" (gives life to all the living) as more in line with our understanding of God as acting within the forces of nature to sustain and nurture the living. Contrast this with the Reform *mehayey hakol* (gives life to all). Ask the students if they see a difference between the Reform and Reconstructionist language, and how they both differ from the traditional language. Solicit student discussion on this important point of Reconstructionist theology, that we do not claim that the dead will be brought back to life, and make sure that they understand that the Reconstructionist wording is not seen in other prayerbooks or services they may encounter.

## LESSON 7

### KEDUSHAH

1. Read through both the Friday night and Saturday morning versions of this prayer, and note the differences. Remind students that this prayer, like some other prayers (*Barehu*, Mourner's Kaddish) can only be said in a *minyan* (this is a place to explain the concept of *minyan*, if students are unfamiliar with it.) Note that in the weekday Amidah, this is the prayer that directly precedes the petitionary prayers—why? Is this a good order for the prayer to take? Ask students to comment on this.

2. Focus on the Shabbat morning version in this lesson. The idea of "*kadosh*" (holy) permeates this blessing. Students should focus on what it means for God to be holy. Generate ideas regarding how God is "holy" by Jewish definitions of "holiness" (i.e., set apart, unique, special). What sets God apart from themselves, and from other living things? What, to them, is the main source of God's holiness?

3. Point out the biblical passages in the *Kedushah* (Isaiah 6:3 and Ezekiel 6:12) and explain that these recall the specific ways the angels on high in the Biblical text praised God. Discuss the meaning of the title of this blessing, the *Kedushah*, or Sanctification, bringing in other meanings of the root *kadosh*. (For a good list of all words in Hebrew that have the root *kuf dalet shin*, from *kadosh*, see Edith Samuels, *Lexicon Of Jewish Life*, UAHC.) Ask the students how angels saying this prayer might say it differently than the way we are told they said it? (This could be a place, if students and teachers are interested, to discuss the nature of angels in the Jewish tradition, citing various texts on angels—i.e., the angels that came to visit Abraham, the angel of death, the ministering angels in Isaiah's and Ezekiel's prophetic visions, etc. Students could discuss their own ideas of angels, and how those may compare/contrast with Jewish views on angels.) Point out that the word for angels can also be translated as messengers. Ask what that translation would mean here.

## LESSON 8

### *KEDUSHAT HAYOM*

Introduce the *Kedushat Ha-Yom* prayer as the prayer that sanctifies Shabbat and is said in place of all the middle petitionary blessings. Review the concept of "*kadosh/kedushah*." Talk about the idea of "sanctification" as "separateness" or "holiness" in Judaism, and the interrelationship between these terms. Point out other prayers of sanctification in the liturgy, such as the different forms of the Kaddish prayer, as well as the Kiddush.

Ask students to generate lists of ways in which they designate particular places, times, and people in their lives (including their friends, possessions, rooms, activities, events) as *kadosh*. What makes these people/places/things/times holy? Are there any similarities between these holy items? Discuss Judaism's emphasis on holy time rather than holy space. (For instance, a Jew may pray anywhere; synagogues are not inherently holy).

Ask students to discuss the difference between a holy name (from the previous lesson) and a holy time. Are there similarities, differences in these two kinds of holiness?

**Activity:** Have students draw a time that they would consider holy. Ask them to reflect on what made the time holy—was it the objects that they could draw in the picture, or was it more a feeling that was inherent in the time? Have students discuss the representation of holiness of time that they drew. What made it holy? How was it different from other times? Would the same activity have been holy if done on a different day of the week/month/year?

## LESSON 9

### *AVODAH/HODA'AH—WORSHIP/ACKNOWLEDGEMENT—THANKS*

#### *Avodah*

Have students read through the text in English. Discuss the idea of *avodah* as both “work” and “worship” or “sacrifice.” What connection is there between these ideas? Take some time to discuss the idea of sacrifice as ancient worship, and how it evolved into prayer as we know it after the destruction of the Temple. Make sure students understand this connection, and the organic relationship between sacrifice and our verbal prayers of today. Actual references to sacrifice have been taken out of Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative siddurim. However, it is important that students understand the historical connection, even though it is no longer part of the actual wording of the prayer. Be sensitive to students’ possible discomfort with the idea of animal sacrifice, and allow for and guide constructive discussion on this issue.

#### *Hoda'ah*

Read through the text of the prayer in English with the students. Remind them that during the first three words of this prayer is one of the places at which bowing occurs.

Go over the special additions for Hanukah on page 316. Discuss briefly the story of Hanukah, and why this might be a place where additional, special thank-you’s to God might be warranted. Do students think other Jewish holidays or events would also be appropriate here to single out for thanksgiving? Should Hanukah warrant special attention?

**Activity:** Ask students to construct their own prayers of thanksgiving that could be inserted at this point based on other particular Jewish holidays or celebrations. For what other blessings in our history as a people would we want to give special thanks?

## LESSON 10

### *BIRKAT HASHALOM AND CONCLUDING MEDITATION*

#### *Birkat Hashalom*

Read through the text with the students in English. Then read through the large-type print on page 319. Identify this blessing as the Priestly Blessing and talk about the historical context for the priestly blessing in the Temple. Review the Commentary by Michael M. Cohen on page 318. This is a good place to discuss the ancient idea of the class structure in Judaism: Kohens, Levites, and Israelites, and what each of their roles were vis a vis the Temple. You might also talk about the fact that although this is not part of liberal Judaism, *aliyot* were traditionally given according to class, and that this is still seen in Orthodox and some Conservative settings.

**Activity:** Divide the students into Kohens, Levites, and Israelites. Have them debate the pros/cons of having a class system in Judaism.

**Activity:** Ask students to generate a list of peace-making qualities. What makes someone an effective peace-maker? What kind of peace has the Jewish people known in our history?

**Activity:** Have students wrap each other in *tallitot* (these probably need to be provided by the synagogue) and bless each other with the priestly blessing. Ask students to discuss what it feels like to bless someone else, and to receive a blessing. Does it have power for them? If so, in what do they think that power lies?

Read the text of *Sim Shalom* on page 320 to conclude the *berakah*. Discuss the idea of being blessed. Do students feel the list of what is being asked for here (page 320) is complete? What would they add? Point out the Reconstructionist addition of “and all peoples” at the end of the prayer, and discuss the idea of universalism in Reconstructionist Judaism. Do students think only Israel and the Jewish people should be blessed in Jewish prayer? Discuss pros/cons. Point out the addition for Shabbat *Shuvah* and explain why a more fervent yearning for peace might be appropriate on that day. Explain that the Amidah ends with bowing and taking three steps backward as a sign of respectful leave-taking at the end of our conversation with the Divine.

**Activity:** Teach different melodies for *Sim Shalom*.

### ***Ribono Shel Olam/Concluding Meditation***

Describe this passage as the private meditation of the fourth century Rabbi Mar bar Rav Rabina. The focus of the prayer is on choosing and using one’s words and deeds for good. Discuss why this prayer does/doesn’t make sense as a closing to the Amidah (emphasize that it is not formally part of the Amidah). Note that it includes Psalms 60:7 and 19:15.

**Activity:** Teach several melodies to *Oseh Shalom*—have students sing as a round, if they wish.

## **LESSON 11**

This section will contain activity suggestions for each of the *berahot*. The purpose is to provide a more in-depth review of praxes studied in previous sections. Choose those you feel would be most relevant/helpful to your class to help bring alive and make relevant the thematic ideas studied in the last several lessons. The implementation of, or planning for any of these suggestions could be a lesson in itself, or a teacher could utilize a few of these and have them enrich the content of several previous lessons. It might even be possible, time and curriculum permitting, to try to do at least one suggestion for each of the *berahot* during the course of the year to give students a fuller appreciation for the contemporary relevance of the themes of the Amidah. After all, it is “the” prayer of Judaism.

## I. AVOT VE'IMOT

- A) Have students interview their parents and/or grandparents about what some of the family's accomplishments through the generations have been. What does the family pride themselves on? Are there pictures to make some of these family tales come alive? Have students create a collage and/or write a story reflecting their findings.
- B) Ask students to place themselves in the situation of being their own grandchildren, and writing about their "grandparents'" lives. How and for what would they like to be remembered by succeeding generations as a foremother or forefather?
- C) Create a "family appreciation night" in which students are encouraged to bring family members to school for a class dinner (cooked by the students!) at which parents, and hopefully grandparents, can share family stories with their child's classmates.
- D) Invite a genealogist to come in and talk with the students about how family trees are created.

## II. GEVUROT

- A) Have students survey their classmates on the following question—what makes someone truly a strong person? Compile the findings and put them on display on a large bulletin board.
- B) Ask students to look through newspapers and magazines and find examples of people in the news who they feel have acted with true strength. Challenge them to find specific examples of people who have shown strength in the ways strength is attributed to God in the *Gevurot* prayer (page 298) such as sustaining the living, nurturing the life of every living thing, upholding those who fall, etc.
- C) Ask students to find examples in the media of people who they feel are put forth as heroes, but who, in their opinion, show only superficial or phony "strength." What does this teach them about some of the values that society holds? What do they think of these "values"? How do they conflict with what they know of Jewish values from this prayer? How would they work to counter those?
- D) Invite people or organizations in the community who do acts of *gevurot* to come in and talk with the students about their work. Frame the particular person's work in a Jewish context, particularly emphasizing the holy nature of such work, based on its similarity to the attributes of Divine *gevurot* in the *berahah*. Suggestions for such visitors might include: representatives from Amnesty International, doctors who work with particularly marginalized populations (such as people with AIDS or the poor), a representative from Mazon or other such institution which helps to "sustain life." Discuss the "godly" nature of the work of such a person—it would be particularly powerful if a representative from a Jewish organization can help connect the lesson to his/her own work via a discussion of Jewish values.

### III. KEDUSHAT HASHEM

A) In the Bible, we are enjoined to "Be holy, because I the Lord your God am Holy." (Leviticus 19:2). Rabbinic teaching understands this to mean that we must work to do holy things in the world. According to the rabbis, a holy life, filled with doing mitzvot, will help us to keep separate, and apart. We can understand this today not as keeping apart from other people, but rather, as keeping us separate from unholy, profane deeds. We can be holy, indeed we can be godly by doing godly work in the world. Explaining this to students can establish a deep framework for doing acts of *tikun olam*, acts of repairing the world, acts of social justice.

**Activity:** Divide students into small groups. Each group is responsible for envisioning, planning, and executing a small social action project. Such projects could include, but are not limited to: setting up recycling projects, writing to government officials to express concern about problematic political policies, working in a soup kitchen, etc.

### IV. KEDUSHAT HAYOM

A) Plan and do a Shabbaton/Shabbat retreat with the class. Let the class have a great deal of the responsibility for the programming, if possible, including taking part in services and meal planning and preparation. Discuss as a class and plan what Shabbat afternoon activities would most honor the *kedushah* of the day, and why. Students can put considerable time/planning into leading study sessions, outdoor activities such as nature walks, skits, etc., that they feel would honor the Sabbath day. Such a Shabbaton can be turned into a family experience if students so desire.

### V. AVODAH/HODA'AH

A) Have students brainstorm about the relationship between worshipping, sacrificing, and giving thanks. How can we best show our appreciation for the blessings we receive daily? This is a good place to emphasize the value of *tzedakah*. *Tzedakah* can be a way of giving of ourselves something of value to us, just like our ancestors gave their animals as a way to express thanks for their blessings. Plan a *tzedakah* project with the class. Assign groups of students to research and report to the class on various agencies that would be appropriate for *tzedakah* giving. Have the class vote on which agency/agencies they would like to support, and institute a system of collection of funds from the class.

B) For similar reasons to the above, this would also be an appropriate place to discuss the concept of *gemilut hasadim*/acts of lovingkindness. Students could also vote on which actions they would like to perform in the community. Such actions could include, but are not limited to: tutoring an underprivileged child, volunteering time to help a person with HIV/AIDS, reading to a blind person, visiting an elderly shut-in, etc.

## VI. BIRKAT HASHALOM

A) Divide the class into different groups with each group responsible for exploring and completing a project on a particular form of peace or things that threaten peace. For example: one group might work on domestic violence, another on communications skills, another on the work of *Shalom Akshav* (Peace Now) in Israel, another on interreligious understanding, another on the group Women at the Wall (who work to gain the right of women to have equal rights at the Western Wall in Jerusalem), another on the Arab-Israeli conflict, etc. Projects might include written reports, collages, plays, skits, poetry, songs, etc.

B) Hold a peace festival. Have students sing songs of peace—including traditional and new versions of “Shalom Rav,” “Sim Shalom,” and “Oseh Shalom,” as well as other songs dealing with global, environmental and other forms of peace. (This could be a mini-Woodstock day; students could wear tie-dyed clothing, serve environmentally-conscious food, and hold an outdoor fair, if weather permits.)

## LESSON 12

The Amidah is the core prayer of Judaism—“the” prayer, as we have learned. Ask students to discuss the themes of the Amidah as they have learned them. Do they think all important themes, all the themes they would want to cover in a “conversation” with God on Shabbat are covered in this prayer? Ask them to reflect on the “conversation” they wrote out in Lesson 1. After having done a unit on the Amidah, would they now add anything to that conversation?

**Activity:** Ask students to take a half an hour of class time now and to write their own Amidah, in their own words. They can choose to utilize some or all of the themes in the Amidah itself, but they must make it their own, original prayer. Students should be instructed to make an outline of what themes they want to be sure to cover in their Amidah and to “flesh it out” into prayer form. Remember, no petitionary prayer on Shabbat! Ask students to consider and discuss how they would write the prayer differently if it were for only their own use, or if it were being written for others’ use as well.

**Activity:** Students may also choose to write which petitionary prayers they would insert for weekdays, and to put those into their “weekday Amidah.”

**Activity:** Ask students who are willing to share their Amidah with the class. Students who wish to do so should be encouraged to set parts of their prayer to music, and to share it with the class if they wish (one option would be to make a recording to hand out to classmates).

**Activity:** Students could create a play based on a theme or themes of the Amidah, and offer that as their “prayer” to other classes in the school.



**Activity:** Another “offering” to the school or synagogue might be an art project which encompasses the themes of the Amidah. Students could choose and collaborate on the project—for example, a large mural reflecting the themes of the prayer, or a concert incorporating songs which speak to the themes of the Amidah.

**Activity:** Final activity for the end of semester or end of year could be another “offering” to the synagogue, in this case, the leading of the parts of the service that the class has mastered, in particular, leading the Amidah. This would be a good benchmark for mid-year and the end of the year to show the progress that the students have made.

**Activity:** The class might lead the school in reciting the Amidah, or lead the congregation during one or more services, including sharing some of their own interpretations of the Amidah.

## A Guide to Creating Children's Services Based on *Kol Haneshamah*

Aviva Batya Bass and Toba Spitzer

### INTRODUCTION

The following guides—one for children aged four to seven, the other for children aged eight to eleven—are intended to help educators create a prayer experience reflecting the structure and spirit of a Reconstructionist Shabbat morning service. For the younger children, we have provided a guide to creating a mini-siddur for use in the classroom and/or in the context of a children's service. The guide for the older children is meant primarily for use by a teacher or service leader in the context of morning worship services, and is accompanied by a mini-siddur (which can be copied for use by the students). Though a Shabbat morning mini-siddur, it can easily be adapted to weekday services. Just such adaption is intended.

Both of these guides attempt to familiarize students with the language and content of Jewish prayer while also giving expression to children's innate and free-flowing spirituality. As Barbara Staub has commented, "Teaching children about God is in some ways like teaching children about fun. Anyone who has shared quality time with children knows that a child's sense of the miraculous, of the wonder of existence . . . is extremely strong. Children are naturally spiritual . . ."<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, it is all too easy to stifle this innate spirituality when teaching about and engaging in traditional Jewish prayer. These guidelines are structured so as to stimulate and give particularly Jewish—and Reconstructionist—expression to children's thoughts and feelings, within the framework of the morning *Shaharit* service. Our hope is that the children's services that result are meaningful, creative, and fun—while also familiarizing the students with the essentials of Reconstructionist prayer.

In addition to utilizing portions of the Hebrew and English text of the *Kol Haneshamah* siddur, these guidelines are Reconstructionist in a number of ways. The first is the emphasis on the inclusion of the children's thoughts and voices within each service. Second is the sensitivity to the inclusion of female aspects of the Jewish people and of divinity—from the mention of the *imahot*, the foremothers, to the use of gender-neutral and gender-balanced language in relation to God. Finally, the children are encouraged to explore Reconstructionist notions of God and Godliness in the world, in others and in themselves.

The two guides have been structured so as to lead one into the other—as the students mature—and as preparation for use of the full *Kol Haneshamah* siddur. Each major prayer is accompanied by a graphic design, and the same design is to be used for each mini-siddur. In the teacher's guides we have also designated key Hebrew terms and concepts for each prayer, repeating these words and themes (in ways appropriate to each age group) in each guide. We hope that this attempt at continuity will help prepare the students for each new stage of encounter with *Kol Haneshamah*.

---

<sup>1</sup>See Barbara Staub's article, "God Talk," elsewhere in this volume.



## A Prayer Service for Ages Four to Seven

Aviva Batya Bass

The following is a guide to the *Shaharit* (morning) worship service meant for the teacher or service leader of a group of children, ages four to seven. It is structured so that it may be used in a variety of settings: for classroom learning of the major sections of the prayer service, for a children's worship service or assembly, or for the classroom teacher to use to enable him/her to create a mini-siddur for his/her students for their use in services.

Because of the short attention-span of this age-group, I have opted to limit this guide to a bare-bones structure of the morning service and have even omitted important portions that may be difficult in a practical sense with this age audience. Most apparent is my omission of a Torah service. This is partially due to the fact that even if this guide is used for the leading of a children's service, it may not be used on Shabbat or on another day when the Torah traditionally is read. If the service leader does wish to utilize this guide for a service in which he/she would like a Torah reading section for the children or wishes to use sections or prayers I have omitted, an excellent source of ideas for ways in which to facilitate services for this age group is Lyndall Miller's *Seeking Shabbat Delight* (United Synagogue of America, 1991. See pages 29-31 for Torah service material).

**Aims and Focal Points:** The main purpose of this guide is to present the material in such a way as to enable the teacher/service leader to give the children a forum in which to experience prayerful experiences within a Reconstructionist Jewish context.

The children should come away with a knowledge of some of the basic prayers and key words of the Jewish morning liturgy and a passive knowledge of the structure. They also should be better prepared for the next children's siddur, leading to the adult siddur, *Kol Haneshamah* (see Toba Spitzer's guide in this volume). More importantly, however, the students should feel that they have a forum for personal spiritual expression within a Jewish religious context.

**A Mini-Siddur:** This guide may be used in the creation of a mini-siddur by the teacher with his/her students. This would be an actual booklet of pages that the teacher would put together for the students, but which would be a joint expression of both teacher and student, in which the student's own feelings about each prayer could be recorded, in the form of art and, in the case of the six- to seven-year-olds, key words and phrases. After teaching a lesson about a given section, the teacher could instruct the students to draw what they are thinking about that particular prayer on that page in the siddur. At the end of the project, each student will have his/her own prayerbook that he/she has created, but based on the same pagination as that of the other students, for use in the context of worship services.

**The Guide:** The guide is structured in such a way as to adapt easily to the different contexts described above. First, there is a list of Key Words for the teacher of that section. These may be just for the teacher's own point of focus or some or all may be taught to the students, given the amount

of time the teacher has to devote to *tefilah* in his/her classroom. These key words may also be used in the creation of a mini-siddur, should the teacher decide to do so. The key word I suggest for that section of a mini-siddur is indicated by an asterisk (\*). At the end of the mini-siddur enclosed in this book are blank pages, each with the key word/words of that prayer on the top of the page. Where I have indicated more than one option for a key word for a given prayer, each asterisked option has a separate blank page from which the teacher may choose. These may be utilized by the teacher in the creation of the mini-siddur. I have also included a graphic, a pictorial representation of that section, which corresponds to those used in the next siddur for ages eight to eleven, included in this volume. If the teacher chooses to use this guide in the formation of a mini-siddur for his/her students, he/she could photocopy these pictures to use for these sections of the booklet and place them on the appropriate blank pages in the back of this guide. Or, for some of the prayers, the teacher could instruct the children to draw their own artwork on these pages. Two examples of pages with children's artwork have been included as a reference. Themes are also indicated for each section, to indicate several possible foci for the teacher in his/her lesson.

Activities are indicated for classroom use, as well as activities for use during Prayer Circle Time, the time of actual prayer in a worship service. I have chosen the title "prayer circle time," because I feel that this title indicates the warmth of the experience that I hope that this guide will help to generate.

The children should feel as comfortable sharing and experiencing within the time of the worship service as they are during the traditional "circle time" used by many educators of this age group. I would suggest sitting in a circle to help to create this atmosphere as well.

**The Structure:** The emphasis should be on the overall order of the service, rather than memorization of each prayer. The teacher could relate the service to physical exercise, because it begins with warm-up and stretch activities (the morning blessings and *Pesukei Dezimrah*), gets everyone involved with the call to worship, the *Barechu*, reaches a semi-peak with the Shema, reaches its peak when we all stand before God in the Amidah, and descends or has a "cool-down" phase with the *Aleynu* and concluding blessings and songs.

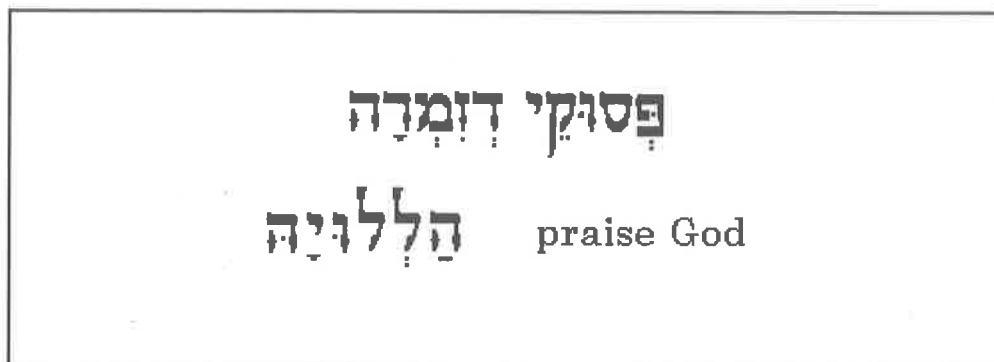
### OPENING SONG

In the setting of a service, the leader may want to open with a song. This could be a *nigun*, a wordless melody, or it could be a traditional song for Shabbat (if the service is on Shabbat), such as "Shabbat Shalom," or it could be an easy song from the liturgy, such as "*Hiney Mah Tov*" or "*Mah Tov*."

# OPENING BLESSINGS/PESUKEY DEZIMRAH

**Key Words:** *She 'asani ben/bat horin*      Who has made me free  
*She 'asani yisra 'el*      Who has made me a Jew  
*She 'asani betzalmo*      Who has made me in Your image  
(or as much of the traditional text as the teacher wants; see pages 153-161).<sup>1</sup>  
\*Halleluyah      Praise God

## Graphic:



**Themes:** God in our daily lives; thanksgiving for what we have; we show our praise for God with all we have, including with song and dance.

**Prayer circle activities:** The leader starts out by explaining that these blessings are to thank God for things with which we are blessed in our daily lives. He/she models how this is done, in both Hebrew and English or just in English. The leader instructs the students to stand up, and shows them how to begin their blessings. The body movements can be as follows: the leader bends the knees on “*Baruk*,” bows at “*Atah*” and stands up on “*Adonay*,” with arms outstretched upwards and twisting to the left on “*Eloheynu*,” then right for “*Meleh*” and then back to center on “*Ha'olam*.” Then the leader demonstrates how to finish each blessing, by choosing one of the traditional blessings or one of his/her own: “*She 'asani ben/bat horin*, who has made me to be free,” meanwhile finding a way to act out the meaning of that blessing, like stretching the arms and legs to show freedom.

Then the leader directs the students to do the same. He/she helps the students to start out the blessing and then leaves a pause for the next person in the circle to say his/her own English ending to the blessing, such as “Who helped me to get up for services today.” (This activity was developed by Rabbi Marcia Prager)

---

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all page numbers listed here refer to *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehahim*.

An important note: This is a wonderful place to introduce various Reconstructionist feminine/egalitarian beginnings to blessings, such as "*Berukah at Shehinah, Eloheynu Ruah Ha'olam*," (Blessed is the Feminine Presence of God, Our God, Spirit/Breath of the Universe), or any number of variations on this. (See the bottom of page 247 for suggestions).

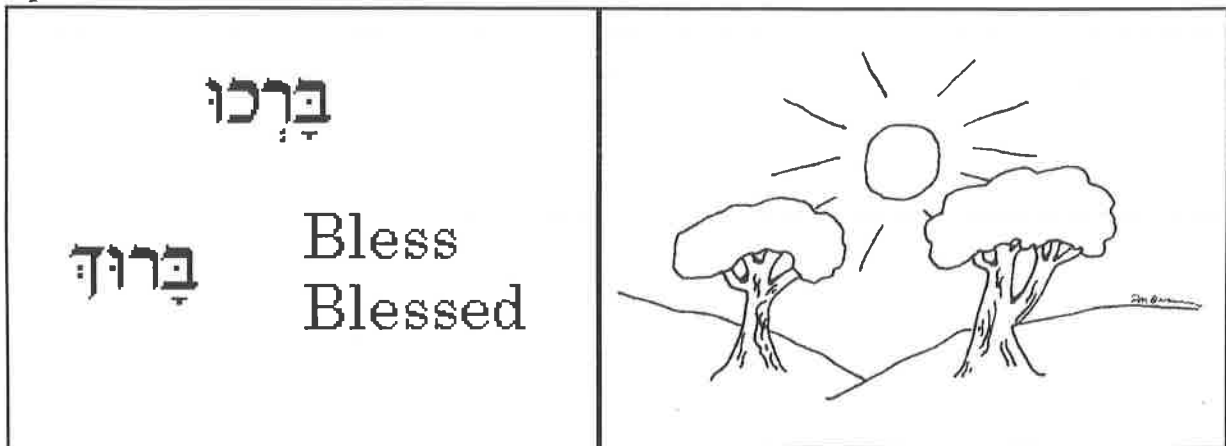
For the *Pesukei Dezimrah* section of the service, Psalm 150 is a good psalm to use, because the tune is catchy and because it is about the use of musical instruments to praise God. For a classroom activity, the teacher could have the students make or decorate their own musical instruments which they could then use for the service for this section. For the text of Psalm 150, the leader could just repeat the word "Halleluyah," rather than the whole psalm, since the Hebrew is difficult and the tune is catchy enough for the children to dance around the room singing. Perhaps the only line of text that the leader might opt to teach is the last line: "*Kol Haneshamah Tehalel Yah*." (Let every soul/everything that has breath praise God). Because *Kol Haneshamah* is the name of the adult siddur, it is good for the children to be familiar with the words. It is also fun to make a lot of noise singing "Halleluyah," dancing around the room with musical instruments, and then for the students to see how quiet they can become for the line "*Kol Haneshamah*," until they are just a whisper, like breath. (The leader could tell the students in advance that they are to sit down where they are and to get quiet for singing that part.)

### ***BAREHU AND YOTZER OR***

**Text:** Page 247

<b>Key Words:</b>	<i>*Barukh/Barehu</i>	Bless
	<i>Yotzer</i>	Creator
	<i>Or</i>	Light
	<i>Hosheh</i>	Dark
	<i>*Shalom</i>	Peace, Wholeness, Completion
	<i>Hakol</i>	All

**Graphic:**



**Themes:** *Barehu:* Prayer as a communal activity, God in community and people. *Yotzer Or:* God in nature, light and dark, God as Creator, appreciating God's creation.

**Activities:** If your setting allows for the growing of actual plants, an excellent source of easy planting tips for various kinds of vegetables may be found in *Jewish Holiday Crafts* by Joyce Becker (Bonim Books, 1977).



If the school permits, take a field trip to the zoo. Ask the children about the animals' natural habitats, what they need in order to live, how they are provided for in the zoo, etc. This is also a good way to introduce the concept of *tza'ar ba'aley hayim*, and bring out the concept of having sensitivity to causing unnecessary pain.

If the field trip is not possible, provide a list of questions for the children to discuss with their parents, and ask the parents to take their own children to the zoo. Or, ask the children if they have pets. What do they need in order to live? How do they grow?

Go on a nature walk, either on a field trip to an arboretum or state park, or just outside on the school grounds. Notice all kinds of worms, ants, and caterpillars (which the children may be more likely to notice than you are, given their lower height and greater observance of detail!).

Discuss with the children what it means to grow, and how wonderful and necessary that is for all life, that God makes this possible. What things grow? What determines how they grow? Do you grow? What things have changed physically in you during the past year (lost teeth, etc.)? What makes things grow?

Put on a tape or CD of a new-age recording artist. (Windham Hill Records has great recordings of this nature. I recommend George Winston, Michael Hedges, or Ray Lynch.) Explain to the children that they are to pretend that they are seeds of a plant or a tree, and that they are to grow as that plant or tree would during the song. Posting photographs of the various stages of seed growth on the bulletin board helps for reference. (Guide them along with phrases like, "Okay, we're really little now, like seeds. Get really small and in a little ball," or "Now you're going to sprout. Sprout just a little. Now more. Good.")



Some great books to prompt discussion about God in the environment and about nature are: *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein (Harper Collins, 1964); "Joey Meets Ossie," and "The Climbing Tree" from *God's Wonderful World* by Morris and Lenore Kipper (Seingold Publishers, 1973); and "The Strawberry Plant" from *Hear, O Israel: About God* by Mollie Cone (UAHC, 1973). (Note Appendix B, "A Tu Bishvat Lesson Plan for Ages Four to Six.")

**Prayer circle time:** Some of the above activities can be used as-is or adapted to meet the needs of a prayer experience for the *Yotzer Or* section of prayer. For the *Barehu*, to have the children experience the "call to worship," the leader could ask one student to volunteer to say just the word "*Barehu*," (or the whole line, if he/she is able), as he/she bows with the rest of the student "congregation" responding "*Baruh*," (or the whole line, if they are able), bowing in response. There is a song by Faith Rogow that can be sung to replace this section, that is easy enough for the children to learn and sing the first time they hear it. The words to the song are as follows: "As we bless the Source of life, so we are blessed (2x) And our blessings give us strength and make our vision clear, and our blessings give us peace, and the courage to dare. As we bless the Source of life, so we are blessed." (See below the line on page 246).

For the *Yotzer Or* section, another song may be used. If the students can handle the Hebrew, the whole song can be sung with all of the following words. If not, the leader could choose to use only the English lines. The words are as follows: "*Yotzer or uvorey hosheh, Oseh shalom, uvorey et hakol.* (2x) Forming light, creating darkness, making peace, creating all. (2x)" (This melody is by Geela Rayzel Raphael.)

## SHEMA

**Text:** Page 277

**Key Words:** \*Shema      Listen  
                  \*Ehad        One

**Graphic:** See Appendix A of this volume for hand signs.

**Themes:** God's Unity; Multiplicity/Infinite variety within the unity of God; God in everyone/everything.

**Activities:** One message that one may learn from the Shema is that it is a call to all Israel, to all of the Jews listening to the prayer, to remember that the One we call by the name of *Adonay* is the same God of all peoples of the earth, the same Source of all life, regardless of what any person or people may choose to name that source. A wonderful way to illustrate this point is reading the book *In God's Name*, by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso. To introduce this book, the leader could ask the children if they are called by different names at different times or by different people, such as a nickname, a longer name, and a Hebrew name. Discuss how just as we have many names that we are called at various times and by various people, so does God, and that Jews have many different names for

God, as do all people. Then, after reading the book, they could discuss a time when they feel close to God and what name they would give to God at that time. The leader could also prompt a discussion of names for God that the children do not like because they are negative in some way. (Stress that there are no right or wrong answers with any of these activities). A wonderful song for prompting God names is a song by Rabbi Jack Gabriel called “*Ufros Aleynu*” (“Astonishing is God,” cassette tape, Nisa Records). This song allows the children to add their own names/descriptions of God in each verse. Additional activities for Sandy Sasso’s book may be found in “A Curriculum Guide for *In God’s Name*” by Leah Mundell, located in the *Reconstructionist Curriculum Resource Guide*.

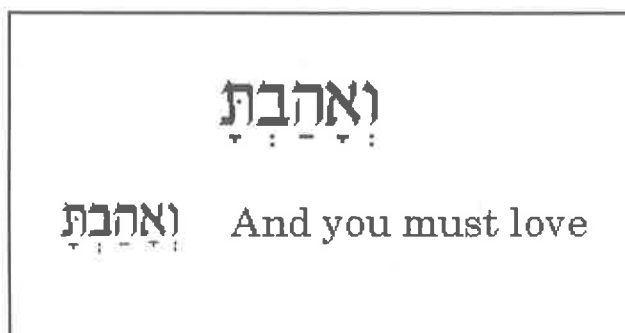
**Prayer circle time:** For the recitation of the first line of the Shema, stress the importance of listening, and that the first word of the line tells us to do just that. For a pre-prayer exercise, the leader could ask the children to close their eyes and concentrate on the sounds the farthest away that they can hear, and then ask the children to concentrate on the closest thing that they can hear, even as close as their breathing and their own hearts. Then the leader says that because listening is so important, many Jews cover their eyes while saying the Shema, so they will not be distracted by what they see, and so they can listen for and hear both the farthest things from themselves and the things as close as their own hearts. Then the leader asks the children to cover their eyes while he/she leads them in the first line of the Shema.

### VE’AHAVTA

**Text:** Page 277

<b>Key Words:</b>	*Ahava/Ve’ahavta	Love/And you shall love
	Lev/Levaveha	Heart/Your heart
	Mitzvot	Commandments
	Tzitzit	Fringes on a <i>tallit</i> (prayer shawl)
	Mezuzah	Mezuzah on door

**Graphic:**



**Themes:** Loving God, Seeing reminders of how we should love God and follow God’s mitzvot (commandments); God in ourselves and in all people.

**Activities:** A wonderful book for talking about when we feel God's presence is *God's Paintbrush*, by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso. Reading a page or pages from this book could prompt a discussion about why we should love God. The leader could ask the children when they feel God's love or when they feel close to God and what that feels like. The leader could ask the students to complete the sentence, "I feel God when . . ." (Also see the *God's Paintbrush Teacher's Guide*, edited by Jeffrey Schein and Joseph Blair and available from JRF.)

Another important aspect of this paragraph is about visual reminders of God's presence in our lives. Stress that just as we are told to listen for God and to each other we are told to look around us at various objects to remember God's commandments. Talk about *tzitzit*, *tefillin*, and *mezuzot*.

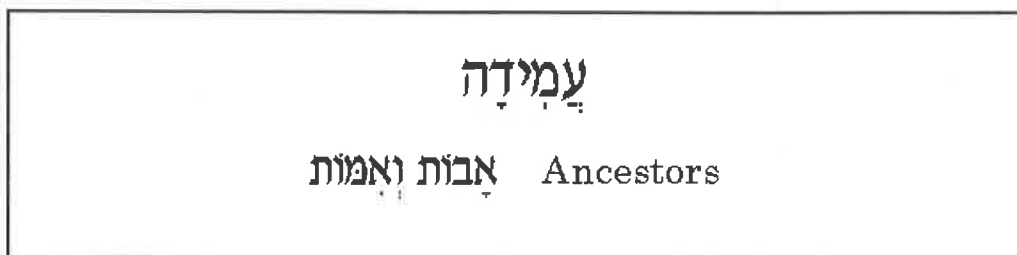
A fun art activity is the making of *mezuzot*. *The First Jewish Catalog* has several suggestions for making of various types of *mezuzot* (Richard Siegel, Michael Strassfeld and Sharon Strassfeld, 1973, page 14), including an easy one made from a walnut shell attached to a piece of heavy cardboard with a slit in the back to insert the parchment.

**Prayer circle time:** Lyndall Miller's book *Seeking Shabbat Delight* is an excellent source of ideas for activities with prayers of the *Shaharit* service. For this paragraph, she suggests that the prayer leader say, "We want to love our God with all of our hearts," and then the leader puts his/her hand over his/her heart, "with all of ourselves," and then the leader hugs him/herself, "and with all of our might—our strength," and then the leader holds up his/her arms so that he/she looks strong. Then she suggests that the leader instruct the children to do these motions as he/she recites the first line of the *Ve'ahavta*, putting his/her hand on his/her heart at the word "*levaveha*," holding his/her arms around him/herself at "*nafsheha*," and holding up his/her arms at "*me'odeha*" (page 24).

### AMIDAH

**Key Words:** \**Avot/Imot* Forefathers/Foremothers  
Shalom Peace, Wholeness, Completion

**Graphic:**



**Themes:** Our ancestors supporting us in our lives; God's awesome power; The sacredness of Shabbat (if on Shabbat); shalom; personal connection to God; God in oneself; praise, thanksgiving, and petition (even if this is done on Shabbat, when petition is traditionally absent from the Amidah, it is important to include this concept with young children to enable them to feel that God is there for them); Shabbat rest, if on Shabbat; safe spaces; holy spaces and times.

**Activities/Prayer Circle Time:** Although the children are too young to learn and understand the words to the traditional Amidah, it is important for them to understand the idea of a special time in the service that they can think silently about and connect with God.

There are many ways to set up a silent meditation time for young children (see Marilyn Price's article in this volume). The leader could say, "Now we're going to have some time to think or pray silently, by ourselves. Find a special place in the room that you can feel is your space for this time. Now I want you to think about . . ." I drew from the prayerbook of Congregation Or Ami several good suggestions of open-ended questions that the leader could facilitate a discussion about.<sup>2</sup> These include the following: "I'm proud that in the past week I . . ."; "I'm thankful that . . ."; "I could help make the world a better place by . . ."; "God could help me best in the week to come by giving me the strength to . . ." (See Appendix B for additional suggestions). When they come back together after the silence, students could discuss what they thought about.

Of course, there are an unlimited number of topics to ask children to think about, and the exercise should completely allow for the students' own creativity. Asking the children to think about a safe space they like or a special time they have had recently are two examples of nice openings for both thought and later discussion.

Another idea is leading the children through a short guided meditation (keeping in mind their short attention spans). This meditation could be related to themes of the traditional Amidah. For example, the leader could guide the children to imagine meeting Abraham and Sarah in their tent and what they would see and hear and smell and taste as the honored guest of our foreparents. (This one might require some explanation or review about Abraham and Sarah and their hospitality to guests). For all of these, the leader should keep in mind the vast capacity children have for imagination and to expect this to be a fun activity for them.

After the silent activity, the leader might want to lead the children in "*Oseh Shalom*," or a *nigun* (a wordless melody) before the discussion of what the students were thinking during the silent time. This is a good way to bring the children back to reality after their time of imagination and "let's pretend."

#### ALEYNU

**Text:** "*Aleynu leshabe'ah la'adon hakol*—It is our responsibility to praise God." (This line only)

**Key Words:** \**Tikun Olam*  
*Shevah*

Repairing the world  
Praise (*leshabe'ah*—to praise)

---

<sup>2</sup>Or Ami is a Reform congregation located in Lafayette Hills, Pennsylvania. Information about this siddur may be obtained from Jeffrey Schein at the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies, 26500 Shaker Blvd., Beachwood, OH, 44122.

**Graphic:**

**Themes:** Our responsibility to praise God; gratitude; our responsibility to work together for a better world; our awe of the overwhelming nature of God; God in us, all people, and community; working together for *tikun olam*.

**Activities/Prayer circle:** Before saying the one line of the text given above, each person gets up and says a wish he/she has for a better world. If time permits, the leader might ask what it would take for each wish to be accomplished.

Discuss the concept of being in awe, of being overwhelmed by the power or greatness of something. The leader might begin by discussing somewhere/sometime he/she has felt that way, perhaps sharing photos of a trip (i.e., the Grand Canyon) in which he/she experienced that. The leader asks the students to describe such a time or place for them. Then the leader could explain how that could be a time for prayer, to show our gratitude for being alive at that moment. Then the leader could lead the first line of the *Aleynu*, as above.

### CLOSING SONG

Here the leader has complete freedom. Any easy tune or *nigun* (wordless melody) could be taught, or the leader could choose a song the children know, or that is appropriate to the time of the year, if it is close to a holiday, etc. If the prayer service is on Shabbat, he/she could close with "Shabbat Shalom," or another easy Shabbat song. Or, one verse of "*Eyn Keloheynu*" or "*Adon Olam*" are easy and help familiarize the children with the songs they will later sing with the adults in an adult service, especially if sung to the tune that the adult congregation uses.

## A Kol Haneshamah Children's Service For Ages Eight to Eleven

Toba Spitzer

### GOALS

The children's mini-siddur presented separately in this volume is intended for use during children's or family services, either in the morning during religious school, or on a Shabbat morning alongside the adult services. The siddur as it is presented contains the basic skeletal structure of a morning service, appropriate for a weekday or Shabbat (although some special Shabbat prayers and songs are included).

To accompany this siddur, we offer the following guide for the teacher or prayer-leader, with suggestions for how to involve the children in creating a meaningful *davening* experience. Alone, the children's siddur is really nothing but a skeletal structure; the flesh and breath will be put into the service through the joint efforts of the teacher and the children. The goal of the siddur-plus-guide is that, as a supplement to study of the prayers in the classroom, the children will:

1. gain familiarity with the major *Shaharit* prayers;
2. begin to get a sense of the structure and flow of a service;
3. experience a meaningful Jewish context for their own prayers and thoughts.

### THE SIDDUR

Portions of each of the morning prayers are presented one prayer to a page (one page of Hebrew, and a facing page of translation). A **minimum** of transliteration has been included, generally for songs. Accompanying each prayer is a graphic design, expressing a key theme associated with the prayer.

Some of the translations are taken directly from *Kol Haneshamah*, but most have been simplified and/or adapted for easier understanding by children. Following this introduction is an outline of the contents of the siddur.

### THE GUIDE

For each prayer, **key themes** and **key words** are highlighted for the teacher. The siddur—even in a pared-down form such as this—offers an abundance of ideas and an overflow of words, and so it becomes important to focus in, at any given service, on just one or two key words/themes in a prayer, in order for the students to be able to connect to the prayer and grasp some portion of its meaning. The teacher can use the key themes and words to guide any introductory comments, meditations, etc. For Hebrew reading practice, students can be encouraged to find the key words in the text.

In addition to key words and themes, the guide offers suggestions for activities to accompany each prayer. The goal of these activities is for the students to add their own voices and experiences to the service that they are creating. This may take the form of making up a motion to go with certain words, expressing out loud a hope or thanks, or quietly listening for God's presence. Again, these are just suggestions, and the teacher is invited to be as creative as the children.

Finally, there are some suggestions for continuing exploration of certain prayers in the classroom, and for bringing the fruits of those explorations back into the service, in the form of Commentary pages that the students create in their own copies of the siddur.

## Teacher's Guide to the *Kol Haneshamah Children's Siddur*

Toba Spitzer

### A. *BIRHOT HASHAHAR AND PESUKEY DEZIMRAH*

These opening prayers and songs are a kind of warm-up, where we get our minds and our hearts and our bodies ready for the direct prayer that comes later in the service.

#### 1. *MAH TOVU*

*Mah tovu* is an introductory song, which can be sung in a round (each part comes in on the second syllable of “o-**ha**-leha”). The words are few, and all are important, but words to focus on are *tov* (good), *ohel* (tent), *mishkan* (sanctuary) and *Yisrael*—all linked to the themes of safe spaces, holy spaces, community. This opening song helps establish a sense of community and a space which feels holy, where you will be creating your own *mishkan*, your own temporary sanctuary.

**Activity:** If parents are present, a few of them can hold up a large tallit, and the children can enter into the davvening space, the *mishkan*, by passing under the tallit, as everyone sings *Mah Tovu*.

#### 2. *BIRHOT HASHAHAR (THE MORNING BLESSINGS)*

The key word is the word for bless/blessed, *baruh*. These prayers express our thanks, our feeling of being blessed, for all that we have every day—the ability to get up, the fact that the sun rises each morning, our freedom, our material needs, our strength. Another important theme is that of finding God in our daily lives, in every aspect of our living, from opening our eyes to putting on our clothes. This prayer also teaches that we find God in those actions that help others—when the captive is set free, the naked person clothed, the oppressed person lifted up.

**Activity:** These blessings help wake everyone up, and one good way to do that is through movement. Pick a few of the blessings to recite together. Ask a student to make up a motion for one of the blessings, and have him/her show the group the movement. Then the group as a whole can do the motion while reciting the blessing together. Then it's someone else's turn to make up a motion.

**Activity:** This is also a good opportunity for the students to add their own blessings. After reciting a few of the traditional blessings, ask the students to think for a moment about something that they feel very thankful for this morning, something they are blessed with. Chant the *petihah*, the opening of the blessing: “*Baruh atah adonay, eloheynu hey ha'olamim*, who has given us . . .” and then have the students add what they are thankful for. You can say “amen” after each student speaks, and then chant the opening again, or make it one big blessing, with everyone's contributions, and a big “Amen” at the end.



This is also a good opportunity to familiarize the students with an alternative blessing formula: begin the communal blessing with “*Barukah at Yah, eloheynu hey ha'olamim*” (see page 143 for alternative blessing formulas), and then have the students add their personal thanks.

### 3. BARUH SHE'AMAR

Key words are *amar/omer* (spoke/says) and *merahem* (be compassionate, from the root *rehem*, meaning “womb”). This prayer begins with the power of speech, especially God’s speech, which is said to have created the entire world. The prayer also focuses on God as Creator, and as One who is compassionate towards all of Creation. As Arthur Green comments on page 178 in *Kol Haneshamah*: in using words to pray, “we somehow partake of that same act of Divine word-power through which the world was created.”

**Activity:** The English on page 6 can be chanted to the same traditional tune as the Hebrew. After hearing this interpretative translation of the prayer, point out to the students the power of words in how we talk about God. Does it feel different to call God “Her” instead of “Him,” and to describe God as a mother? What image do you have when you call God “He,” and when you call God “She”?

**Activity:** Ask the children, how is speech powerful? Can we create anything with our words, the way God created the universe? Do we have the power to be kind and caring, as the prayer says God is, through our words?

### 4. SHABBAT PSALMS

The siddur includes songs from a few of the Psalms that are recited on Shabbat morning, including verses from Psalm 92 (*tzadik katamar yifrah*, “the righteous will flourish”) and Psalm 121 (*esa eynay*, “I lift up my eyes”). Other upbeat songs can be sung in this part of the service as well, or songs specifically about Shabbat (see *Mah Yafeh Hayom* at the end of the siddur).

### 5. PSALM 150

Key words are *halel* (praise) and *kol haneshamah* (every breath/soul/living being)—the latter is the name of the Reconstructionist siddur! This psalm is the final one recited in the section of the service called *Pesukei Dezimrah*, “verses of song.” The main theme is praise of God, which we do with our voices and bodies and musical instruments. The theme of using our *neshamah* to praise God is important, because it is our breath that makes us alive, and so we are using that which makes us alive to praise the source of Creation that gives us life. We can also understand *neshamah* as “soul” or “self,” so that we praise God with our whole selves, with all of our soul.

**Activity:** Sing the psalm, with accompaniment of different instruments—especially percussion instruments (a fun project would be to make different instruments during class time). Sing just one or two verses per service, so students can learn the words. Try singing the verse with the sound described (e.g. of a drum, or violin, or cymbals), or act out playing each instrument as you sing about it. Have the students use all of their *neshama*, all of their self, and see how many different sounds they can make using different parts of their body—clapping hands, beating legs or chest, whistling!

### COMMENTARY EXERCISE #1 (preceding the *Barehu*)

A natural break occurs between the introductory segments of the morning service and the *Barehu*, the formal beginning of *Shaharit*. In the siddur at this point is space for the students to add their own commentary and creativity directly into the siddur itself (if each student has his/her own copy of the siddur). These commentaries can be worked on in class, and incorporated into a service afterwards.

Before working on the commentary, point out to the students that each generation of Jews and each Jewish community has understood the siddur in its own way, depending on the time and place. You may want to show them a copy of the *Kol Haneshamah* siddur and the various commentaries “below the line” on many pages, where the thoughts of both ancient and contemporary Jewish thinkers, poets and rabbis are included. Explain that they are now going to get to add their own personal commentaries to their copy of the siddur, on some of the themes from *Birkhot Hashahar* and *Pesukei Dezimrah*.

**Activity:** Using the following statements as examples, ask the students to complete one or more phrases on the commentary sheet (you can prepare a sheet with the first part of the sentence[s] written in, or just have them write it out themselves):

*I feel like I want to sing and jump for joy when . . .*

*I feel thankful when . . .*

*If I were a musical instrument, I would be a . . . , because . . .*

*If God had a voice it would sound like . . .*

**Activity:** Have the students read through the prayers in the first section of the siddur (pages 1-10), and ask them to pick out specific words or phrases—in Hebrew or English—that they particularly like or think are important. You may want to review with them the various key themes of the prayers (see the guide above). From the phrases they’ve picked out, have each student choose a word or phrase that s/he likes the best, and then create a drawing or poem based on and somehow incorporating that word/phrase.

You might want to prepare a sample drawing, to give the students an idea (for example: the words “*Baruh she 'amar vehaya ha 'olam*” forming or outlining a globe of the earth). One idea for creating a poem: Have them write out the phrase word by word down the left margin of a sheet of paper, and then create a sentence using each word.

Paste each student’s drawing or poem onto the commentary page in the siddur.

## B. THE SHEMA AND ITS BLESSINGS

Surrounded by prayers about Creation, Torah, love, and freedom, the Shema is at the center of this portion of the service.

### 1. *BAREHU AND YOTZER*

***Barehu*:** The theme of the *Barehu* is its function as a call to worship. Now that we have “warmed up” by doing the morning prayers and singing, we are ready to pray as a community and to move on to the central prayers: the Shema and the Amidah. The *Barehu* is a call-and-response way of letting everyone know that we’re ready.

**Activity:** As preparation for chanting the *Barehu*, sing “As we bless the source of life” by Faith Rogow.

***Yotzer*:** The first prayer preceding the Shema is the *Yotzer* prayer. Its key words are *yotzer* and *borey* (two words for “create”), and *or* and *hosheh* (light and dark). The theme of this prayer is God’s power in Nature, and the idea that all things come from God, light and dark, good and bad. Different versions of the *Yotzer* are said on weekday and Shabbat mornings, but this first line is always said. The *Yotzer* prayer is a good opportunity to experience or discuss how we encounter God’s presence in the natural world around us.

**Activity:** Have the students sit and think quietly for a moment about a spot outside where they have felt close to God—maybe in the woods, or at the beach, in their backyard, beneath or in a favorite tree. Have the students share their thoughts—or, hand out paper and crayons and have everyone draw their special nature spot. Lay the pictures out in the middle of the circle, so that everyone can see, and let each student who wants to say what they appreciate in Nature.

**Activity:** Talk about the cycles of nature—from light to dark to light again; how trees and plants grow and die and become soil for new plants. Ask the students for their thoughts about how humans are hurting nature and interfering with those cycles. What are some environmental problems, and how can we help solve those problems?

### 2. *AHAVAH RABAH*

Key words are *ahavah* (love), *Torah* (in the sense of all of Jewish teaching, not just the Five Books of Moses), *mitzvot*, and words based on the root *l-m-d* (to learn/to teach). The major theme of this prayer is God’s love for the Jewish people as shown through the gift of Torah. God is pictured as a loving parent/teacher, showing care for us in teaching us how to live a good life. The *mitzvot*—deeds of kindness and caring—are the essence of that teaching. We in turn show our love for God by acting Godly—that is, by doing *mitzvot* and acting towards other people with love and kindness just as God acts towards us. This prayer leads thematically into the Shema, which also emphasizes teaching, Torah, and *mitzvot*.

**Activity:** Shefa Gold has created a chant and simple dance using the first three words of the prayer. The dance goes like this: Everyone stands in a circle, with their hands on their hearts. On the first repetition of "*ahavah rabah ahavtanu*," take four slow (or eight quick) steps into the circle, raising your hands up to the heavens. On the second repetition of this line, step back to your place, bringing your hands back in towards your heart. On the next "*ahavah rabah*," twirl one full circle to your right, and then on "*ahavtanu*," raise your hands to the heavens, rocking forward and back; repeat this sequence to your left. Then back to the beginning!

**Activity:** Read the first line of the prayer in Hebrew and the first paragraph in English. Ask the students: if God has given us a gift of Torah and *mitzvot*, what can we do to "give" something back? What's a *mitzvah* each of us can do to show our love for God and for other people? Have the students make a commitment to do one *mitzvah* in the coming week, and then have them report on their *mitzvah* during the *ahavah rabah* section of the next week's service. This section of the service can become a regular occasion to report on a *mitzvah* done during the previous week.

### 3. THE SHEMA

The recitation of the Shema is the first "peak" in the service, focusing us in on our connection to God as we approach the Amidah, the time for individual prayer. It is a powerful moment and an easy prayer for children to remember. Every word of the first line is important, but two key words are *shema* (listen/ hear) and *ehad* (one). The key theme of the Shema is God's unity, and the variety that is contained in that unity. There are many ways to talk about and understand what God is, but ultimately we are all talking about one power that connects all things. The importance of listening is stressed in this line and in the *Ve 'ahavta* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), where we are told that we must hear, remember and teach words of Torah. Again, as in the *Ahavah Rabah* prayer, showing love for God is connected to learning and doing Torah.

**Activity:** Learn the sign language for the Shema, and do the signs as you recite the words (see Appendix A in this volume). Together with the students, figure out hand motions for the major ideas in the *Ve 'ahavta* paragraph. This is an opportunity to teach about *tefillin* ("tie them as a sign upon your hand and between your eyes") and about *mezuzah* ("write them on the doorway of your house").

**Activity:** (This is best done in warm weather, when the windows are open, or outside.) Ask the students to close their eyes and sit very quietly. Ask them to listen carefully, and to focus on sounds as far away as they can hear. Guide their listening to sounds progressively closer in; see how close in they can listen. Ask them to try and hear their own breathing, their own heart beating. Keeping their eyes closed, have everyone recite the Shema together.

**Activity:** Read the story *In God's Name*, which deals with the multiplicity that is contained in the One name of God. Before saying the Shema, ask each child to say his/her own "name" for God, and have everyone else **listen** very carefully.

**Activity:** Read the first Hebrew sentence in the last paragraph, and all of the English. Have a few *tallitot* available for the students to examine. Can they find the royal blue thread in the *tzitzit*? (You can explain that the particular dye used to make the blue threads has been lost for centuries, although some people in Israel now say they've found it again). How can looking at *tzitzit* help remind us to do *mitzvot*? What are some other ways we can remember?

#### 4. *GE'ULAH*/REDEMPTION

The blessing after the Shema deals with the theme of *ge'ulah*, redemption, and celebrates the Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt. The key word *ga'al* means to redeem from captivity, to set free. Another key phrase is *mi hamokah*, "who is like you," which is taken from the book of Exodus 15:11. This follows the theme of the Shema, that God is a unique power. Where the *Yotzer* prayer talks about God's power in Nature, in the *Ge'ulah* we talk about God's power in human history, freeing people from slavery and oppression.

**Activity:** It would be especially appropriate to focus on this prayer at Passover time, and/or when studying the book of Exodus. In terms of being familiar with the adult service, the students can learn to chant the "*mi hamokah*" line. Take this opportunity to talk about the problems in our society and in the world that keep people from being fully free. Go around the circle, and have each student complete the sentence, "People will be free when . . . ."

**COMMENTARY PAGE #2** (preceding the *Ge'ulah*)

The *Ge'ulah* section of the service provides a nice opportunity for the students to add their own *midrash* to their siddurim. Facing the blank Commentary page in the siddur is a page with two rabbinic *midrashim* about the splitting of the sea—one recounts that the Israelites had to walk in up to their noses before the waters receded (see page 289 in *Kol Haneshamah*), the other tells the story of Nahshon, who jumped into the sea while the tribes bickered and Moses prayed (see page 291).

Read over these *midrashim* with the students, and discuss what they say about human involvement in bringing about liberation from slavery and oppression. According to these *midrashim*, who was mainly responsible for the Israelites getting across the Red Sea? Are humans alone responsible for our freedom? What were the rabbis trying to teach in these *midrashim*? This may lead into a larger discussion about the role of people and of God—in whatever ways we think about God—in creating change in the world.

Have each student write his/her own commentary on freedom or the crossing of the sea on the Commentary page. What are their thoughts on how people and God—or Godliness—work together in the world for freedom? They can close their commentary with their own blessings for freedom.

### C. THE AMIDAH

The Amidah (the “standing prayer”), also known as the Shemonah Esrei (“18,” for the original number of blessings said in the full Amidah recited on weekdays, now 19) is the moment when we address God directly, speaking from our hearts about the things that concern us most. It is a communal prayer, in that we reflect on and ask for things that affect us a community, but it is also a very personal time, where we have space to think to ourselves and express our own hopes, fears, and thanks.

Included in the siddur are the first two blessings found in both the weekly and the Shabbat Amidah—*Avot/Imot* (Ancestors) and *Gevurot* (Divine Power)—and a final blessing, for peace.

1) *Avot/Imot*:<sup>1</sup> The first blessing focuses on the *avot v'imot*, the forefathers and foremothers. Other key words are *hesed* (translated here as “love,” it can also mean kindness), *magen* (shield or protect), and *ezra* (help). An important theme of this blessing is our connection to our own ancestors and to the many Jews who came before us, all the way back to our biblical forebears. This prayer also depicts a very personal relationship with God, beginning with the recitation of “God of Abraham, God of Sarah,” etc.—it is phrased in this way so that we know that each of the ancestors had his/her own particular relationship with God, as do we. Godly power is described in terms of acts of lovingkindness, protection and help.

2) *Gevurot*: The second blessing extols God’s *gevurah* (power—the word *gibor* comes from the same root). A key phrase is *mehayeh kol hay* (giving life to all living things). The essence of God’s power is that of life and death, of creation—in this way God is unique, for only God can create and sustain life. Another central theme of this blessing, especially important to a Reconstructionist understanding of God, is the way in which divinity is described in terms of Godly acts. We can find God in acts of compassion, in raising up those who have fallen, healing the sick, freeing those who are bound.

**Activity:** After chanting all or part of the opening blessings, leave time for a few minutes of silent meditation (you may or may not want the children to stand for this part). You can leave space for the students to think their own thoughts, or suggest a topic for them to meditate on for a few minutes:

1. What is something you really like about yourself that comes from your parents—a personality trait, or a way that they taught you to act?
2. I feel protected and safe when . . .

---

<sup>1</sup> “*Imahot*” is the modern Hebrew plural form of the word “*ima*” (mother). In *Kol Haneshamah*, the classical Hebrew form “*Imot*” is used, a parallel construction to the masculine “*Avot*.”



3. I would like to feel God's *gevurah*, God's power, in the coming week by having the strength or courage to . . .
4. What is most important to you in being a Jew? What makes you proud to be Jewish?
5. The Amidah tells us that we find God when people help each other, when a sick person is healed, when someone is able to do something they couldn't do before. Did you find God in any of these ways in the past week? Is there something you could do to help bring some Godliness into the world in the coming week?
6. Think of a special place or a special activity where/when you feel *kedushah*, holiness, God's presence.

After the meditation, you may want to let the students share a thought they had, in just a few words.

**Activity:** In addition to suggesting a topic for reflection, you can also lead the students through a guided meditation. Have them sit with their eyes closed and focus on their breathing as preparation for the meditation. See the chapter on Guided Meditation by Marilyn Price in this volume for specific meditations, or models to create your own.

**Activity:** The Amidah time can also be a space to let students share their thoughts and feelings about something particularly troublesome or wonderful that has happened in their family, in the community, in the wider society or in the world that week. After chanting the prayer and allowing some time for personal reflection, raise an issue and ask for people's thoughts, or ask if anyone is particularly concerned about something that has happened in the past week. At the end of the sharing, offer a prayer of hope, or of healing, or of peace, for the people/places affected.

- 3) Close the Amidah prayer by singing *Oseh Shalom*, the prayer for peace.

### COMMENTARY PAGE #3 (after the Amidah)

In a traditional service, a full Kaddish comes after the Amidah and before the Torah Service, marking the end of the morning prayers. The end of the Amidah is also traditionally a time to add one's own prayers to the set text of the *Shemonah Esreh*. In this space in our siddur is the final Commentary page. These pages have been left blank for any sort of creative project you might want to include, touching on themes of the Amidah or on prayer in general. The following are a few suggestions.

**Activity:** The Amidah includes a variety of portrayals of God and Godliness. Use the Commentary page to explore with the students their own notions of God. Harold Kushner suggests that by asking "when is God?" instead of "what is God?" we can help open up children's conceptions of divinity, moving away from personification. The idea of "when is God" can be found in the Amidah, where we hear about God in connection to sick people being healed, captive people being freed, etc. Ask the students to complete the phrase "God is when . . ." Each student can include his/her own ideas in the siddur, or a class list can be compiled and then put into everyone's siddur. Reading together the book *God's Paintbrush* is a nice way to introduce this exercise with younger children.

**Activity:** Discuss with the students how, in the Amidah, we pray both for ourselves and for our community, helping ourselves to imagine a much better world. Have the students draw a picture of their community or city as they imagine it in such a world—what would need to be better? Where would they be in such a world? Include these pictures on the Commentary page.

**Activity:** Most simply, use this space to allow the students to add whatever they want to their own siddur—a picture, a collage, a poem, a commentary on their favorite prayer, a letter to God.

## D. TORAH SERVICE

The siddur includes a simple framework for Torah study, in lieu of a full Torah service. It begins with the traditional blessing for Torah study, and concludes with the singing of "*Etz hayim hi*." Two other songs are also included, as alternative beginnings and/or endings: "*Yisrael Ve'orayta*" and "It is a Tree of Life" (by Jeff Klepper). This part of the service can be used for any kind of teaching or story-telling. The following activities are all suggestions for teaching the *parashat hashavuah*, the weekly Torah portion.

**Activity:** Summarize a key story or teaching from the *parashat hashavuah*, and have a short discussion.

**Activity:** If the service occurs **after** class time: either together as a school or in separate classes, pose one question related to the *parashat hashavua* or to another aspect of Jewish teaching that the students are studying. The answers that students come up with to this question can then become the basis of a discussion during the Torah Service.

**Activity:** There are a number of ways to involve the children dramatically in the exploration of a Torah story. As you tell the story, ask the students what a particular character might have been feeling at a given moment; have different people give their answers. You can then pick a few students to act out the characters in the Biblical drama, playing out the feelings that they suggested. You can "freeze" the action at any given moment, and bring someone else up to play a role, or to "double" one of the characters, adding a new voice or perspective while the first "actor" stays frozen.

This is a good opportunity to ask the children about characters that we don't hear from in the Torah text itself--often the women and children especially are silent. Did Sarah know Abraham was taking Isaac to be sacrificed? What did she think? Where were Moses' wife Zipporah and their sons when Moses went back to free the Israelites? What was Esau thinking all those years that Jacob was away? What was Miriam doing while Moses was up on the mountain? etc.

**Activity:** Create a visual *midrash* on a Torah story. Pose a question about a story--something that is left unexplained, or a verse that can be understood in two different ways, or ask the students to imagine themselves inside a story at a particular moment--and then have them create an "answer" by way of a picture.

## E. CLOSING PRAYERS

### 1. ALEynu

A major theme of the Aleynu prayer is *tikun olam*, the repair of the world (in the prayer we find the words *letaken olam bemalhut Shaday*, "to repair the world under the rule of God"). The dominant image in the prayer is of all the people of the world turning to Godly ways, so that all evil disappears.

What does it mean to praise God? To work for a world where everyone lives together in peace, where no one is suffering! God will be One when all people are able to live together in peace.

In the Reconstructionist version of the Aleynu, we have removed the words referring to Jews and Judaism as placed above other peoples and traditions. We have our own, special path to God and holiness—represented by the Torah—but there are other holy paths. The vision of a perfect world is not one in which all people share our religion, but one in which everyone is working for the good by “calling on” God in ways which promote love, peace and justice.

**Activity:** Before reciting the Aleynu, ask the students to share—in just a few words—their vision of a perfect world. What is one bad thing that would not exist in such a world? What do we hope will come soon to our world? What is one thing each of us can do in the coming week to make our world a little bit better?

## 2. REMEMBERING THOSE WHO HAVE DIED

The Mourner’s Kaddish included in the siddur provides an opportunity to teach about the tradition of *yarzheit*, remembering every year the day on which someone in our family or someone else close to us died. If a student has recently lost someone important (or a beloved pet), this can be an opportunity for him/her to share a little bit about that person, maybe telling a favorite memory, or something special s/he did with that person (or pet).

## 3. CLOSING SONGS

The siddur includes a few songs to choose from to close the service; some are Shabbat songs and some are more general. Please add additional songs!



## F. The Mini-Siddur





## Introduction to the Mini-Siddur

Joseph M. Blair

The mini-siddur included in this volume was “test-driven” at the 1995 JRF (formerly FRCH) convention. Based on comments and feedback there, it has been modified to some degree. It is not a complete siddur: it was not intended to be. Instead, it is a skeleton, or framework structure upon which **you**, the user, are to build. The idea is to use this siddur a starting point, then to add to it, modify, fix it, personalize it, perform *hidur mitzvah* (beautification of the mitzvah) on it, and otherwise make it your own. For that reason, it does not include readings: you and your students will find readings you think appropriate, or better, write such readings for insertion and use in your services. We invite you also to add commentary, *derashes*, *kavanot*, and additional, original artwork.

This is the opportunity for your class to demonstrate creativity! Let them explore and grow in this area. Incorporate the projects and activities suggested in this volume, and create extremely personal and meaningful siddurim for each student. What better way to recall what has been learned than to have at the end of the year the product of their own efforts?

So remember that this is only a starting point, and make it the beginning of a wonderful journey!





## A Kol Haneshamah Mini-Siddur: The Contents

Toba Spitzer

This outline of the prayers included in the mini-siddur includes the corresponding page numbers in *Kol Haneshamah*. All English translations are my adaptations, unless otherwise noted.

### **BIRHOT HASHAHAR AND PESUKEY DEZIMRAH**

*Mah Tov*, page 141

Morning Blessings, pages 153-161; translation as in *Kol Haneshamah*

*Barukh She 'amar*, pages 177-178; interpretative translation by Janowitz and Wenig, page 177

Shabbat Psalms: Psalm 92, page 211; Psalm 121, page 215

Psalm 150, page 231

Commentary

### **THE SHEMA AND ITS BLESSINGS**

*Barehu* and *Yotzer Or*, page 247; "As We Bless the Source of Life," by Faith Rogow, page 246; excerpt from prayer attributed to Nahman of Bratzlav, page 762

*Ahavah Rabah* (excerpts), pages 273 and 275

The Shema, pages 277 and 285; translation as in *Kol Haneshamah*

*Ge'ulah*/Redemption, English, page 290, and Hebrew, page 291

Commentary

### **THE AMIDAH**

*Avot/Imot* and *Gevurot*, pages 295, 297, 299

*Oseh Shalom*, page 323

Commentary

## TORAH STUDY

Blessing for Torah Study, page 169

*Etz Hayim Hi*, page 441

Songs (not in *Kol Haneshamah*): Yisrael V'Oraita, It is a Tree of Life

## CONCLUDING PRAYERS AND SONGS

*Aleynu* (excerpts), pages 445, 447, 449

Song: "And Then," words by Judy Chicago, music by Margot Stein Azen

Mourner's Kaddish, pages 450-451; translation as in *Kol Haneshamah*

*Adon Olam*, pages 458-459; translation as in *Kol Haneshamah*

*Eyn Kelohenu*, pages 442-443, translation as in *Kol Haneshamah*

*Mah Yafeh Hayom*, page 828, translation as in *Kol Haneshamah*

*Eli, Eli*, page 839, words by Hannah Szenes (translation, as in *Kol Haneshamah*, can be sung to same tune as the Hebrew)

## Family *Davening* Activities<sup>1</sup>

Jeffrey Eisenstat

### *MAH TOVU*

- A) Creating our tents—each family spreads a *tallit* over their heads to create the sense of a tent.
- B) While singing *Mah Tov*, adults hold a large *tallit* like a *kupah* so that children can walk through the “tent.”
- C) Using crepe paper, each family unit creates their own tent and leaves it up throughout the service.
- D) Discuss the following questions: What is your home like? If you had a tent during the times of tribal Israel, what would it be like? What are the special elements of your home today and what would you want to have in your biblical tent?

### *BIRHOT HASHAHAR*

- A) Chant the blessings in Hebrew and English.
- B) Divide up the blessings so that each family will act out one individual blessings of the morning.

### *PESUKEY DEZIMRAH*

#### **PSALM 145—ASHREY**

- A) Discuss the concept of an alphabetical acrostic, as demonstrated in the *Ashrey* prayer (pages 428-431).
- B) Make an acrostic listing of the things you want for your family, from A to Z.
- C) Use your family name for acrostic words that represent your family. Use Jerusalem, Israel, Havurah/Congregational name, etc.

#### **PSALM 150—KOL HANESHAMAH**

- A) Review the different musical instruments of the psalm and ask family members who play which instruments. As that phrase appears those members will play in the Temple band.

### **SHEMA AND ITS BLESSINGS**

#### ***BAREHU***

- A) Explain the reasoning for bowing. Families may create some other movement for this blessing, e.g., a circle with arms around each other to represent community.

---

<sup>1</sup>These creative suggestions for using the mini-siddur were developed and implemented in a “test-run” of the mini-siddur at the JRF Convention in Florida in 1995. The activities were used again by Jeffrey Schein and Steve Booth with the families of Kehillat Israel in March 1996.

**YOTZER**

- A) Discuss: What are the things that you have created as a family?
- B) List some projects of the coming year that you would like to create together.

**AHAVAH RABAH**

- A) Read together the second paragraph of the prayer, beginning with *veha'er eyneynu* (light up our eyes). Imagine that our eyes could not see. How would we use our other senses to compensate?
- B) What are ways we should be considerate of those members of our community who have visual disabilities?
- C) Read together the last paragraph of the prayer, focusing on the phrase, "*Mey arba kanfot ha'aretz* (from the four corners of the earth)." On what part of the earth does your family live? With a map, place stickers on the cities and regions of the world where your family lives and where they came from.

**SHEMA**

- A) Listening is important in our tradition. What about those who are hearing impaired, and cannot hear the words of the Shema?
- B) Teach the signing of the Shema (page 17).

**VE'AHAVTA**

- A) Discuss: What are ways that kids love parents and parents love kids? How is this like God's love?
- B) What does it mean to do something with all your soul and all your breath? Use all of your breath in reciting each of the words of the Shema. What does breathing and chanting feel like in this important prayer?
- C) Discuss the phrase, "*Veshinantam levaneha*" (Teach them to your children—line 3). What is something that you learned from your parents? What is something you learned from your children?
- D) Find the phrase, "*Ukshartam le'ot*" (Bind them as a sign—line 4). Strap crepe paper on your arm and your head, like *tefillin*. For the arm, list ways in which you use your physical strength. For the head, list ways in which you use your mind.
- E) Find the phrase, "*Uktavtam al mezuzot beyteha*" (Inscribe them on the doorposts of your house—line 5). Fold a large sheet of paper in half. On one side, make a list of all the items a visitor to your home would see that would show it is a Jewish home. On the opposite side, make a list of all the Jewish values that are in your home and how these are displayed.

**GE'ULAH****MI HAMOHA**

- A) This is a prayer that represents great triumph. Discuss the times in your life when you have overcome adversity and triumphed.
- B) Have adults stand on opposite sides as kids walk through center singing the *Mi Hamoha*. What does it feel like to walk through the water of the Red Sea?

**AMIDAH*****AVOT VE'IMOT***

- A) Name one thing that you appreciated this past week from your parents. Parents mention one thing they appreciated from their kids.
- B) Mention someone who was a great teacher and model in your life

**BLESSING FOR HEALING**

- A) Sing the Debbie Friedman *Mi Sheberah* and her song of Raphael and Gabriel.
- B) Was there a time when you or someone you love was in need of healing? What were the things that helped?

**PRAYER FOR THE STATE OF ISRAEL**

- A) Discuss the importance of "land." Remember a place outside the home that was beautiful and meaningful place for you as a family. Draw a picture of this space.
- B) How is the land of Israel a special place for your family?



and for all who dwell on earth

ועל כל יושבי תכל

ועל כל ישראל

ועל כל

**שלום**

Shalom

ועל כל יושבי תכל

ועל כל ישראל

ועל כל

and for all who dwell on earth





## An Experience in Adult Jewish Learning: Exploring Prayer in *Kol Haneshamah*

Jeffrey Schein

*This article follows the path that the Reconstructionist Havurah of Cleveland took to incorporate adult learning into its activities. Also included in the article is a specific plan of action and studies which can be used by most havurot.*

### EVOLUTION

The Reconstructionist Havurah of Cleveland was formed in November of 1992 and had several years of holiday celebration and adult learning under its belt when it began praying as a community for the High Holidays of 5755 (1994). At the same time, monthly *Kabalat Shabbat* services using *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Eve* began.

In December of 1994, Dr. Lois Zachary came to our havurah and offered a seminar on "Jewish Learning Journeys." She presented several case studies which will be included in a forthcoming book. The studies were linked by a common theme—the importance of adult learning in the lives of Jews who had intensified their Jewish living. Lois' seminar gave us the opportunity to take stock of our own adult learning needs and provided the impetus for creating the course detailed below.

### OUR NEEDS

Several things became clear as the havurah worked with Lois:

- 1) The group missed the regularly-scheduled adult learning which we had done twice a month in the early days of the havurah.<sup>2</sup> Our 5755 (1994-95) adult learning was more sporadic, because we had planned our sessions as preparations for holiday celebrations. As each holiday approached, we would explore a chapter from Mordecai Kaplan's *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*.
- 2) When havurah members described their best Jewish learning experiences, there was a clear division within the group. Some members felt that lay-led sessions with the characteristic informality and feeling of shared quest made these some of their best adult learning experiences. Others were impatient with lay-led groups that felt to them like "the blind leading the blind."
- 3) After all, we were a group with limited resources. We wanted simply to enjoy the friendship of other havurah members, to celebrate Jewish life together, and to keep learning and growing Jewishly. We didn't have time to create a separate venue for each need, neatly bound in a package for each havurah member.

---

<sup>2</sup>We had studied *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach* by Rebecca T. Alpert and Jacob J. Staub (Reconstructionist Press, 1985).

## THE PLANNING RESPONSE

I tried to think about these three havurah challenges in the context of two more needs:

- 1) Solidification of the havurah's knowledge base and identification of the group as Reconstructionist.
- 2) The need to increase the centrality of prayer in our life together. (We anticipated five *benay mitzvah*, a conversion, and five—rather than our usual two—high holiday services.)

In a pure, rational planning model like those of Ralph Tyler and other curriculum scholars, these five issues would have been enough to have led to the course described below. But in truth there were—as always—some personal needs catalyzing the whole process. In my case, the needs were both personal and professional.

My professional need was to create another chapter about adult Jewish learning for our educators' guide to *Kol Haneshamah*. Personally, I was tired of trying to fit havurah study into my own crazy schedule. Whether we meet on Sunday afternoon or a weekday afternoon, havurah study—even when I was simply a participant—felt equally intrusive (even when the sessions were terrific). Ah, but if the study was on Shabbat . . . Well, my wife, Deborah, and I are always looking for a way to fill Shabbat with good Jewish stuff. Besides if we could “study” later on Shabbat afternoon and after *shul*, there would be less of a reason to do un-*shabbasdik* errands before dinner and *havdalah*.

Somehow the chemistry—or more accurately, alchemy—of all these needs mixing together led to my proposing a course titled “Prayer, *Havdalah*, and Dinner: Tasting the Fruits of Shabbat.” Havurah leaders responded enthusiastically, agreeing that the course was a way to respond to the challenges that had emerged at Lois Zachary's seminar. The leaders added one final feature to the course: free child-care during these sessions. Leadership sensed that some of our newer members had young children and would not join our adult learning community without some extra support.

### PRAYER, HAVDALAH, AND DINNER: TASTING THE FRUITS OF SHABBAT

The sessions were slotted for the six *Shabbatot* in March through May that I was free. Each of these Shabbat afternoons was structured as follows:

- 1) 3:30-5:15 – study time;
- 2) 5:15 p.m. for *havdalah* with the children<sup>3</sup>;

---

<sup>3</sup>We made use of a Reconstructionist opportunity to set our clocks anthropologically rather than cosmologically for *havdalah*; this would end Shabbat for all of our participants);

3) Following *havdalah*, we would go out to dinner together at a different restaurant each week.

The study sessions were broken into two parts; part one was lay-led and part two was led by a professional Jewish educator (me). In preparation for part one, a havurah member selected an article or several articles on prayer from *Reconstructionism Today* or *The Reconstructionist* journal. The articles were distributed to participants prior to the study session in the hope that they would read the material in advance. At the study session, the havurah member who selected the article would facilitate a discussion on the topic. Generally, the discussions focused on matters of *kavanah* (spiritual intent and focus). This enabled lay leaders to draw upon their own experience and spirituality.

For the second part of the session, I led a study of a section of *Kol Haneshamah* related to the articles at hand. In a sense, I took more responsibility for leading study around matters of *keva* (fixed prayer) for which detailed knowledge of the siddur was required, while lay leaders focused on *kavanah*.

Both the macro-structure of the experience and the micro-structure of the study segment of the program should be viewed through the lenses of the havurah needs discussed above. The overall structure of the program was to say *elu, ve'elu, ve'elu* (these, and these, **and these**)— learning, ritual, and social needs of the learners are important. The division between issues of *keva* and *kavanah* was designed to balance the Reconstructionist concern with lay empowerment and the need for Jewish expertise.

## EVALUATION

In general, the course was very successful. Nearly 30 havurah members participated in these sessions and each purchased a copy of *Kol Haneshamah*. Participants voiced appreciation for the depth of the learning as well as the opportunity to combine the intellectual and social sides of the life of the havurah. Presumably will go into our more prayerful havurah next year with increased comfort, insight, and knowledge

## OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

### SESSION 1:

Readings: Selections from "Prayer Why? How?" in *Reconstructionism Today*, Spring, 1995.

"The Journey Towards Prayer: How Beautiful are Your Footsteps," Steve Sager<sup>4</sup>

Discussion: *Kol Haneshamah* Exploration: *Keva I: Matbe'ah Shel Tefilah* (Basic Structure of a Service).

---

<sup>4</sup>All articles listed here without other references are found in this volume

**SESSION 2: WHAT A DIFFERENCE A WORD MAKES.**

Readings: "Translating the Siddur," Joel Rosenberg.

Discussion: *Kol Haneshamah* Exploration: *Keva* II: Searching for Differences in *tefilah* for Shabbat and *hagim*.

**SESSION 3: THE "DEEP STRUCTURE/GRAMMAR" OF THE SIDDUR.**

Readings: Sheila Weinberg, "Commenting on the Commentary" and Steve Sager, "Linking Text and Heart: The Challenge of the Siddur" in *The Reconstructionist*, vol. 54, no. 3 (December, 1988).

Discussion: *Kol Haneshamah* Exploration: *Keva* III: Exploring the Commentaries of the Siddur.

**SESSION 4: BETWEEN KEVA AND KAVANAH: TRANSVALUATION AND INTERPRETATION**

Readings: David Teutsch, "Seeking God in the Siddur: Reflections on *Kol Haneshamah*."

Discussion: *Kol Haneshamah* Exploration: *Kavanah* I: Differences between *Kol Haneshamah* and the traditional siddur.

**SESSION 5: THE PROCESS OF MEANING MAKING IN *KOL HANESHAMAH***

Readings: Sid Schwarz, "Some Call it God"

Discussion: *Kol Haneshamah* Exploration: *Kavanah* II: Making the Old New, Searching for Transvaluations in *Kol Haneshamah* (utilizing Betsy Teutsch's illustrations in *Kol Haneshamah* as a basis for making our own midrash).

**SESSION 6: AT THE EDGES: THE BOUNDARIES AND PARAMETERS OF INTERPRETATION FOR THE "WONDERFULLY CREATIVE, YET DEEPLY TRADITIONAL SIDDUR"**

Readings: Tikvah Frymer-Kensky, "On Feminine God-talk" and Richard Hirsh, "Spirituality and the Language of Prayer" in *The Reconstructionist*, vol 59, no. 1 (Spring, 1994).

Discussion: *Kol Haneshamah* Exploration: *Kavanah* III: Making the New Holy.

**SESSION-BY-SESSION LESSON PLANS****SESSION 1**

- I. Hopes and Expectations for the Course
- II. Personal Sharing With the Group of an Intense (positive or negative) Prayer Experience (optional)
- III. *Derash*: The Nature of Prayer (*lehitpalel*) as Self-Reflection and Intercession  
But what if what is inside you is confused? Explore the possibility that *Kol Haneshamah* could be a kind of therapy for the Jewish soul. What do therapists do that's helpful? How could a therapist to the Jewish soul do the same?

IV. Exploring Articles from *Reconstructionism Today*<sup>5</sup>

(Read them aloud in session; these are short.) Which insights are most valuable and how can we begin to work with them?

## SESSION 2

- I. Facilitated Discussion on Steve Sager's article. Do we need maps for *tefilah* or do maps get in the way? Do we need to learn how to be lost?
- II. Translation in *Kol Haneshamah*
  - A. Bialik: Learning Judaism in another language is like kissing a bride through a veil. Is this so? If so, how can we make the veil more transparent? What is the role of good translation?
  - B. Joel Rosenberg's article from *The Reconstructionist*, Spring, 1994
    1. Discussion
    2. Examples of different types of changes from the traditional siddur
      - a. In the *Ahavah Rabah*, pages 274-276 of *Kol Haneshamah*, the translation of *komiyut* is an example of a minor but significant change.
      - b. The uses of God's names is a major kind of change.
      - c. Feminine voices in the readings is a third order of change.
- III. A Guided Overview of the Shabbat *Shakarit* Service (emphasis on the major divisions and the use of Kaddish as a marker of those divisions)

## SESSION 3

- I. *Keva* and its First Cousin, the *Matbe 'ah Shel Tefilah*
  - A. *Matbe 'ah* mistranslated as "fixed order"
  - B. Search for etymology of the root of "*matbe 'ah*" by passing out copies of entry for *teba-ah* in the *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature* by Marcus Jastrow. Semantic range includes "ring" and "royal seal." Indeed, the best understanding of the phrase *matbe 'ah shel tefilah* is as that which makes the service distinctive and recognizable, serving as its distinctive seal.
- II. Explore the differences between the "royal seals" of Shabbat and *Yom Tov*. Have people move into *levrutot* (study pairs) and compare paragraph by paragraph and prayer by prayer the "royal seals" of the Amidah of Shabbat (page 246) and Yom Tov (page 326). (Share first with one another and then with the group as a whole.) Focus on the impact that simple changes in wording can make in concepts. Note how these differences reflect the distinctive features of the holiday.

---

<sup>5</sup>You may purchase the course packet assembled for this class by sending a check for \$5.00 to Rabbi Jeffrey Schein in care of the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies, 26500 Shaker Blvd., Beachwood, OH 44122.

### III. Commentary in *Kol Haneshamah*

Facilitate discussion of articles by Sheila Peltz Weinberg and Steven Sager.

#### SESSION 4

##### I. Two Paths to Meaning in Prayer: Action and Words

- A. Action: discuss Sid Schwarz's article, "Some Call it God." How does one connect prayer values with our own words and experiences?
- B. Words: the importance of meaning them—examples and analysis of changes from the traditional prayerbook to the 1945 Reconstructionist Siddur (*Sabbath and Festival Prayerbook*) and now to *Kol Haneshamah*

##### II. Discussion: Exploring the differences between classical and contemporary Reconstructionist thought.

- A. Discuss Richard Hirsh's article, "New Thinking About God" in *The Reconstructionist*, Spring 1988. Where are the significant divergences between classical and contemporary Reconstructionist thought? Who is right and for whom?
- B. Read sections of David Teutsch's article, "Seeking God in the Siddur: Reflections on *Kol Haneshamah*" to sensitize the group to the complexity of the changes.

#### SESSION 5

##### I. Simulation: Changes in the Siddur: Is it Good or Bad for the Jews?

##### II. The Course, Me Now, and My Jewish Self in Relationship to Prayer (see *Gesher Vekesher*, vol. 4, no. 3 [October, 1995])

## The Next Step: Teaching Prayer to Adults

Sheryl Lewart Shulewitz

How often do Jewish adults ask to study prayer? A recent survey in a national magazine reported that of Americans who identify themselves with a religion, Jews are among those who least believe in God. Yet participants in Jewish, Alive & American, a thirty-week outreach class, asked to study prayer. The impetus for offering a substantive seminar teaching prayer to adults arose from their interest. Jewish, Alive & American, an intense seminar experience, is offered by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, with support from the Nathan Cummings Foundation. The seminar is designed for Jews who are looking for a way back into Judaism. Participants are attracted to Jewish, Alive & American (JA&A) because of its serious yet contemporary nature. JA&A offers an introduction to the process and experience of being Jewish in the late twentieth century.

Participants, mostly professional adults and couples ages 35-50, thoroughly enjoy encountering Judaism in an open and engaging environment. JA&A provides a road map for understanding the spiritual landscape through which we travel and provides basic map-reading skills. By the second year of JA&A's existence, it was clear that students wished to continue their spiritual journey together, having formed strong bonds during the thirty-week seminar series. As one participant put it "When I signed up, I thought thirty weeks would be much too long—but it isn't. I'm looking for more!"

Participants asked that the JA&A experience provide the basis for a new seminar, one that would serve as a forum for asking questions about ultimate meaning and mundane day-to-day reality. They felt drawn to explore prayer, to see if this central expression of Judaism could become part of their newly forming Jewish lives.

They wanted to encounter and experience prayer. Many students were beginning to explore synagogue affiliation. Their experiences with local suburban Philadelphia synagogues led them to question their own authenticity in Jewish communal prayer settings. They, the uninitiated, were uncomfortable. They wanted to enter the world of Jewish prayer in a safe and engaging way. The search was for a prayer experience that would be both meaningful and comfortable—the environment they had come to expect in a Jewish, Alive & American seminar.

Thus, Jewish, Alive & American: The Next Step was created. The seminar series presents nine weekly two-hour sessions on encountering prayer. The course is designed for those, already on a path of Jewish learning, who wish a substantive, personal and interactive seminar.

Building familiarity with certain central prayers and rituals quickly became a basic goal. Through repetition and exposure, students reached a level of comfort with difficult texts and unfamiliar rituals. Structuring more than half the seminars as "learning laboratory (lab)" experiences provided opportunities encouraging participants to unfold layers of meaning in prayer as they formed a relationship with the siddur, *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*.



The two required texts for the course are: *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*, and *Nashir Unevareh* (Reconstructionist Songs and Grace After Meals). For many students, these would be the first prayer books they ever owned.

Exploring the power of the siddur as a textbook is the second goal of The Next Step seminar. A sense of ownership of the siddur—as text—develops as students search out various assigned prayers. Flipping through the textbook to answer specific questions helps demystify the siddur as prayer book. At the same time, understanding a prayer book as a textbook pushes participants to explore the tension between studying prayer and experiencing prayer.

Understanding the order of a prayer service as reflected in the layout of the siddur is the third goal. To accomplish this goal, students explore the *matbe'ah* (the set order of prayer) looking for connections and themes. They learn the peaks and valleys of a Jewish prayer service, the fixed and the flexible, the communal and the individual.

A final goal is to establish connections between synagogue prayer and home prayer, communal prayer and personal prayer. As participants become increasingly familiar with the prayer service, they begin to enjoy leading parts of the Shabbat prayer service in communal settings (synagogue/havurah).

Students develop a sense of empowerment as they became more familiar with home Shabbat rituals as well. Home rituals encouraging family prayer (Shabbat and bedtime rituals) form another level of connection between synagogue and home observance.

A traditional mode of Jewish study, *hevruta*, is employed to empower participants to ask questions of the prayer or text and to share personal responses. Couples are encouraged to study with someone new, to explore a different study partnership in the seminar, and then share the experience with their spouse or partner at home. Each *hevruta* shared difficulties and insights with the class as a whole.

An overview of the nine-session seminar includes:

**Class 1: Language of Prayer**

Jewish prayer vocabulary  
Faith statement and surrounding blessings  
*Shema uvirkhotcha*

**Class 2: Charting the Essentials**

Order of Friday Eve service  
*Matbe'ah Erev Shabbat*  
*Shema uvirkhotcha*

**Class 3: In the company of Angels (lab)**

*Erev Shabbat at home*  
Kiddush

**Class 4: More Essential Charting**

Order of Shabbat Morning Service

*Matbe 'ah Shakarit shel Shabbat*Songs of Praise/*Pesukey Dezimrah***Class 5: Unlocking the Heart**

Order of Standing Prayer/Amidah

**Class 6: Torah as Symbol (lab)***Aliyah***Class 7: Sacred Boundaries (lab)**

Separation/sacred space

*Havdalah***Class 8: Personal Dedication (lab)**

Hanukah

**Class 9: Turning Inward (lab)**

Meditative prayer

Personal prayer

Each seminar session begins and ends with communal prayer. The *berahah* (blessing) for Torah Study opens each session and *Kaddish Derabanan*, the prayer for those who study, closes each session. Often, specially chosen *kavanot* (focus for prayer) are included. Thus studying about prayer is wrapped in prayer.

Of all the sessions, those with lab experiences seem to be the most powerful. Of them all, the seminar on Torah was especially moving for instructor as well as participants. An overview of the class on Torah as Symbol warrants further discussion. To facilitate the choreography of the Torah service, we brought a Torah into the seminar room. The Torah evoked a charged sense of expectation and connection into the seminar. So powerful was the presence of a *sefer* Torah, the class stopped to don *tallitot* and *kipot*.

A discussion opened the session exploring personal responses to the Torah as symbol. Students were encouraged to share childhood associations and personal stories. The class then did *hevruta* study looking at the text on pages 384-5—“*Vayehi binso 'ah ha'aron*”—exploring the theme of journey. Questions were raised about the primacy of Torah for Jews, the journeying of the Torah, what a spiritual journey meant. Together as a class the discussion continued about feelings and traditional behaviors around the Torah, for example, what kissing a sacred symbol might mean.

Next, each participant had the opportunity to practice having an *aliyah*. Some participants, who had no idea of their Hebrew names, chose new names so that they could be included in the formulaic

calling up of a person for an *aliyah*. The act of naming themselves proved to be an important rite of passage for participants. Everyone practiced the blessings. They moved through the orchestration around the open scroll, sensing a pull never to leave the Torah unattended.

Students practiced the socialization rituals—shaking the hand of the *gabai*, waiting until the next person is called up before moving to the other side of the reader's table. They returned to the seminar congratulating each other as they learned the traditional words, *yashir koah* (go on in strength).

The class closed with everyone receiving a *mi sheberah*, a blessing before the Torah. The meaning of a *mi sheberah* was discussed. Actually giving and receiving one provided a very powerful moment for all participants. As participants folded their *tallitot*, many of them expressed feelings of validation as Jews. They indicated they would be attending a Shabbat morning service soon, hoping to be honored with an *aliyah*, “now that it's not so scary,” admitted more than one student amid a good deal of laughter and joking.

One other class merits further discussion. The last class, Turning Inward, was personally important for many participants. This class is a practicum, devoting considerable space to the “how to's” of making prayer part of a daily life routine. Preparations for prayer at home centered the opening discussion. We debated when and where and what to pray. Opening oneself to the spiritual and emotional dimensions of prayer required some scheduling. Participants discussed ways to try and structure a bit of time for prayer on a daily basis. Echoes in the liturgy of morning's freshness in the preparatory prayer section of *Kol Haneshamah* was referenced as was the statement in the Talmud (b.Ber 17a), that for prayer “a room with windows open to the world is preferable.”

Next we looked at models of personal prayer. The class was excited to note that the closing section of the Amidah in *Kol Haneshamah* reflects an alternate choice of personal prayer. The concluding meditation on page 352 was discussed as an opportunity for personal and private prayer. To reinforce the idea that personal prayer belongs in the prayer service we also looked at the section on additions at the end of the Amidah printed in *The Second Jewish Catalog*, as well as the short Amidah on page 730 and alternative Amidot in *Kol Haneshamah*.

We looked at evening prayer as a time not only for personal prayer, but as family prayer. The section in *Kol Haneshamah: Shirim Uvrahot* provided the text. Shared memories of childhood prayers or the longing for such an experience provided moments of real closeness.

The need for spiritual rest as well as physical rest was discussed. We explored the traditional idea of studying the Shema as a way of reaching spiritual rest. We deepened our awareness of the *Hashkivenu* and the commentary below the line on pages 82-3. To achieve physical rest, we discussed the traditional blessing recited before going to sleep, *Birkat Hamapil*.

We returned to the need for preparation for prayer and asked ourselves the question, “why is *Kol Haneshamah* so large?” We talked about “prayer before prayer,” and participants shared different pieces that seemed to speak to them as personal preparation for prayer.

Finally we discussed blessings as prayers—as moments of prayer sprinkled throughout our day. We decided saying “Wow” is a form of prayer, a contemporary way to acknowledge a greater power in our lives. Finally we learned together the generic “*shehakol hehakol bidvaro*” blessing to get us through the day. (Blessed are You O holy One, everything exists by your Word.)

While *Kol Haneshamah* was our basic text, we became each other’s texts as well. Personal reactions and shared memories lent a seriousness and intensity to this seminar. The participants hope to continue to study together. Many of them have found a way to make prayer a part of their Jewish lives.



## An Exploration of Innovations in the Shabbat Morning Service

Amy J. Levenson

The publication of *Shabbat Vehagim* heralded a whole new world for both experienced and novice *daveners*. Many of us, who have been using it since 1994, have found ourselves awed and fascinated by the many thoughtful and creative changes from other liturgies which we have used before. Yet, even to the trained eye, the number and complexity of the innovations in this siddur are not fully apparent until careful study focuses us on the nature of the text.

In order to access the meaning of the changes and innovations in the liturgy, therefore, the following questions can be asked of each case:

1. What does this change contribute to your experience of prayer?
2. Is this a major or a minor change?
3. How are these changes addressed in other contemporary siddurim?
4. Does this change reflect your own understanding of Judaism?  
Why or why not?  
What do you think the original authors would say about this change?
5. How is this the same or different from the 1945 Reconstructionist version and why?
6. In instances where *Kol Haneshamah* provides choices, how will you shape the *davening* and why?
7. What can make this prayer real and important in your own life experience?

A complete understanding of the Reconstructionist approach to the liturgy could best be accomplished by starting with a thorough study of the traditional prayers; their structures and the evolution of the siddur. This background can be found in numerous studies of the liturgy, such as *Blessed Are You* by Jeffrey Cohen. Such a study can help the learner to anticipate the stumbling blocks which may have prompted and informed the discussions within the Prayerbook Commission and the Editorial Committee.

In essence, the goal of this section of the guide is to provide a format and some tools for inquiring about the changes in the liturgy. The learner can apply these questions, which address ideology, belief and experience, to the technical presentation of the prayers, readings and services presented in *Kol Haneshamah*. For an example of the type of analysis discussed here, see the article "Comparing Texts: An Exercise" by Joseph Blair.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Rabbi Levenson is currently working on a revision of sections of *Reaching Into Prayer* that will provide more concrete examples of this kind of analysis. It will be distributed to purchasers of this volume without charge.



## Comparing Texts: An Exercise

Joseph M. Blair

### CHANGES IN THE *AMIDOT*: FROM TRADITIONAL TEXT TO *KOL HANESHAMAH*

The purpose of this article is to lay out an exercise that can be used effectively in the classroom to reinforce what has been taught. It is useful with both older students (grades six and up) and adults.

This type of exercise helps the students to master the text, to become familiar with the changes from a traditional text that were made in the *Kol Haneshamah* series, and to practice their Hebrew literacy skills.

I have chosen to use as my example a comparison of the Shabbat *Amidot* as the focus of this exercise. Using this text is particularly fruitful, I believe, because the Amidah is central to all prayer services, and there are significant changes among *Amidot* in the three daily services, and among the daily, Shabbat and *Yom Tov* versions. This provides a text with a large amount of change within itself, as well as between the traditional and *Kol Haneshamah* versions.

For a traditional text of the Shabbat *Amidot*, you may choose to use Artscroll, Birnbaum, the Rabbinical Assembly, Silverman, Hirsch, Rinat Yisra'el, or any of dozens of other texts, any one of which will do. I have tried to list the changes that were made in the Shabbat *Amidot* for all three services. I do not claim that this is a complete or exhaustive list: it is what I found in going over the texts fairly quickly.

**The Exercise:** Give the students a copy of the text you select. Have them compare this text to the appropriate version in *Kol Haneshamah*. The goal is to find all differences, give the different meanings that are presented in the two versions, try to identify if this is a change in wording or in substance, and explain why they think the change was made. You may find that this exercise goes most smoothly if the students work in pairs.

This kind of exercise is effective for comparing the versions of the Amidah found in each of the three daily services and in each of the three Shabbat services. One might also compare the Amidah for Shabbat with the daily or *Yom Tov* Amidah or compare these *Kol Haneshamah* versions with their counterparts in other siddurim. It is clearly a rich exercise, and one that will significantly reinforce what has been taught, leading to greater mastery and comfort level for the students.

**Suggested Activity:** Have the students read the traditional version of the *Shaharit* Amidah in English and Hebrew paragraph by paragraph. Compare this to the version found in *Kol Haneshamah*. Ask the students to find the differences, analyze them, and then to discuss the reasons for them.



**Suggested Activity:** You may try to incorporate an examination of the changes in *musah* (tune), in manner of presentation (recitation aloud versus silently, using a *heha kedushah* approach, etc.), and in community versus alone (with a *minyan* or less).

In looking for differences in other places in *Kol Haneshamah* from other more traditional texts, follow a procedure similar to the one that I have outlined here. Remember that a word for word examination is necessary, and it is an exacting process to catch all of the changes. The educational value of this type of exercise, however, is well worth it. It provides familiarity with the text on both memory/familiarity and on cognitive levels. Students feel far greater mastery of the material when they have reviewed it more than once in this much detail, and the comparisons necessarily involve going over the material several times at a minimum (no less than once for each version compared). Because of the exacting nature of the exercise, however, I strongly recommend that this exercise be used sparingly, and the various comparisons, if used, spread out over a period of time.

**Teacher's Aid:** As a beginning, I have tried to identify the changes in the Shabbat *Amidot* for a traditional text and the *Kol Haneshamah* version, so that the instructor will have a starting point for evaluating the students' performance.

In examining the *Shaharit* service Amidah, found in *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*, on page 294, the following changes from the version found in the Artscroll series are noted.

1. *Avot*: Inclusion of *imahot* (mothers),<sup>1</sup> Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel.
2. *Avot*: Inclusion of *ezrat Sarah* (help of Sarah).
3. *Gevurot*: Change of *mehayeh metim* (resurrection of the dead) to *kol hay* (All life) and removal of *mehayeh metim atah* from the first line.
4. *Gevurot*: Inclusion of both *tal* (dew) and *geshem* (rain).
5. *Kedushat Hashem*: Removal of *al yadey David mashiah tzidkeha* (by David your righteous anointed) before *Yimloh*.
6. *Kedushat Hayom*: Replacement of the first paragraph (*Yismah Moshe*) with another paragraph (*Ashreynu mah tov*).
7. *Kedushat Hayom*: Replacement of the *Velo natato* (You did not give) paragraph with the *Yismehu* paragraph in *Kedushat Hayom*.
8. *Kedushat Hayom*: Addition of *imoteynu*.
9. *Kedushat Hayom*: Addition of the word *kol*(all) before *Yisra'el*.
10. *Avodah*: removal of the middle of the first sentence (*Uvetefilatam vehasev et....ve 'ishay Yisra'el*, referring to the restoration of sacrifice in the Temple), and addition of *velahav* in its place.
11. *Birkat Hashalom*: The removal in the first sentence of the priestly blessing introduction (*Behol eyt uvehol sha'ah bishlomehah*).

---

<sup>1</sup> "Imahot" is the modern Hebrew plural form of the word "ima" (mother). In *Kol Haneshamah*, the classical Hebrew form "Imot" is used, a parallel construction to the masculine "Avot."

12. *Hoda'ah*: Addition of *Imoteynu*.
13. *Birkat Hashalom*: Change of last sentence and *hatimah* of *Sim Shalom*.
14. Replacement of *Elohay Netzor* with *Ribono Shel Olam* for Concluding Meditation, and addition of *yoshvey teyvel* to the last line of *Oseh Shalom*.
15. Complete elimination of *Musaf* service.

I performed the same analysis for the Shabbat *Minhah* Amidah found on Page 488, *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*.

1. *Avot*: Inclusion of *imahot*, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel.
2. *Avot*: Inclusion of *ezrat Sarah* (help of Sarah).
3. *Gevurot*: Change of *mehayeh metim* (resurrection of the dead) to *kol hay* (all life) and removal of *mehayeh metim atah* from first line.
4. *Gevurot*: Inclusion of both *tal* (dew) and *geshem* (rain).
5. *Kedushat Hayom*: Addition of *imoteynu*.
6. *Kedushat Hayom*: *Veyamuhu vah kol* (And let them rest on it) changed from *Veyamuhu vam* (And let all of them rest on it).
7. *Kedushat Hayom*: Replacement of the second sentence with a new one.
8. *Avodah*: removal of the middle of the first sentence (*Uvetefilatam vehasev et....ve'ishay Yisra'el*, referring to the restoration of sacrifice in the Temple), and addition of *velahav* in its place.
9. *Hoda'ah*: Addition of *imoteynu*.
10. *Birkat Hashalom*: Change of *hatimah* from "the people Israel" to "the one who makes peace."
11. *Birkat Hashalom*: Addition of words *vekol yoshvey teyvel* (and all who dwell on earth).

The same analysis for the Shabbat *Ma'ariv* Amidah, found on Page 90, *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim* focuses on the following changes.

1. *Avot*: Inclusion of *imahot*, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel.
2. *Avot*: Inclusion of *ezrat Sarah* (help of Sarah).
3. *Gevurot*: Change of *mehayeh metim* (resurrection of the dead) to *kol hay* (all life) and removal of *mehayeh metim atah* from first line.
4. *Gevurot*: Inclusion of both *tal* (dew) and *geshem* (rain).
5. *Kedushat Hayom*: *Veyamuhu vah kol* (And let them rest on it) changed from *Veyamuhu vam* (And let all of them rest on it).
6. *Avodah*: removal of the middle of the first sentence (*Uvetefilatam vehasev et....ve'ishay Yisra'el*, referring to the restoration of sacrifice in the Temple), and addition of *velahav*.
7. *Hoda'ah*: Addition of *imoteynu*.
8. *Birkat Hashalom*: Change of *hatimah* from "the people Israel" to "the one who makes peace."
9. *Birkat Hashalom*: Addition of words *vekol yoshvey teyvel* (and all who dwell on earth).

10. Concluding Meditation: *Elohay Netzor* is changed, with a large part of the traditional version removed, and a new second paragraph inserted.
11. The paragraph that follows the traditional *Elohay Netzor* about rebuilding the Temple is removed from *Kol Haneshamah*.
12. *Magen Avot*: *mehayey metim* is changed to *kol hay*, the *imoteynu* are added, and as in *Kedushat Hayom*, the word *kol* (all) is added in *veyamuhu vah kol*.

This list is not exhaustive, but it gives an example of the type of changes that can be identified.

#### IV. Using the Siddur





## Schools and Congregations as Supportive Environments: Making Room for Children and Families to Pray

Jeffrey L. Schein

Children and families need specially crafted communal contexts to have meaningful prayer experiences. Since most North American Jewish children and families find their formative prayer experiences in congregations and supplementary religious schools, these institutions need to provide creative opportunities for Jewish prayer.

Several exemplary North American Jewish communities have successfully created supportive prayer environments. These successes ought to be made accessible and emulated or adapted by other congregations seeking to strengthen prayer in the lives of their children and families. I asked several rabbis and educators to respond to the following survey: "Creating the Culture for Effective and Meaningful Jewish Prayer."

### SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What contexts has your school/congregation created that allow children to become their own *davening* (prayer) community?
2. In what ways have you tried to integrate children into the *davening* life of the adult/congregational community?
3. Describe several of your most successful programs in regard to either of the above.
4. How would you describe the major obstacles to creating a *davening* community?
5. What kinds of special teamwork are required between professionals (or between professionals and lay leaders) in order to initiate these programs?
6. There are different models for incorporating students into the prayer life of the congregation. Three possible models are:
  - A. Students individually are invited to lead prayers as they master them
  - B. The class as a whole does "Fourth Grade Shabbat"
  - C. The class leads the congregation in sections that correlate with their Hebrew and prayer studies
 Of these, which do you prefer? Are there better alternatives, in your judgement?
7. What special contexts have been created for family prayer?
8. Every institution has constraints as well as potentials. If the restraints of your institution in regard to prayer were temporarily suspended, what would you be doing as educational leaders to create effective and meaningful *davening* communities?

## THE RESPONSES

The following is an interpretive summary of the responses we received from three congregations in the JRF/Covenant Cooperating Schools Network and one Conservative Congregation.<sup>2</sup> Readers will glean most from the interpretive summary if they have carefully read the explanation and survey questions above. Our summary combines the responses to questions 1 through 4 and presents them as a series of suggestions; some include expanded commentary. Since question 8 did not lead to the extensive kind of "dreaming and wish list" that we had hoped for when we created the survey, the responses to this question are not presented here.

### INTERPRETIVE SUMMARY

#### QUESTIONS 1-4: Meaningful Contexts, Successful Programs, and Challenges of Integrating School and Congregation

Collectively, our respondents find the following ideas useful for facilitating effective *davening* experiences for children and families.

1. Carving out a period of the religious school day for *davening* (*Minhah* for weekday afternoons; *Shaharit* for Shabbat and Sunday).
2. Creating *davening* communities within the school according to age divisions (e.g., ages five to seven and six to nine).
3. Family and Tot-Shabbat *davening* opportunities—sometimes replacing regular Friday night services, sometimes preceding the usual service.
4. Scheduling of critical grades (particularly sixth and seventh) to meet on Shabbat and be part of the religious life of the institution. (One religious school reported that their students were assigned to alternate their attendance between the main congregational service and the library *minyán*. The educators expected that this would help students develop an understanding of Jewish pluralism.)
5. High holiday responsibilities for older children (leading services for younger children or reading Torah).
6. New contexts such as Shabbat in the park and havurah-style Shabbat services in congregants' homes.
7. *Shabbatonim* and retreats.
8. "Grade Shabbats" in which a particular grade in the religious school takes responsibility for leading services for the congregation.

---

<sup>2</sup>Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation in Evanston, Illinois; Ramat Shalom in Plantation, Florida; Kehillat Israel in Pacific Palisades, California; and the Conservative congregation, B'nai Jeshurun, in Cleveland, Ohio.

A few of our rabbis and educators perceived a potential downside to these otherwise heralded “grade Shabbats.” One rabbi/educator team strongly believes that a “grade Shabbat” is an invitation (however inadvertant) to the rest of the congregation not to attend services. These educators are concerned that the religious school can “privatize” services in the same way that the bar/bat mitzvah can unintentionally disinvite regular *daveners* to Shabbat morning services.

The concerns and tensions regarding the relationship of the school to the congregation run very deep. One rabbi and educator describe their attempts to create a more organic relationship between the two. They indicate that the demographics of prayer community is itself an issue. Most of the more committed *daveners* in congregations are either senior adults or adults whose children have already become bar/bat mitzvah and/or confirmed. On the surface, and in theory, these committed *daveners* might recognize that it takes a whole community to raise a Jewish child. But in practice they often resent the intrusions of the religious school into their religious life.

Why is this so? Our surveys only provide some hints. In some instances, it appears that religious school students use congregational services as a forum for practicing rather than polishing prayer knowledge. (A shabby Hebraic education rears its ugly head.) In other instances, it seems as if the adult congregation is taken by surprise. A rabbi and educator report that their congregation was surprised to arrive at a Tu B'shevat Seder and find out that the religious school students were leading this special seder/Friday night service; the congregants had seen only a brief bulletin mentioning the students.

This raises interesting and important questions about where the communication necessary for a more “organic” relationship would happen in congregational life. Are these issues brought to the education committee? The religious observance committee? The synagogue board? My own experience is that they usually are raised in a very reactive mode and to committees—whether education or religious observance committees—that are narrow in the way they interpret the mandate of their committee.

The committees’ horizons can be expanded. For instance, the education committee’s perspective can be broadened, and interactions with the school can become more valuable when a veteran *davener* who cares about Jewish learning joins the education committee. Similarly, a young family on the cusp of greater religious commitment who joins the religious observance committee could be a vision-broadening resource. Perhaps the congregation needs to create a task force devoted to the prayer life of the community that integrates these and other perspectives.

One rabbi/educator team shared an interesting insight in this regard. They had inadvertently conceptualized the relation between school and synagogue in a one-sided fashion. The congregation assumed that students would learn naturally by attending services. But no one thought about the school as a context for the experienced *davener*. Inviting a congregant into the school—to tutor an individual student, lead a school service, or share why prayer plays such a meaningful role in his/her life—was not imagined.



**QUESTION #5: What Kinds of Special Teamwork are Required Between Professionals (or Between Professionals and Lay Leaders) In Order To Initiate These Programs?**

We already indicated the price that some of our respondents see congregations paying when decisions about meaningful prayer experiences for children and family are made without lay involvement. In general, our respondents focused on the kind of coordination among the professional staff (educator, rabbi, cantor) that is necessary to make these programs work.

One of our respondents indicated that while communication was critical, shared vision was even more fundamental. The key for this rabbi/educator team was mapping out a common vision of what they wanted for their community in regard to prayer. Once this happened, many programs and details began to fall into place.

Another important comment from one of our teams focused on the role of teachers. Or, more pointedly expressed, the non-role of teachers. Somehow, in this community, even though prayer had become more of the religious school's priority the involvement of teachers as partners in the process had been overlooked. Perhaps because the school did not meet on weekends. However, the rabbi and educator indicate that this survey has become the occasion for rethinking the involvement they want to offer teachers.

**QUESTION #6: Different Models for Incorporating Prayer into the Religious School**

Most of our respondents utilize the "grade leading a service" format. It was interesting that none of our respondents suggested that students might need to do services more than once in order to achieve real mastery. Nor did they suggest that it might be meaningful for students to lead a single prayer individually or as a groupage

The assumption seemed to be that students were studying the service as a whole. One might speculate that a student attempting to perform the "whole" service is related to the superficial quality some congregants observe with student prayer leaders.

One rabbi and educator team was intrigued by the first model even though they didn't utilize it. The ideas that students might individually go *lifnim meshurat hadin* (do more than what is required) and gain a sense of honor from mastering the prayers, was worthy of greater exploration. This points to the competing Jewish values of a group responsibility/class model and a skills attainment/individual model for organizing the involvement of children in the prayer life of the community.

**QUESTION #7: What Special Contexts Have Been Created for Family Prayer?**

One of our congregations reports that a new Shabbat in the Park program has transformed the way that they think about family services. Previously, they might have considered the presence of parents

simply watching their children participate in a service a “family service.” Now, they are much more interested in the level of family participation. In the park, families seem to be more willing to study and pray with their children than in the synagogue.

Yet, parents can still get appropriate *nahas* (pride) from genuine student *ruah* (spirit) and accomplishment. One educator describes the consistently positive response that parents report when they come to a Family Torah Study Day on Shabbat. The level of skill, the high energy, and the teamwork of students with teachers never fails to impress parents. And then the *ruah* becomes contagious.



## Using Commentary to Teach

Joseph M. Blair

With both older children and adults, it is quite possible to use the commentary that appears in the *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim* siddur to great advantage. Adults, and advanced sixth graders and junior high school students, can be expected to read the text and the commentary, and be able to integrate them appropriately, leading to some useful and interesting discussions. A few examples of the sorts of activities that might be undertaken with these older students are presented here. Similar activities can be created easily by the instructor by looking at the commentary, and fitting it into the material to be covered or points to be made.

**ACTIVITY:** Look to the commentary below the line on the pages of *Kol Haneshamah*. Select items for the students to react to, discuss, or think about. For example, note the R.M.S. *derash* on page 294 and the L.B. *kavanah* on page 295. These two items could serve as the basis of an exercise on the inclusion of the *imahot* in the *Avot* blessing. Additionally, reading the note by R.S. on page 297 would make this an interesting set of texts to compare and discuss.

Another example of an activity based on the commentary would be to ask students to read the *derash* by M.M.K. on page 302, or the *derash* by S.PageW. on page 315, and to ask them to comment on whether that definition works for them, and if not, what does.

Look for other commentary that seems useful or helpful in making points you wish to emphasize, and use it in preparing your lesson plans. Remember to look at commentary surrounding each text item in the siddur; when an item appears more than once, the commentary differs in some cases from place to place. You can also use these differences as the basis for a comparison activity.

**ACTIVITY:** Ask the students to read the English translation of the blessing in *Kol Haneshamah*, and then to compare it to the English in the Jules Harlowe Siddur, *Sim Shalom*, the Phillip Silverman siddur, *Shabbat and Festival Prayer Book*, and possibly others. Ask them to talk about which one they understand the best, which one they think might best express the meaning of the prayer the best, and which one they like best.

**ACTIVITY:** Ask the students to read the commentary below the line about the formulation of *berahot*. Have them construct several different *berahot* for a particular circumstance, perhaps a baby-naming, using different parts of the suggested phrases, or other phrases of their own choice. Have them discuss what they like about these *berahot* and which one or ones they prefer.

**ACTIVITY:** Look at the commentary in the Amidah about the replacement of the phrase "resurrection of the dead" with "enlivens all life." Have students discuss the reason given and explain why they agree or disagree.

**ACTIVITY:** Have students read the opening of the *Aleynu*, including the three alternatives provided (two above the line and one below) and the commentary about the alternatives and the reason for the

change. Have them discuss this reason and whether it was necessary to remove chosenness as an idea from the siddur.

Through activities such as this one, the use of the commentary can greatly enhance discussions, and can help to focus the attention of the class on particular points. This approach can allow students to work out for themselves the reasons that Reconstructionists have made certain choices regarding the siddur, and to be sensitive to the concerns that underlie those choices.

## Using the Siddur as a Non-Liturgical Teaching Tool: *Erev Shabbat Services for the Family*

Leila Gal Berner

Like many Reconstructionist communities, Congregation Beth Israel is blessed with a growing population of families with young children. In an attempt to meet these families' *Erev Shabbat* worship needs, we created a Family Service that incorporated song, story telling, prayer and some "learning by osmosis." The service was attended by parents and their children, ranging in age from small toddlers to ten- or eleven-year-olds.

The format of the Family Service was as follows:

1. Chairs are set up in a circle, with the rabbi within the circle and the children seated on the floor in the middle of the circle, facing the rabbi. Parents are seated on the chairs.
2. A few minutes of Shabbat singing (*Bim Bam, Shalom Aleylehem*, etc.).
3. Candle lighting.
4. More singing (usually lively, fast songs, with clapping and tambourines encouraged).
5. Chanting of the Shema (with children and rabbi singing first and all other adults present repeating after the children) and *Ve'ahavta*.
6. A Shabbat- or Torah-related story told by the rabbi.
7. The rabbi explains the tradition of parents blessing their children on Shabbat. The children are asked to get up from the floor and go back to their parents. The parents are invited to tell their children what they love most about them and to emphasize the nice things that happened in their family during the week that has passed. This continues for three or four minutes and then all the children are invited back into the middle of the circle where all the adults bless them with the priestly blessing ("May God bless you and protect you; May God's face shine upon you with compassion; May God's light shine upon you and bring you peace").
8. The children are then given "Shabbat decorating" materials (usually markers, crayons and blank paper or sheets outlined with different Shabbat or synagogue-related pictures on them). They begin their coloring on these sheets, while the adults continue the service with the siddur *Kol Haneshamah*.
9. The adults continue the service with *Leha Dodi, Ma'ariv Aravim*, a couple of English readings, *Veshamru, Aleynu*, Mourner's Kaddish.
10. The children are asked to finish up their drawing and we all join in a circle to end the service with a closing song (usually *Oseh Shalom* or *Adon Olam*).

The whole service, from beginning to end, lasts about forty-five minutes.

The pedagogical goals of this format were originally conceived to:

- A. Provide an opportunity for families with children to share in a Shabbat experience that was geared primarily to the children, but which also gave adults some opportunity for Shabbat worship;

- B. Give children the “osmotic” experience of being surrounded by safety and love while having fun (making their Shabbat decorations) which they are encouraged to take home to adorn their homes. While they were learning (without being explicitly “taught”) the concept of *hidur mitzvah* the children were also surrounded by their parents and friends’ parents singing, praying and celebrating Shabbat together;
- C. Teach the children (and their parents) the rudimentary elements of an *Erev Shabbat* service, including our community’s melodies for songs and prayers in a fun, non-didactic way.

After having followed this format for two years, we discovered that we were successful in our pedagogical goals to the extent that the younger children (toddlers to about six-year-olds) enjoyed the service very much and looked forward to coming. They also seemed to be very familiar with the songs, prayers and melodies, even the ones they weren’t actually singing, but just picked up by “osmosis” from the adults’ singing.

We also discovered that this format does not work for children over about six years of age. It is simply too infantile a structure for them—and they find the Shabbat decorating boring. It is also very difficult to gear Shabbat- or Torah-related stories to such a wide age range. If the story worked well for the “little ones” (toddlers to age five or six), the older children were bored and restless, and vice versa. Another weakness of the format was that children who were old enough to begin to understand and learn about the structure of a traditional *Erev Shabbat* service (with all of its elements) missed out by being offered a fairly truncated and unstructured service.

After much consideration, we made the following changes in our congregation’s *Erev Shabbat* service offerings. We continue with a monthly Family Service (as described above), but emphasize that this service is designed for younger children. In order to meet the needs of our children aged about six or seven and older, we have added another service each month. This *Erev Shabbat* service begins at 6:00 p.m. and lasts no more than an hour. It is designed for families to attend with their children and then for each family to return to their own home for Shabbat dinner. This service follows a fairly complete traditional format (*Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Ma’ariv*) with mostly singing or chanting of the prayers. There is no formal sermon or *devar Torah*. Rather, there may be a very short (three to five minute) story geared for older children or adults.

A typical month of *Erev Shabbat* services at Beth Israel includes:

- A. Three “adult” services (beginning at 8:00 p.m. and including a *devar Torah*, speaker or discussion)
- B. One family service for younger children and their parents (as described above)
- C. One early service (beginning at 6:00 p.m.—as described above). Since this service ends by 7:00 p.m., we also offer an 8:00 p.m. service on the same evening.

By offering a variety of different *Erev Shabbat* service formats, we are doing a fairly good job at Beth Israel of addressing the worship needs of all of our members, from the tender toddler to the individual blessed with many years of life. As our congregation continues to grow both through the addition of new adult members and their children, and through a very healthy birth rate, we face new challenges in celebrating Shabbat and holidays as a community. We should all have such “challenges”!





## Applying *Kol Haneshamah* to Life Cycle Events

Seth Daniel Riemer

Our daily and Shabbat prayer liturgy lends itself naturally to use in life cycle events. The daily rhythms of morning, afternoon and evening worship reflect our understanding of birth, maturity and death as milestones along the path of life. *Kol Haneshamah* thus includes traditional prayers, contemporary adaptations of them, and commentary whose evocation of sacredness in time's cyclical movement can be metaphorically applied to the events that serve as a focus for sacred expression in Jewish life: birth (covenantal naming), adolescence (bar/bat mitzvah), maturity (marriage or commitment, anniversary, retirement), and death (funeral, shiva, unveiling). A sampling of those uses follows, and we hope that the reader will use it as a starting point in finding ways of their own to creatively devise new ritual expressions for the life cycle.

### BIRTH

The *Yotzer* blessing and its accompanying texts (pages 246-270) are spiritual reflections on the power and beauty of creation in the world, a subject that easily transfers to ceremonies around the time of birth. "As we bless the Source of Life, so we are blessed. And the blessing gives us strength and makes our vision clear. And the blessing gives us peace, and the courage to dare" (page 246). Parents designing covenantal ceremonies for their newborn children can use this *kavanah* by Faith Rogow to express their faith that the newborn child's entrance into our age-old Covenant will strengthen us as a holy community.

In browsing through the related material, one may come across other passages and phrases, such as commentary by Rabbi David Teutsch which captures the sense of joy, akin to what one feels in pondering the miraculousness of birth:

"We wonder at the order, the complexity, the vastness of our world. Struck by our own smallness, we are nonetheless also caught up in the grace of having a home amidst the splendor that is nature. Our wonder and our sense of smallness give way to thankfulness for the gift of life in this world." (page 246)

Here, the emphasis on "smallness" amidst the marvels of nature accords with a feeling of wonderment universally acknowledged in the sight of a new-born child.

The traditional text, as translated by Joel Rosenberg, echoes a similar awareness: "Let all beings acknowledge you, all cry praise to you, and all declare: There is none as holy as THE ONE!" (page 248). Juxtaposed with the cries of a baby girl who is for the first time brought to her mother's breast, this declaration might be used to emphasize the bond of love that is at that instant forming between parent and child.

A phrase adapted from the 1945 Reconstructionist Prayer Book could form the basis for a *devar Torah* during a baby-naming, or for a welcoming ceremony for a first-born child and his or her

parents: "With the dawn, nature's familiar shapes and colors emerge from the darkness to delight us afresh with their variety and beauty" (page 270). The words serve to convey the appreciation of a new life whose vision of the world is gradually, moment by moment, coming into focus.

While the possibilities are endless, it is up to those responsible for designing these ceremonies—whether for the more personal use of parents upon the birth of their child, or for the larger, community celebrations of *brit milah* and *brit rehitza*—to draw upon their creative vision to explore the siddur for its applicable uses in birth-related rituals.

## ADOLESCENCE

The "*Mi sheberah* for Bar/Bat Mitzvah" (page 688) is, of course, the first text to consider when organizing the bar/bat mitzvah service. Many wonderful readings, both from the translated text of the Shabbat services, and from the Readings section, might work well as supplementary material.

For example, Psalm 148 (page 228), normally recited as part of *Shaharit*, the morning service, rises in a crescendo of acclaim as it produces a long list of those who are encouraged to "give praise to THE ALL-POWERFUL throughout the earth":

"you dragons and torrential depths,  
  
you fire and hail and snow, and smoke,  
you raging wind, all acting by God's word,  
  
you mountains, all you hills,  
you fruit trees, bearing every seed,  
  
you wild animals, and every beast,  
you creeping thing, and bird of wing,  
  
you rulers of the earth, and all the nations,  
nobles, and you judges of the land,  
  
you young men, and you maidens,  
elders sitting with the young!"

The culminating image of "young men" and "maidens" (i.e., the *beney mitzvah* themselves) calling out in praise of God can itself help to heighten the significance of this coming of age ritual; it is not just a rite of passage but a religious event. The phrase that follows—"Let all bless the name of THE ETERNAL / for God's name alone is to be exalted"—places the ceremonial aspects of the day in proper perspective by confirming what a bar/bat mitzvah is really about; it is not meant to glorify the child but to teach the child about the Torah's primary message of holiness.

Two other readings underscore the same point. The Talmudic "Blessing for Bar/Bat Mitzvah" (page 414) states: "May your gaze be straight and sure, / your eyes be lit with Torah's lamp." Danny Siegel's beautiful adaptation (page 785) of that same theme reads: "May your eyes sparkle with the light of Torah, and your ears hear the music of its words."

A third, more personal reading (pages 785-786) provides an alternative to the traditional bar mitzvah blessing (in which a father thanked God for having "freed" him from the onerous burden of raising his son). By contrast, our reading— which can be recited by one parent alone or two parents together, and can easily be revised from its plural usage ("our sons and daughters") to the singular ("my son," "my daughter")— expresses gratitude "that we have been able to bring them this far" and frankly confesses some measure of parental insecurity about the changes taking place: "We ask ourselves, have we truly prepared them for this? Have we done enough, taught them enough? We are almost afraid to let them go."

Without pretending that one's parenting has enabled one's twelve- or thirteen-year-old children to have assumed complete independence (which would be an insincere claim in this day and age), the piece voices a more realistic and gradual recognition that they are "ready to take their first step into adulthood" and that in "only another year, two, three, and they will begin to go from our homes to find their own way in the world."

## MATURITY

The index of *Kol Haneshamah* includes dependable rubrics for the various life cycle events. Thus, one need look no further than the index to locate the reading "For *aufruf*, engagement, anniversary," and the "*Mi sheberah* for a couple at their *aufruf*," both obvious choices to include in any marriage-related ceremony.

It would be worthwhile, in addition, to take time to sift through the Readings section, in search of appropriate passages for the different life cycle events. The careful browser will begin to notice that a number of readings have multiple applications. For example, the reading "A Blessing" (page 785, already mentioned in connection with Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremonies) can also work in context of a marriage or commitment ceremony—the link to loving commitment being the lines "until Life itself arrays itself to you as a dazzling wedding feast."

Less obvious, but no less useful, choices are other thematically apt verses and paragraphs scattered throughout the prayerbook. For example, another multi-applicable section is that for *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Ma'ariv*, the Shabbat evening services which are filled with classic images of Shabbat as bride and of the "marriage" bond between God and the Jewish people.

In particular, the selections from the Song of Songs (pages 14-19) offer new translations of texts frequently used in and identified with the Jewish marriage ceremony. The song *Yedid Nefesh* (pages 4-9) a love song addressed to God, and the hymn *Leka Dodi*, with its references to love and marriage, can be cited as well, during remarks at the wedding, as reminders that the bond of intimacy between

loving companions is itself an express of godliness, and that the purpose of marriage as stated in the Hebrew word for it—*Kidushin*—is to “sanctify” this bond.

## DEATH

Those organizing burials, unveilings and other memorial events should turn, of course, to the *Yizkor* service (pages 630-645), which contains several of the classic texts associated with the Jewish funeral. But do not confine yourself to looking at this section. When recited in the context of a funeral, many of the traditional prayers for Shabbat take on new life and augmented force.

For example, hidden nuances of *Asher Bidvaro* (page 58) emerge when this blessing is uttered in the context of a burial service, which marks the division between life and death. The line—“Creator of the day and night, who rolls back light before the dark, and dark before the light, who makes day pass away and brings on night, dividing between day and night”—takes on poignancy as a reminder of the inevitability of death but also of the abiding power of holiness that accompanies all mortal souls through their decline.

The interpretive version (page 60) of this same text could be used in a eulogy for a person whose death came as the serene conclusion to an especially long and satisfying life: “The day with its light calls to activity and exertion. But when the day wanes, when, with the setting of the sun, colors fade, we cease from our labors and welcome the tranquility of the night. . . . We give thanks for the day and its tasks and for the night and its rest.” Here the intimation of life’s transcendent value echoes through the image of nightfall as an acknowledgment of death accompanied, nonetheless, by the assurance of spiritual regeneration and the greater renewal of the life-force that lies beyond the horizon of mortal reckoning.

A poem by Blaga Dmitrova (page 794), one among several readings in a section designated as “Preludes to Kaddish,” gives eulogistic voice to a much different attitude of reverence for one who has died. Affirming the need to face death with stoic realism, it states: “You gathered incredible strength / in order to die / to seem calm and fully conscious / without complaint, without trembling / without a cry / so that I would not be afraid....” With sensitivity to the particular circumstances of and relationships among the deceased and their survivors, this selection and various others in the Readings section of the prayerbook give users resources to devise funeral and memorial services that convey greater respect for the uniqueness of those life situations.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON THE VALUE OF *KOL HANESHAMAH* AS A TOOL FOR THE LIFE CYCLE

The foregoing sketch is not meant to exhaust, but only to suggest some possible uses for *Kol Haneshamah* in relation to the life cycle. The examples referred to above do not mention other important areas such as conversion, illness and divorce. And given the limitations of space, this article has not provided elaborate details about the numerous ways in which the more innovative texts

found in *Kol Haneshamah* can be either adapted to fit into the traditional, familiar rituals of the Jewish life cycle, or used to help create new ceremonies.

There is, in any case, no prescribed procedure for doing all these things. It depends to a great extent upon your creativity and imaginativeness. However, *Kol Haneshamah* lends itself to such creative and experimental uses. Distinctive among prayerbooks intended for a wide public, it was conceived in the **evolutionary** spirit that defines Reconstructionist practice as a whole. The life cycle, as well as our prayer life, is shaped by a process of adaptation that addresses the need for change, as much as by an abiding respect for Jewish tradition. The language of the English translations, readings and commentaries in *Kol Haneshamah* is gender-inclusive, socially responsive, facilitating original and in some cases daring applications. The rich array of materials in *Kol Haneshamah* can provide ways to heighten our recognition of our bond with each other and nature. It is geared toward many voices and adaptable to different communities of worship.

Two final, closing illustrations may help to show how deeply and powerfully, yet broadly and variously, this prayerbook can speak to the concerns of contemporary Jewry in the ongoing effort to rediscover, reclaim and reinvent our life cycle rituals along with our liturgy for the synagogue. Both examples involve the use of texts which convey a hauntingly precise and particular emotional quality, yet which could apply to more than one life cycle context. (E.g., the first example might be used in the context of illness or of divorce, the second example in the context of death or of recovery from addiction.)

Picture a woman lying on a hospital bed and awaiting the results of a biopsy. Friends arrive to sit with her and give her their support. One of the friends opens *Kol Haneshamah* and reads, among other prayers shared by the group, the following poem (page 753), translated by Marcia Falk from a poem by Malka Heifetz Tussman:

"I know not your ways—  
A sunset is for me  
a godset.  
Where are you going,  
God?  
Take me along,  
if, in the 'along,'  
it is light,  
God.

I am afraid of the dark."

The poem speaks powerfully and tenderly about an unspecific (yet emotionally well-defined) set of circumstances. When spoken to a woman facing the uncertain prospect of illness, the words can come alive as a living evocation of her condition.

The second scenario, which speaks entirely for itself and needs no further commentary, actually took place. A mother called a *yartzayt minyan* to honor the memory of her young son, a victim of cancer. The group of family and community members, densely crowded together in a large room, sat face to face in a large circle. During the service, I, seated next to the mother and her surviving son, led the group in reciting an "Interpretive Version of *Ahavat Olam* (page 61) adapted from a poem by Rami Shapiro. It ends with these words:

"Embraced, touched, soothed, and counseled...  
ours are the arms, the fingers, the voices;  
ours are the hands, the eyes, the smiles;  
We are loved by an unending love.  
Blessed are you, BELOVED ONE, who loves your people Israel."

## V. Making the Siddur a Friend: Your Siddur Safari







## Make of the Siddur a Friend

Jeffrey L. Schein

Judah Ibn Tibbon, a Medieval Jewish poet and philosopher urges us “to make of books a friend.” We know becoming familiar with the siddur and the Jewish prayer service is a slow but worthwhile process. Below is a potpourri of different techniques that I have used with Reconstructionist congregations and havurot to introduce them to *Kol Haneshamah* in a user-friendly fashion.

1. In a Teaching Service–Sectional Approach: During a service, pause after each major section of the service and invite questions and comments about what congregants have just prayed.
2. Teaching Service–Communal Commentary: Instruct congregants to pray a section, then read the commentary in *Kol Haneshamah*. Next, they may share their insights with the group.
3. In Search of *Keva* (structure): Using the Kaddish as a division marker, explore the transitions and different structures of the prayer service. With more sophisticated groups, discuss the various forms of the Kaddish and what their nuances say about the place they occur in the service.
4. New *Berahah* Formula: First, invite congregants to look at the alternative forms of blessings found on page five of *Kol Haneshemah: Shabbat Vehagim*. Guide them in choosing one of the alternative beginnings to the *berahah* which reflects their own spiritual sensitivities. Then ask them to use the form they have chosen as the beginning of a personal *berahah* and create a *hatimah* (conclusion, signature) that reflects their personal experiences or global events of the week.

For example, “Blessed is God who . . . restores my vitality” (in response to a restful vacation). “Blessed is God who . . . gives people the power to change their actions” (Bosnia). “Blessed is God who . . . creates great natural beauty.”

5. Count Your Blessings: To study the Shabbat Amidah, ask group members to count the number of times that *baruh atah adonay* appears in the text. After establishing the number seven as the correct answer, explore how this differs from the 19 blessings said on weekdays. Explore why out of the three kinds of blessings—praise (*shevah*), thanksgiving (*hoda'ah*) and request (*baksha*)—only the petitionary *berahot* are not recited on Shabbat.
6. Visual Midrash: Invite people to pay attention to the graphics in *Kol Haneshamah*. Explore the *Shiviti* that introduces the Amidah on page 293 as an alternative form of praying the Amidah. Also, suggest that group members connect the image of the sukkah spread out over Jerusalem on page 80-81 with recent experiences they have had in visiting Israel.
7. Reconstructionist Interpretations of Shema’s Biblical Selection II: Review the reasons why it was changed in the 1945 Reconstructionist Siddur (to remove references to reward and punishment and phrases about divine intervention in nature). Do we read this text differently today? How does

our understanding of interdependence and ecology affect the way we *daven* this prayer? Does it lead us to prefer a particular alternative or interpretive text?

8. The Arts in the Siddur: First, discuss with the *daveners* their estimation of the role that graphics and aesthetics play in the siddur. Then introduce the following *mahloket* (disagreement) between Mordecai Kaplan and Martin Buber.

Buber believed that the Jews were a people of *shemiyah* (listening); thus, the ear was our primary sensory modality (as opposed to the eye, which Buber associated with the Greeks). Kaplan believed that as a religious civilization Judaism needed to recultivate all of its senses, not only hearing; thus he encouraged the rebirth of the Jewish arts. Which side of the *mahloket* do they fall on?

**RABBI WAYBACK: A PLAY**  
Daniel Mordecai Silberman Brenner

During a summer I spent in a trailer in the Wisconsin Dells, I became acutely aware of the distance young people feel from traditional prayer. I was tutoring *b'ney mitzvah* students from a JCC summer camp and attempting to teach them why prayer was, for me, such an essential piece of my spiritual life. I found that one *kvetch* was perpetual: "I don't, like, really believe in these prayers," my students said, "but I'm doing it for my parents" (you can substitute "for Grandma/The Rabbi/The Cantor/The money" or "because I have to" if you like).

Basically, I met with wonderful, intelligent, creative kids who had not learned that the siddur can also be wonderful, intelligent and creative. What I attempt to do with the following play is to provide a model for helping them see themselves in the siddur. The play lends itself to a number of different formats: classroom lessons, school-wide assemblies, or a family program on services. The individual scenes can also be studied and analysed as separate learning segments.<sup>1</sup>

So... let's set the stage.

---

<sup>1</sup>One scene in this script discusses the origins of the siddur. For a different understanding of the deep emotional attachment to the siddur as a repository of Jewish memory the reader is referred to the story told in "The Old Siddur" in *Puppets and Paradigms*, available from JRF.

**RABBI WAYBACK'S ADVENTURE****ACT I**

(Hannah, Jonah and Mom on two chairs center stage, all three in *tallisim*, with *siddurim*)

**Narrator:** Once upon a time, in a place that looked much like this one, two friends, Hannah and Jonah, were sitting in services, scratching their mosquito bites and daydreaming. They liked their rabbi and had many friends at synagogue, but they just couldn't sit through services. They called it Temple Beth Shnooze.

**Hannah:** (Whispered loudly) Hey Jonah!

**Jonah:** What?

Hannah: 9,452

Jonah: 9,452 What?

Hannah: 9,452 times. The word "The" appears 9,452 times in this book!

Jonah: No way! I counted over 10,000 and I'm just on page 411!

**Mom:** Jonah! Either sit quietly or go wait outside. Do you understand me?

Jonah: OK, mom.

Hannah: Psss!

Jonah: Shhhh!

Hannah: Jonah, Let's go outside . . .

Jonah: Bye, Mom!

**ACT II**

**Narrator:** Our fearless heroes, escaping from services, decide to wander around the building, looking for some trouble to get into.

Hannah: Hey Jonah, I dare you to open that door.

Jonah: Why don't **you** open the door.

Hannah: What's the matter... are you chicken?

Jonah: How can I be chicken. I'm a vegetarian.

Hannah: Very funny. Now open the door.

Jonah: No way. I'm not gonna do it.

Hannah: OK, then I will.

Jonah: Don't do it!

Hannah: Well then you do it!

Jonah: OK already!

Narrator: Jonah opened the door. Behind it he and Hannah saw a long dark passageway that no one had ever seen before. They walked down it on their tiptoes.

(Sound Effect: Voice of rabbi, chanting in Hebrew, echoes in passage—very spooky sounding)

Jonah: Waaaaaaaah!

Hannah: What was that?

Jonah: What was what?

Hannah: Did you hear that?

Jonah: Would you stop asking me questions?

Hannah: Why?

Jonah: Oy vey!

Narrator: Jonah and Hannah continued to creep down the passageway until they saw a strange young woman, working in a library. Jonah and Hannah hid behind some old books and watched the young woman.

**Rabbi Wayback:** Someday I'll get this crazy *tallis* to work! Those banana brain professors thought that I couldn't do it. Well we'll see about that!

(She walks over to the book pile and spots Jonah and Hannah)

Jonah and Hannah: Waaaaaaaaaah!

Rabbi: Who are you? (Silence) Well? Do you go to this synagoue? I'll bet that you are skipping services! Well, I used to do that! But then I became a rabbi!

Hannah: You're a rabbi?

Rabbi: Well, it's a long story, but yes, I am a rabbi. My name is Rabbi Wayback. It's a pleasure to meet you.

Hannah: I'm Hannah and this is my friend Jonah.

Jonah: Hi, Rabbi.

Rabbi: Hello, Jonah. Now maybe you two can help me with this *tallis*.

Jonah: What do you mean?

Rabbi: Well it's top secret. So don't tell anybody about this, O.K? (They nod.) Good. If you wrap yourself in this *tallis* and say the right words, then you can travel back in time!

Hannah: Cool!

Jonah: Totally awesome!

Rabbi: But I've forgotten the words.

Hannah: Hey, I've got an idea. Can we try out the *tallis*?

Rabbi: Sure.

Hannah: O.K., Get under this *tallis* with me, Jonah, and wrap yourself in it. Now repeat after me and spin around: *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh*!

Jonah: *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh*!

(Rabbi Exits)

## ACT III

Narrator: Jonah and Hannah spun around and around until they landed in a very strange place.

Jonah: Where are we?

Hannah: It's a desert. But I can see a small body of water over there and it looks like a woman is dancing toward us.

(Stage Direction: Play tape of Debbie Friedman's "Thus Sang Miriam" or Geela Rayzel Rafael's "And the Women Danced" as background to this scene. Think about having audience join in singing.)

Miriam: (Dancing) Thank you God! Bless Yah! You have done wonderful things! Yeee Haaawww!

Jonah: Who are you?

Miriam: I am Miriam, the prophetess! Do you know what just happened to me?

Hannah: What happened?

Miriam: All of us, my people and me, were being chased by a very angry troop of Pharoah's army. It was scary! We ran, but there was a sea in front of us! We were trapped! We didn't know what to do! Then, somehow the water opened up, forming two big walls, and we were able to cross. I looked back and saw that when the army tried to cross, the water filled back in! We were saved!

Jonah: Wow! Is that why you are dancing?

Miriam: Yes! I am celebrating the fact that I am alive! Thank God for saving me! Praise Adonai! Praise Yah!

(Miriam exits, dancing)

Hannah: That woman reminds me of my soccer championship!

Jonah: Your what? Your soccer championship?

Hannah: That's right. The championship game. We thought that we would lose. At halftime we were behind two goals to zero, but in the second half we came back and we scored three goals! It was amazing! We were all dancing just like she was!

Jonah: That was cool! Let's try this *tallis* thing again!

Hannah and Jonah: (Wrap up in *tallis*) *Kadosh Kadosh Kadosh!*



## ACT IV

Narrator: Our two heroes spun around until they landed in a cloud, on the top of a high mountain.

Jonah: Where are we?

Hannah: It looks like a mountain in the desert. Hey, look at that old dude over there!

Moses: Help! You two with the funny looking clothes! Help me!

Hannah: What's wrong?

Moses: (crying) Boohoo! Boohooooo! I have an important message and I don't know how to say it.

Jonah: Maybe I can help. I got an A+ on my last book report!

Moses: What's a book report?

Hannah: You don't know what a book report is?

Moses: No. We didn't have them in Egypt. But my people and I are going to a new land.

Jonah: Wait a minute. Are you who I think you are? Are you Moses?

Moses: That's what they call me.

Hannah: Cool.

Jonah: Totally awesome! We are standing on a mountain with Moses!

Moses: Well could you help me with my message? I need to get the people, Israel, to listen to me. I must tell them that there is one infinite God.

Hannah: I've got an idea. You could say: Listen, Israel: The ETERNAL is our God!

Jonah: Yeah! *SHEMA YISRA'EL, ADONAI ELOHEYNU, ADONAI EHAD!*

Moses: That's a great idea! Now I know what to tell my people! Thank you, Thank You! (Moses leaves dancing)

## ACT V

Narrator: Jonah and Hannah wrapped themselves in the Rabbi Wayback's *tallis* and spun off again.

Jonah and Hannah: *Kadosh! Kadosh! Kadosh!*

Jonah: Oh no, something must be wrong!

Hannah: Be quiet! Maybe we can help her.

*Hanah*: (Curled up on floor, crying, moving her lips)

Jonah: Can we help you?

*Hanah*: Only God can help me.

Hannah: What's your name?

*Hanah*: I am *Hanah*.

Hannah: That's my Hebrew name!

*Hanah*: It is a beautiful name.

Jonah: What are you doing here?

*Hanah*: I am praying. I am very sad. I want to have a child. I am asking God to bless me with a child.

Hannah: Why are you moving your lips like that?

*Hanah*: A man thought that I was drunk, but that is my way of praying. I pray in my heart. My lips move, but only my heart calls out to *Adonay*.

Jonah: Well we hope that you are blessed with a child!

*Hanah*: Thank you. I must go.

(*Hanah* exits)

Hannah: I hope everything turns out O.K.

Jonah: Me, too. Let's go.

Jonah and Hannah: *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh!*

## ACT VI

Narrator: Hannah and Jonah spun again. They soon found themselves in a strange house in a tiny village in ancient Israel.

**Rabbi Amram:** Where did I put the glue? Come here glue, wherever you are! The glue! I am such a peanut brain! Where did I put that glue!

Hannah: Excuse me, sir, but I think that it's right over there.

Rabbi Amram: Oh thank you. Wait!!! Who are you!! And why are you wearing those funny clothes?!

Jonah: I'm Jonah and that's Hannah. We were....

Rabbi Amram: (Interrupting) OK, very nice. Now could you help me. I'm looking for my glue.

Hannah: It's right over there.

Rabbi Amram: Yes, of course, thank you.

Jonah: What are you doing with the glue?

Rabbi Amram: Well, I had a wonderful idea. I am creating a collection of many people's prayers. I am going to take them all and glue them into this book. I will call it a prayerbook! A siddur!

Hannah: Oh yeah. We use those in my synagogue.

Rabbi Amram: What? You have heard of a siddur?

Jonah: (Whispering) What are you doing, Hannah? You are going to mix up all of history! This rabbi is about to write the first siddur!

Hannah: No, I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean siddur. I meant . . . si . . . si . . . uh . . . uh . . . seashore! Yes we have a lovely beach synagogue right by the seashore!

Rabbi Amram: I love the ocean. Before I became a rabbi I did a lot of surfing. Now, maybe you could help me. What prayers should I put in this book?

Jonah: Well, you should put in some of the words that Miriam sang!

Rabbi Amram: That's a great idea!

Hannah: Do you have anything that Moses said?

Rabbi Amram: Of course! Everybody says the Shema! Thank you so much. I will get to work immediately! Now if only I could find my glue!

(Rabbi Amram exits)

Jonah: I wonder what else he put in that siddur.

Hannah: There's one way to find out.

Jonah: What's that?

Hannah: Let's go back to the future!

(They wrap in *tallis*)

Hannah and Jonah: *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh!*

## ACT VII

Narrator: Our two friends spun around and around until they finally landed back in the old library where they had first met Rabbi Wayback!

Hannah: We must have been gone for hours!

Rabbi Wayback: Nope, you just left a second ago.

Jonah: We did?

Rabbi Wayback: That's right, that's what is so amazing about time travel: you go back and forth, but it never takes any time.

Hannah: Rabbi, have you ever traveled in time?

Rabbi: Oh I didn't tell you?

Jonah: Tell us what?

Rabbi Wayback: Well, according to your time here, I'm 700 years old.

Hannah: I didn't know that they had women rabbis way back then?

Rabbi Wayback: Well they didn't. They wouldn't let me be a rabbi even though I had studied for many years. That's why I am here. Now that there are women rabbis I can finally get myself a congregation!

Jonah: Well, good luck, I mean Mazel Tov, Rabbi!

Rabbi Wayback: Thanks. I've got to go now. Shalom!

Hannah & Jonah: Shalom!

Jonah: Wow, that was totally awesome!

Hannah: It was cool.

Jonah: I'll race you back to services.

Hannah: OK. Now that we know the story behind the prayerbook, services will be a whole lot better.

Jonah: Let's race! On your mark, get set, go!

### ACT VIII

Narrator: Jonah and Hannah raced back to services and joined the congregation in their singing.

Jonah, Hannah and Mom: Halleluyah, Halleluyah!

Mom: Where did you two go?

Jonah: Uh . . . well . . . uh . . .

Hannah: Shhh! I'm trying to pray!

Jonah: Yeah, Mom, we should pray.

Mom: (surprised) Whatever you say.

Jonah, Hannah and Mom: *SHEMA YISRA 'EL, ADONAI ELOHEYNU, ADONAI EHAD!*

**THE END**

**NOTE TO THE TEACHER/DIRECTOR:**

Please feel free to change or add to this script. As you work on the play, I recommend studying the related Biblical texts with your students:

Miriam	Exodus 15:20
Moses	Deutoronomy 6:1-9
Channah	Samuel I 1,2:1-11

**For the adventurous:** Study another person connected to the siddur and write your own act! Some suggestions are: David the hippy, harp-playing Psalmist, The Priests at the Temple and the *Bareku*, The Sanhedrin debates the Amidah, The Kookie Kabbalists and *Kabalat Shabbat*, and whatever else you might think of!



## Once Upon a Prayer: Finding an Entry Into Prayer for Children and Families

Marilyn Price

Entering into a prayer space is often overwhelming, unfamiliar and intimidating, no matter the age of the congregant. This article will attempt to solve the dilemma of how to make that space not only a familiar one, but one that is easy to recreate in a variety of scenarios, including a sanctuary, the home, the dinner table, or just about anywhere where people gather together to form a prayer community. The key is comfort and preparation. Comfort for the community, and preparation on the part of the leader.

A child, simply by the use of its very active imagination, can mentally go anywhere. As we get older, the trip is harder to make, because our past experiences force us to take along old baggage. The trick is to find new spaces and interesting passages. In the congregational setting the leader must force the situation, encourage participation, and make those assembled the leaders of their own journey. How to do this? The simplest way is to invite those gathered to come with you, leave behind the outside, the ordinary, and enter into the world of prayer. Children need leadership, of course (that's our job), but an effective leader who creates strong partnerships will be able to easily reenter with these students by making them feel safe and satisfied.

### COME WITH ME: THE INTRODUCTION

In step one it is necessary to tell the congregation what you are going to do and what you expect to do when you get there. In a Friday evening Shabbat service the entire *Kabbalat Shabbat* is a set of warm-up prayers. In theatre language, the overture; in sports and aerobics it's called the stretching, the limbering up. When we allow ourselves to "get into" the warm-up, we leave behind physically and mentally where we came from, and make ourselves ready. We also join together to form a community with our fellow travelers, and find ourselves in a safe place—together.

The simplest (and quickest) exercise to do this is to ask everyone to exhale and remove the space they brought in from the outside world, and then to deeply inhale the new space. The exhaling removes thoughts of the week, the outside world that effects our secular actions; the inhaling makes us come together as a unit as we draw in our communal space. You might want to discuss the things that could be left behind: the week that had problems, the school work that required too much homework, the squabbles, the bus that forgot us, the annoying brother or the friends who neglected to be friends. Make sure to include as many issues as possible without it getting into a gripe session or becoming too long. Allow room for silent thoughts, especially if the numbers are too great to let everyone speak, or create a beat to let everyone chant together. In other words, let everyone express all the things that characterize "the worst week ever" in the way that works the best for your group.

Now it is appropriate to think about the best things ever. Children can easily be set to converse about places they like to go, people they like to have with them, things they particularly enjoy doing. Put them in a friendly space. Depending on the size of your crowd, it is a great exercise. Around a



Shabbat dinner table it's a good way to initiate conversation, things missed by an ordinary heavy weekly schedule. Before *Havdalah* it's an excellent way to summarize the things that made Shabbat, your day, special, and a place to reenter the following week by taking Shabbat with us into the week ahead.

After you have set up the mental space and helped the congregation become a group, think about introducing your tools of prayer—in particular *Kol Haneshamah*, our Reconstructionist prayer book. Children use prayer books differently than adults. In almost every synagogue I have attended I find that children like to hold their own book, whether they can read or not. It makes them a part of the ceremony. Try to satisfy this need or find other things for holding—*Barehu* song sheets, Shabbat symbols, the hand of an adult who is holding the book. *Kol Haneshamah* has many things about it that can make it user-friendly to kids. They can easily enter with a few visual clues.

The graphics of this book are very friendly. Introduce the *alef bet* and how it will illustrate where we are going. The calligraphy of the Hebrew words “*Kabbalat Shabbat*” (immediately following xxviii in the “Notes on Usage”) tell us we are entering into nightfall by their gentle shading and the presence of the stars as they darken into night. In how many other instances do the Hebrew words tell us what is going to happen? (Lighting the Shabbat candles, page 3—to the *Shiviti* on page 89.) Point out, but don't tell, the dimensions of reaching the prayers through the visual aids provided. That is, make note that they are there but let the art entice and invite the congregation's use and imagination.

**Enter the music!** Music is a vital tool in inclusion, especially for the younger congregant. The trick is to use something they know, or something that they can learn or find a place to fit in comfortably. For years I sang the alphabet (secular and Hebrew) whenever I didn't know the words to something. It wasn't until I began to watch other people's lips move that I discovered I wasn't the only one. So go for the melody first, invite variety, if possible use a familiar tune and repeat it often through the service. Sing the *alef bet* to familiar tunes! Just get them involved. *Nigunim* (songs without words) are good, la-la's are easy and don't require orchestral arrangements. This would be a good time to note that you do not need a splendid voice to lead a song. If you sing clearly and smile, making sure that the joy of your song is evident to those around you—you will effectively create the mood.

Music sets the tone also by its beat, its rhythm. Be careful in the selection of music for children. Loud rip-roaring, bounding-off-the-wall music may put you in a place you do not wish to land. Joyful is not loud, it is passionate, it is rhythmic, and generally the use of extra loud reduces the participation of the adults—not a great idea. Entering children into prayer requires the older passengers as well. Find music that asks for response, even physical. Movement with a purpose is very effective. Again I encourage the use of the prayer book. Match words in the book with words in your songs—even if it is not the song itself. Tying the prayer book into the song is another entry point for prayer.

## TELL ME A STORY

Stories that the community can relate to in their everyday lives and find a reference point to within the context of the service are usually the most effective. Stories that tie in the Torah portion, the lessons of the prayers, and still impact upon their daily lives are great entry points for a younger crowd.<sup>1</sup> Answers to questions, ethical issues, tying in Jewish values all belong within the service format. Stories need not be long, they might serve as much a purpose by just being a reference.

A few examples: The Shema and listening. What an excellent way to teach paying attention. Try bringing in examples of how we listen to each other, refer to the children directly by mentioning their names. "I was talking to . . . and was so impressed by how . . . was listening. How much we can learn from each other by listening, by hearing each other. My friend, . . ., listens to me, that's how I know . . . is my friend." Try thematic stories with the Amidah prayers, stories or quips about peace, nature, etc. Relate them in the appropriate places and make sure that you refer to the prayer when doing that. Tell stories about silence and stories about song and stories about thank-yous.

The Torah portion is a great way to emphasize how the teachings of our religion are important in our lives today. It is hard to empathize with Abraham and Isaac, but not so difficult to hear stories about our parents and their problems. Customize, convert them into parallel tales. There are some excellent books that have short, easy-to-understand tales that relate to each *parshah*.

Find ways to illustrate how the service is formatted like a story. The opening—the introduction of theme—the drama—the listening—the body of the story (*Amidah/Tefillah*)—the gradual softening of the prayers as we reach conclusion with a song—a blessing, and, in general, a happily ever after.

Another nice and effective approach is to tell a continual running story about fictional characters who live parallel lives to the children in your community. These serial Jewish stories might tell of children who are solving problems with Jewish solutions in the everyday world, using examples of *tzedakah* and *mitzvot* by actions that these children do—extraordinary yet cool children who could be anybody's friends, and who "belong" to the community. Have the children in the congregation begin to make up stories about them, stories about listening, about conflict, about prayer, songs, identity, the holidays—anything related. Have them draw pictures of the kids to accompany their stories.

## WHAT IS PRAYER? SAYING THANK YOU

The common denominator of prayer, that which we can all understand, is why we do it. It's about saying thank you. Parents teach children to thank people for everything; prayer is saying thanks to God. If done this way prayers become something we can understand. In praying, we sing our thanks, listen to each other say thank you, describe our thanks, and surround ourselves with the feelings of thank yous. We all understand that.

---

<sup>1</sup>An excellent story emphasizing the special significance of the prayerbook and other Jewish texts is "The Old Siddur" by Isaac Bashevis Singer, available from JRF in "Puppets and Paradigms."

### LEAVING THE DOOR OPEN TO REENTER

In summary, all the things that make children (and adults) enter the world of prayer effectively are things that are understandable to them in as many ways and in as many scenarios as possible. To constantly connect the everyday and familiar to the more mysterious religious will serve as reminders and easy references to prayer. Designating a special place, introducing them to the tools of prayer—the books, the art, the songs, the stories. Making it theirs in a safe and familiar way—a place that can be returned to repeatedly, and rediscovered and built upon as they age. Prayer grows up and they need to know as they grow up how to age it well. With the right entry into prayer a child should return easily and happily ever after.

## **“... That this Song May Be a Witness”: The Power of Chant**

Shefa Gold

Like many Jews, I am a lover of words. I loved Hebrew, even when I didn't “understand” a word of it. The sounds seemed to open up the place inside me that wanted to pour itself out to God. The sounds turned me inside-out in ways that made me feel visible to God. Seen and known and loved. As my love for the sounds, and my knowledge of words grew, I found myself seriously out of step with the congregation.

My thirst to drink deeply from certain phrases in the liturgy that called to me, was constantly being frustrated by the pace and sheer volume of traditional prayer. I began to look for what was essential in prayer, and to search for the deep structure of the prayer service, which would help me to understand the function and not merely the content of each prayer. My background in music and many forms of meditation prepared me in developing a chanting practice which treated the sacred phrase as a doorway. Repetition became a way of stilling the mind and opening the heart wide. In that wide space it felt as if the sacred phrases were planting seeds.

In *Devarim* 31, God instructs Moshe to “write this song for yourselves and teach it to the Israelites; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness. . . .” God goes on to predict that when the people enter the Land, they will “get fat,” meaning that they will grow complacent and forgetful, breaking the covenant. When that happens, even though they might ignore every teaching, the song that has been planted in them will not be forgotten, and it will serve as a reminder, a witness which can help to redirect the hearts of the people towards the One God.

The practice of chanting cultivated in me a garden of devotion, yearning, joy, and vision—reminders of my connection to God. Gradually I became familiar with the wide range of mind-states which the chants engendered. I was drawn especially to the ecstatic states which were both healing and empowering. At some point in my training I became less attached to those ecstatic states, and I began to really notice the silence which followed the chant. I felt myself drawn into that silence. I had known that the chant was a doorway, but before I really understood the invitation of the silence, I had not really entered.

Being drawn into the space within, learning to enter it without disturbing its form is like coming into the *mishkan*, the Tabernacle in the desert. So much tender care and attention to detail is described in the building of the *mishkan* in the book of Exodus. Artistry, skill, inventiveness and sheer generosity was called forth in that building. When I lead chanting, I feel like Betzalel, the chief artist, directing this building project whose purpose is to create a dwelling place for God in our community, in our hearts.

Learning each particular state of mind that it is possible to attain through a certain chant has been a piece of this work. These are the tools I develop. As I expand the repertoire of tools, I feel called

to constantly deepen my connection to tradition, so that I may know the prayer service as a transformational process, trust the power of prayer, and integrate the teachings of Torah into the heart that has been opened by that power.

In developing a chant I will first choose a phrase from the text that reaches out to me with its beauty or mystery. I pay close attention, not just to the meaning of the words, but to the sounds, both consonant and vowel, and the feelings that those sounds evoke. I've learned that certain sounds are particularly powerful in affecting the mind or heart or body. I've learned that certain rhythms of breathing will produce specific states of mind. I've learned to expand the range of "tones" that will inspire and evoke memory, meaning or depth. I've learned that the power of the chant can sometimes be increased through adding certain body movements or visualizations. I work with the tools that I know so well—melody, harmony, syncopation. And yet I don't use these just to make something that is pleasing or beautiful. The chant is not a song.

This difference between chanting and singing is crucial. Chanting is primarily a meditative process which requires an inward focus on the one hand, and a sensitivity to the energy of the group, and a willingness to serve the group on the other. Through the chanting practice, both these foci are cultivated and strengthened.

I will give an example of a chant and how it might be used. The chant consists of a phrase taken from Psalm 23. It is "*Kosi Revaya*," often translated as, "My cup runneth over." In introducing the chant I would bring something of its context to life. Though I walk through the valley of the deepest darkness, I will not fear evil, for You, God are with me. How do you manifest yourself to me? I have come face to face with my own demons across the lavish table that You spread before me. And on that table is a cup that is overflowing.

In building the *kavanah*, the intention for this chant, I would invite the congregation to become aware of, and to begin visualizing two different dimensions of "cup." One cup is located within the heart. It is the connection to the Source of Life and Love, and no matter what befalls us, or what "enemy" faces us from across the table, that inner cup continues to flow and to overflow. The sound of the chant re-connects each of us to that flow. The other "cup" is the cup that is formed in community. The sound of our voices and the strength of our shared intention create that cup which both contains the divine flow and serves as the vehicle for our nourishment. As we form the cup of community, we enable each person to access exactly what they need, to drink individually from the flow that we create together.

This chant is composed of three parts which, through different rhythmic patterns, evoke the feeling of rivulets flowing mellifluously together and apart. Chanting is done with eyes closed in order to promote greater concentration and less self-consciousness. The chant moves through a number of phases as the congregation gradually surrenders to its flow and as each heart begins to open in response to the gentle beauty of both the inner and outer flow. Some people may feel a surge of emotion welling up in them. They are instructed to pour that emotional energy into the chant and to

gently let go of each thought or feeling as it passes. Each repetition is an opportunity to be more present to the fullness of the chant, to bring more attention to the other voices, and to refine one's own intention.

It is the leader's responsibility to understand the direction, function, and potential of the chant in the context of a service and to know when to end the chant. Often chant leaders will end too soon, because there is a powerful message that the mind transmits when it is bored. That message to stop the chant arises from normal consciousness when it is threatened, when it can't hold on much longer. The goal is to chant through the boredom, and through the momentary anxiety of losing control or losing the fixed boundaries of self. Past the boredom, there is a shift of consciousness, a sudden expansion, and a cohesion of the group. The most powerful moment of the chant happens in the silence that follows. The discipline of chanting teaches how to discern the potential of that moment, let its fullness unfold and walk through the door that is opened by the chant. The power of the chant to connect a group to one another is especially important in the context of a prayer service. This allows for the experience of praying in the voice of community as well as from an individual perspective.

In leading a Chanting Service, I study the Torah portion and look for the spiritual challenge that it presents. With that challenge in mind, I will build the *kavanot* for the chants in ways that will inspire a "rising to meet" that challenge. A Chanting Service is a seamless process. The structure of the traditional prayer service becomes a vehicle for healing, self-expression, visioning, inner journeying, and connection—to oneself, each other, the community, the world, and to God.

God told Moshe, "Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness. . . ." Chanting takes the song that is in our mouths and plants it deep in our hearts. There it can grow and flower and bring forth the fruit of constant remembrance.



## God Talk For Children

Barbara W. Staub

Seated on the floor of a classroom at the Germantown Jewish Centre, I am part of a circle made by the six- to eight-year-old members of the Centre's mini-*minyan*. We are surrounded by tables in our classroom-made-*davening-place*. We have just used them for our jumping and spinning versions of *Birhot Hashahar* and *Pesukey Dezimrah*. The head, eastern-most table holds our Torah, which we will examine during the Torah reading portion of our service. *Barehu* and *Shema* are behind us. We began our special Shabbat Amidah by stepping into God's palace. Now, seated close together on the floor, we will have our "God talk."

This week I begin by humming *Ma'oz Tzur*. The children join in the tune, someone provides its name and we collectively wonder why are we singing a Hanukah song at Sukkot time. We put that question on hold, and I ask, "What is a *tzur*?" "A rock," someone answers. "Okay, what is a rock?" Three seconds of deep thought precede wildly raised hands. Everyone wants to speak, and everyone gets a chance to share an idea. A rock, we determine, is: strong, hard, very old, unbreakable, heavy, permanent.

"Who or what is the 'rock,' the *Tzur Yeshuati*, the supporting rock, we sing about at Hanukah and we read about six times in today's Torah portion?"

"God."

"What? You mean God is a rock? How can we talk to a rock?"

"God is not a rock. God is **like** a rock."

"Uh-huh, how? What do you mean?"

The conversation proceeds as a serious, heart-felt discussion, with each child contributing and empathizing with each other. Sharing moments when they've felt God's presence, the children are calm and thoughtful. The icing on the cake comes when a new mini-*minyan* member mentions that he is feeling God right now—in our discussion.

Teaching children about God is in some ways like teaching children about fun. Anyone who has shared quality time with children knows that a child's sense of the miraculous, of the wonder of existence—that which many adults equate with the ineffable power that makes for salvation or God—is extremely strong. Children are naturally spiritual, and one of our goals as teachers (and parents) should be to "nurture every child's innate spirituality." (See *Something More*, by Jean Grasso Fitzpatrick, for more about this idea.)



On the other hand, a child's natural spirituality is often either dissipated or squashed in the process of growing up. One way to try to prevent this terrible loss is to bring as much as possible of the child's intuitive God knowing feelings to consciousness. **Talk** about God with children; **experience** and **identify** Godful experiences with children, and their miraculous minds will store ideas and feelings about God in a retrievable and useful way.

This past summer, at the JRF (formerly FRCH) Family Camp, *Dorot*, Debby Schein and I had an opportunity to try some of our God teaching ideas with a small group of five- to eight-year-olds in an organized fashion. We met with our group for a one and a half hour period on each of four days. We organized our sharing experiences around four areas in which we hoped to demonstrate God's presence. They were:

- a) God in community (and organized religion);
- b) God in other people;
- c) God in nature;
- d) God in ourselves.

We also decided to introduce the subject we would be covering during camp time in a dramatic fun way that we had seen Jeffrey Schein use very effectively. We spread outrageous rumors that an extremely important visitor would be coming to the first meeting of our group.

At the midpoint of our first session (God in community) I raced into the bathroom to change from my Shabbat skirt into a long robe, a paper towel beard and a silver crown. I then hobbled in on a walking stick, carrying a plunger as a scepter. Displaying the appropriate astonishment, Debby asked the children if they had any idea who it was that had miraculously decided to visit them. Stifling giggles, the children all agreed that we were trying to make them think that God was visiting. Debby and I then highlighted the biographical details of the God ideas I was meant to embody. In conclusion, I emphatically declared, "I am God. I am (**absolutely**, of course) an **old man** who sits far away in heaven. I can be mean and do bad things to all sorts of good or bad people. Being God, I follow you everywhere and read your mind all the time. . . ." (at which moment everyone present joined me in the appropriate culturally correct conclusion of my absurd description)—NOT!!!

The idea for this part of our program, which proved to be great fun for all of us, came directly from reading Harold Kushner's extremely helpful book *When Children Ask About God*. Rabbi Kushner stresses the idea that one of the primary responsibilities of Jewish educators is to help children eliminate dangerous misconceptions about God that could greatly inhibit the development of a positive and growing relationship with God. I would also recommend that Rabbi Kushner's wonderful article, "The Idea of God in the Jewish Classroom," become required reading for **all** teachers at Jewish schools.

### GOD IN COMMUNITY

Our first meeting took place on Shabbat morning after the entire camp community had completed *Shaharit* services. It was an opportune moment to discuss finding God in the times when a community of Jewish people are doing Jewish things. Reminding everyone of the song we had

hummed and sung early in our services, we asked everyone if they knew why we had put our *talitot* over everyone's head while we all sang *Mah Tov*. We translated the words of the song together, and then Debby and I told the story of Balaam's unwilling creation of this important song. Why is this song so important to us? Whose tents were so good? Why do they matter to us? *Mah Tov* is one *tefilah* that links us to all the Jews of the past and thereby links our God to their God.

But . . . the song does have some problems. Whose tents were they? "Ya'akov's and Israel's—same person different name." What important half of the Jewish population are not included here? Yes—Sarah, Rivka, Leah and Rahel. They were there too. We then experimented by inserting the *imahot* instead of Ya'akov and Israel and also tried singing about couples instead of individuals. At this point the special guest described above appeared.

After "God" left, we talked briefly about establishing connections with the Jewish people of the future by continuing our traditions. We ended with a rousing dance and twirl to the sounds of "*Am Yisra'el Hay*."

### GOD IN PEOPLE

This session began with *Hiney Mah Tov* sung several different ways and a short discussion about the specialness of brothers and sisters. We then identified the good things that people do for each other as *mitzvot* and quickly realized that *mitzvot* come from God. So **whenever** a person is doing a *mitzvah*, God is there with that person. When we learn about police and firefighters saving people and about Moses being a great leader, we can recognize that it is God who has given these people the power to do these God-like things.

We can learn a lot about God by having friendships. Caring for other people and accepting their love helps us to understand how God cares for and loves all creatures. We ended this session by reading Barbara Cohen's beautiful book *The Secret Grove*. The children were moved and happy.

### GOD IN NATURE

A gorgeous camp setting made this idea self-evident to all of us. On our nature walk we touched touch-me-nots and watched their seeds shoot out, ate blackberries, and collected a variety of pond plants and animals to create a mini-pond near our cabins. We collected samples of nature's abundance and used these samples to make shadow pictures on photosensitive paper. We spoke little during these 90 minutes, but we experienced much and formed delectable enlightening memories.

### GOD IN ME

At the beginning of this session, we talked about what makes people human and whether we'd change into a different animal if we could. We talked about free will, making choices, and our unique ability to knowingly copy aspects of God's behavior. We talked about the individual things that make each

one of us different and special. In the spirit of *Elul*, we talked about the new things we were able to do this past year and how the coming New Year would give us a second chance—to learn from our mistakes.

### OUR GOD BOOK—A CONCRETE REMINDER

At our second session the children each put together an eight-page book to use to record their experiences of the week. Different projects were suggested at the conclusion of each session and materials were provided. For God in community, we provided various small shapes of construction paper, scissors, and glue, and suggested the possibility of a tent scene. We also provided traceable Torah, *magen David*, and tablet shapes. For God in people, we suggested portraits or action scenes illustrating *mitzvah* doing. The God in nature page became a collage of found treasures and a photosensitive print. For God in me the children created personal crests which listed likes, dislikes, etc., and included some samples of traced anatomy.

### FINAL FUN FOR EVERYONE

At our final session we invited our families to see our production of Florence Freedman's beautiful book *Brothers*. We changed the story to *Sisters* but in other respects, were true to the inspiring legend. The parents *kvelled*, and we finished with a round of "*Hiney Ma Tov*," grateful that the God visiting us at the week's end was **NOT** a distant, grouchy, bearded, old, white man.

***Yom Iyun:***  
**A Learning Day About Prayer for Families and Congregants**  
 Mindy Eilender

As a participating member school of the cooperating schools network, Ramat Shalom was presented with the intriguing task of designing a *Yom Iyun* which would serve as the kick-off event of the Network's three year cycle of unique programming. The *Yom Iyun* would hopefully be an interesting preview of the kinds of issues and topics we would be exploring as a congregation. Since the programs to be developed over the next three years will target three populations—children, families, and adults—I felt strongly that the event should have a broad-based appeal. The event should be designed so that it would be open to the entire congregation, to Torah School parents, and to congregants whose children were no longer of Torah School age.

Furthermore, it was important that the program include a varying range of components which would interest children of disparate ages. The entire school needed to feel vested in this new venture. How does one involve the entire student body in the study of the chosen core value if specific curricula are being developed only for the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades? A true wrap-around effect could be achieved through effective family programs.

Quite a tall order! However, the creation of multi-layered activities would fulfill the parameters discussed above. These activities would be hands-on, concrete and visual, as well as conceptual and values-laden. Provide an opportunity for parents and children to interact in a task-oriented way, and one has the kind of ingredients which make for a successful program.

Ramat Shalom's *Yom Iyun* kick-off event was entitled Prayer Fair and Family Dinner, in keeping with the chosen core value of *Kedushah*/Spirituality. Prior to the Fair, students in classes four through seven were assigned a specific learning station. Students prepared for their class "station" through research, study, and discussion so that they would be able to instruct the families who would be stopping at their booth. Classes also decorated the learning stations with posters, objects and symbols. Teachers had the opportunity to review the overall program, and make valuable contributions of their own vis-a-vis both process and content. The research and preparation period proved to be extremely valuable. Younger classes prepared songs which they would perform during the communal sing portion of the program.

The event itself was divided into three parts:

- A) An information-gathering period during which families made the rounds of various learning stations.
- B) Workshop sessions during which families and congregants processed the information just gathered. They did so through values-oriented problem-solving activities.
- C) An informal dinner and communal sing.

The general procedure and time frame were as follows:

- 1) Families were greeted in the lobby of the synagogue, and were provided with an overview/schedule of the program.
- 2) Families "signed up" for two of the four workshops. One workshop would be held immediately after the information-gathering period, and the second would be held after the refreshment break.
- 3) For approximately thirty minutes, families and congregants visited each learning station in a rotational fashion, receiving instructions and explanations from Torah School students. (To enable all students to have the opportunity of making the rounds with their families students staffed the stations in ten-minute shifts.)
- 4) Families attended the first faculty-led workshop for thirty minutes. (Each teacher led the workshop which matched the station his/her class had been assigned to.)
- 5) A fifteen minute refreshment break followed.
- 6) Families attended the second teacher-led workshop for thirty minutes.
- 7) Families gathered in the social hall for a B.Y.O.D.D. (Bring your own dairy dinner), blessings, and communal sing.

## **DESCRIPTIONS OF STATIONS AND WORKSHOPS**

### **I. TAKE THOSE PRAYERS OFF THE SHELF AND USE THEM!**

Students wrapped empty cartons and cans from the supermarket with decorative names of important prayers. The prayers appearing on the shelf were those which the students themselves had chosen as their favorite prayers. A copy of each prayer in Hebrew, English and transliteration was placed inside each container. In addition, each student in the class had chosen one prayer to write about. Students gave a short explanation of the meaning and significance of their chosen prayer, and why they especially liked the prayer they chose. This short explanation was also included in the carton. Several duplicates of prayers were available.

Students were available to explain the prayers and the displays. Every family making the rounds had to choose one prayer "item" they especially liked or felt a connection to. They took their carton with them to the workshop.

During the workshop, the families were asked to share with the rest of the group the information inside the carton of the prayer they chose, and then discuss why they liked or felt a connection to the prayer they picked. Parents and children had the opportunity to compare their choices. Participants

also considered what their choice signified in terms of their own value system.

Some children liked the prayer because they liked the tune. Some adults associated the prayer with a wonderful childhood memory. Others, both children and adults, responded to the message and value of the prayer. All seemed to make a wonderful emotional connection with the prayer being discussed!

## **II. SYNAGOGUE SYMBOLS**

Together with their teacher, students chose a series of synagogue symbols which they felt were important in terms of Jewish civilization. Students studied the meaning, significance, and importance of the symbols they chose, as well as their location in the synagogue. They copied or drew pictures of these symbols, and made up packets of symbols, each packet containing the same group of symbols. Students also prepared posters, and gathered as many objects as they could to represent the symbols they chose. The packets, posters, and objects were all displayed at their learning station. Students were available to explain symbols to families who stopped by their booth, and to hand out a symbols packet to each family.

During the workshop, families were asked to place symbols in concentric circles (on poster board) according to their importance. The center circle was for symbols which they felt were the most essential or the most representative of Jewish religion and tradition—(limit 2 symbols). The middle circle was for those symbols which they felt to be very important, but not quite as important as those in the center—(limit 4 symbols). The outermost circle was for symbols which they considered to be important, yet in relation to the other two circles, not as significant—(no limit).

Each family had to come to a consensus about their placement of the symbols. They then came together as a group to explain their choices and the reasoning behind them. The workshop leader then summarized some of the groups' conclusions. Families found that they were dealing with powerful values and images, not only in terms of their own perception of Jewish culture and religion, but also in terms of their own family values.

## **III. PRAYER FORMULAS: CREATE A PRAYER**

The class responsible for this station studied formulas of basic prayers and blessings, as well as the many kinds of blessings which fit the formulas. Students prepared display posters with the prayer formulas on them (in English, Hebrew and transliteration), and displayed prayer flash cards which families could manipulate to combine different prayers with the basic formulas. Students were available to explain the prayers, blessings and formulas to families who stopped by their booth. Each family was given a sheet of paper with a prayer formula typed on it (again in English, Hebrew and transliteration), and the remainder blank. Families were directed to take these sheets to the workshop.

During the workshop, the teacher gave a short introduction about how blessings, formulated as they are, help us to stop and appreciate things which we may ordinarily take for granted. They also help us recognize God's part in things.

Families were then asked to complete the prayer they received at the learning station by writing their own prayer. Each family was given the option of sharing their prayer with the rest of the group. They also explained the importance of their prayer—why they chose to focus on what they did. By sharing ideas during the composition of their family prayer, family members were exploring their own family values, and making a connection between those and Jewish values.

These prayers may be collected and compiled—(with the consent of family members)—into a creative family service which may be used during a special service.

#### IV. WHAT WE WEAR

The students who were responsible for this station undertook a study of *tallit*, *tefillin*, *tallit katan*, and *kipah*—the meaning, significance, background, and special symbolism. They prepared special display posters, and gathered samples of these ritual articles so that families could not only see and touch, but use them. Students also prepared information handouts about each item, and the customs associated with each, and these were handed out to families. Students were available for both explanations and demonstrations.

This station was combined with the next one for the fourth workshop.

#### V. HOW WE MOVE: THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF PRAYER

As Jews, we always involve both the mind and body in the fulfillment of *mitzvot*, and it is through the fulfillment of *mitzvot* that we strive to sanctify our lives—*kedushah*. The intricate movements we do to accompany our prayers help us focus our entire being when we pray. Students in this class studied the movements associated with various prayers, the reasons for each one, and the location in the service (if applicable). Students prepared a display chart and handouts with information about the various movements which accompany particular prayers. They were also available to demonstrate some sample movements, and to have families practice them.

During the workshop, the need and significance of movement during prayer was considered. Participants were asked to discuss how movement and the wearing of special apparel adds to a feeling of *kedushah*, and helps create *kavanah*.

Parallels were drawn from secular examples of how certain apparel or movements affect our moods, foster an atmosphere of respect, make events more significant, etc.

Whereas the other workshops were designed to include more concrete levels which could also appeal to younger children, this particular one is recommended for older children and families.

Ramat Shalom is a proud participant in the Cooperating Schools Network (CSN) pilot project of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation. We look forward to making a contribution to the outstanding work being accomplished by participating schools in the network, and we are grateful for the leadership and guidance provided by Rabbi Jeffrey L. Schein.





## VI. Growing in the Future





## Resources for Teaching Prayer and Spirituality

### FROM "WRITING A SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY," MARC J. MARGOLIUS

Wakefield, Dan. *The Story of Your Life: Writing a Spiritual Autobiography*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.

Waskow, Arthur. "To Catch a Breath," *Moment Magazine*, 1980.

### FROM "NURTURING STUDENTS' SPIRITUALITY AND PRAYERFULNESS," ROBERTA LOUIS GOODMAN

Fowler, James W. *Stages of Faith*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981.

Goodman, Roberta Louis. "Faith Development: A Jewish View," in *The New Jewish Teachers Handbook*, ed. Audrey Friedman Marcus and Raymond A. Zwerin. Denver: Alternatives in Religious Education, 1994.

\_\_\_\_\_. "God and Prayer and Faith Development" in *The Jewish Preschool Teachers Handbook*, ed. by Sandy Furfine Wolf and Nancy Cohen Nowak. Denver: Alternatives in Religious Education, 1991.

\_\_\_\_\_. *A Test of Faith: An Instant Lesson on Faith Development*. Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1985.

### FROM "TEXT AS A VEHICLE FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN STUDENT AND TEACHER," JEFFREY L. SCHEIN

Ben Shlomo, Tuvya. "Aaron and the Wrath of God," in *Windows on the Jewish Soul*. Wyncote, Pennsylvania: Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, 1994.

Bradbury, Ray. "All Summer in a Day" (video available through Coronet-MTI, P.O. Box 2649, Columbus, OH 43216, 1-800-777-8100.) A fuller curriculum guide may be obtained by contacting Jeffrey Schein, care of the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies, 26500 Shaker Boulevard, Beachwood, Ohio, 44122, 216-464-4050.

Kushner, Harold. "The Idea of God in the Jewish Classroom," in *Creative Jewish Education*. Chappaqua, New York: Rossel Books, 1985.

Milgrom, Josephine. *Handmade Midrash*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992.

### FROM "PRAYERS FOR THE PERPLEXED," ELLIOT N. DORFF

Dorff, Elliot. *Knowing God: Jewish Journeys to the Unknowable*. Aronson Publishers, 1993.

Jacobs, Louis. *Jewish Prayer*. London: Jewish Chronicle Publications, 1962), page 61.

**FROM "THE MATBE'AH; KEVA VS. KAVANAH,"  
STEVEN C. SEGAR AND ERIC TRAIGER**

Fields, Harvey. *Bechol Levavcha: With All Your Heart*. New York: UAHC, 1977.

**FROM "EVOKING THE INDEFINABLE: SPIRITUALITY IN THE CLASSROOM,"  
BARBARA CARR**

Gellman, Marc and de Mejo, Oscar. *Does God Have a Big Toe?* New York: Harper Collins, 1989.

**FROM "SHEMA UVIRHOTEHA FOR AGES TWELVE TO SEVENTEEN,"  
DEBORAH WAXMAN**

Blake, Toby & Sigman, Sarah, *Ve'ahavta*, Baltimore Board of Jewish Education, 1985

Garfiel, Evelyn. *Service of the Heart*. New York: National Academy for Adult Jewish Studies, United Synagogue of America, 1958.

Grishaver, Joel Lurie. *Shema and Company*. Denver: Torah Aura Productions, 1994.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Shema is for Real*, Denver: Torah Aura Productions, 1991.

Hammer, Reuven. *Entering Jewish Prayer: A Guide to Personal Devotion in the Worship Service*. Schocken Books, 1994.

Marcus, Audrey Friedman. *The Jewish Teachers Handbook* (3 Volumes). Denver: Alternatives in Religious Education, 1994.

Sandberg, Martin I. *Tefillin: and you shall bind them . . .* New York: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism Publishing, 1991.

Siegel, Richard, Michael Strassfeld and Sharon Strassfeld. *The First Jewish Catalog*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973.

**FROM "AMIDAH CURRICULUM FOR GRADES THREE TO SIX,"  
JOSEPH M. BLAIR**

Blair, Joseph and Schein, Jeffrey, ed. *Windows on the Jewish Soul: Resources for Teaching the Values of Spiritual Peoplehood*. Wyncote, Pennsylvania: Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot, 1994.

Brown, Steven. *Higher and Higher: Making Jewish Prayer Part of Us*. New York: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 1980.

Eisenstat, Jeffrey and Schein, Jeffrey. "Teacher as Reflective Practitioner," in *Tithadesh: Initiating Renewal and Reflection in Jewish Education*. Wyncote: Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot, 1991.

**FROM "CURRICULUM FOR SHABBAT SHAHARIT AMIDAH,"  
MARSHA J. PIK-NATHAN**

Samuels, Edith. *Lexicon Of Jewish Life*. New York: UAHC.

# **FROM "A PRAYER SERVICE FOR AGES FOUR TO SEVEN," AVIVA BATYA BASS**

*Becker, Joyce. Jewish Holiday Crafts.* New York: Bonim Books, 1977.

*Eisenberg Sasso, Sandy. In God's Name.* Woodstock, New York: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1994.

Gabriel, Jack. "Astonishing is God," (cassette tape, Nisa Records).

Miller, Lyndall. *Seeking Shabbat Delight.* New York: United Synagogue of America, 1991.

# **FROM "SCHOOLS AND CONGREGATIONS AS SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS," JEFFREY L. SCHEIN**

*Alper, Rebecca and Staub, Jacob. Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach.* Wyncote: Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, 1985.

Kaplan, Mordecai. *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion.* Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1994.

# **FROM "GOD TALK FOR CHILDREN," BARBARA W. STAUB**

Kushner, Harold. *When Children Ask About God.* New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1971.

Price, Marilyn. *Puppets and Paradigms.* Available from JRF.

# **OTHER RESOURCES FOR TEACHING PRAYER AND SPIRITUALITY**

Coles, Robert. *The Spiritual Life of Children.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990.

Fitzpatrick, Jeanne Grasso. *Something More: Nurturing Your Child's Spiritual Growth.* New York: Viking Penguin, 1991.

Grishaver, Joel. *You Shall Be a Blessing.* Northvale, New Jersey: Aaronson, 1993.

Heller, David. *The Children's God.* Chicago: The University Press, 1986.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Talking to Your Child about God: A Book for Families of All Faiths.* New York: Bantam Books, 1988.

Hull, John M. *God-Talk with Young Children.* Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1991.

Olitzky, Kerry M., Steven M. Rosman and David P. Kasakove. *When Your Jewish Child Asks Why: Answers for Tough Questions.* Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav, 1993.

Wolpe, David J. *Teaching Your Children About God: A Modern Jewish Approach.* New York: Jenry Holt and Company,



## VII. Appendices

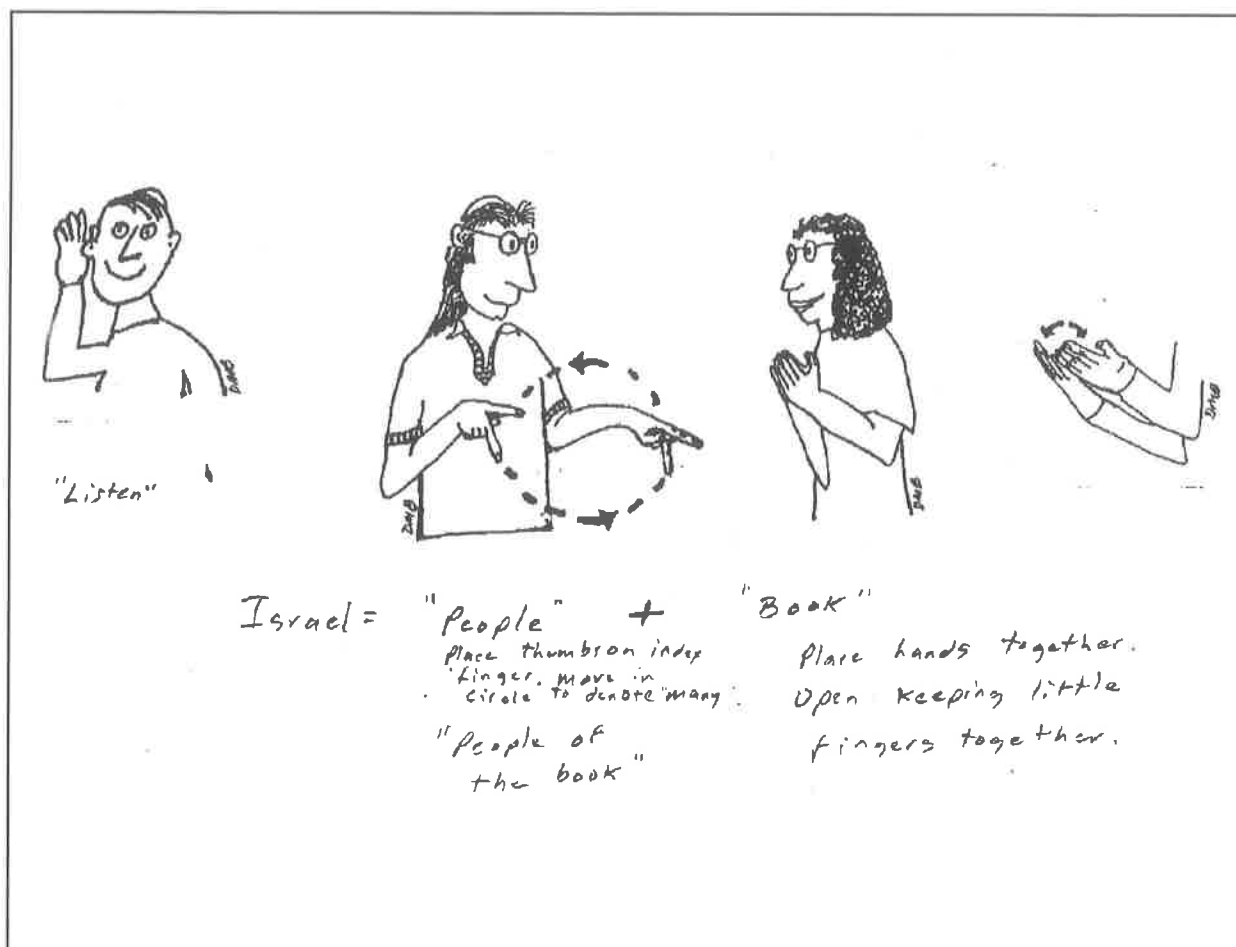






## Appendix A

### How to Sign The Shema



*Shema* (Hear): cup one hand behind an ear

*O*: index finger to center of forehead

*Yisra'el* (Israel—People of the Book): open hands like a book, then take fingers of one hand and walk them up the fingers of the still-open other hand



'n

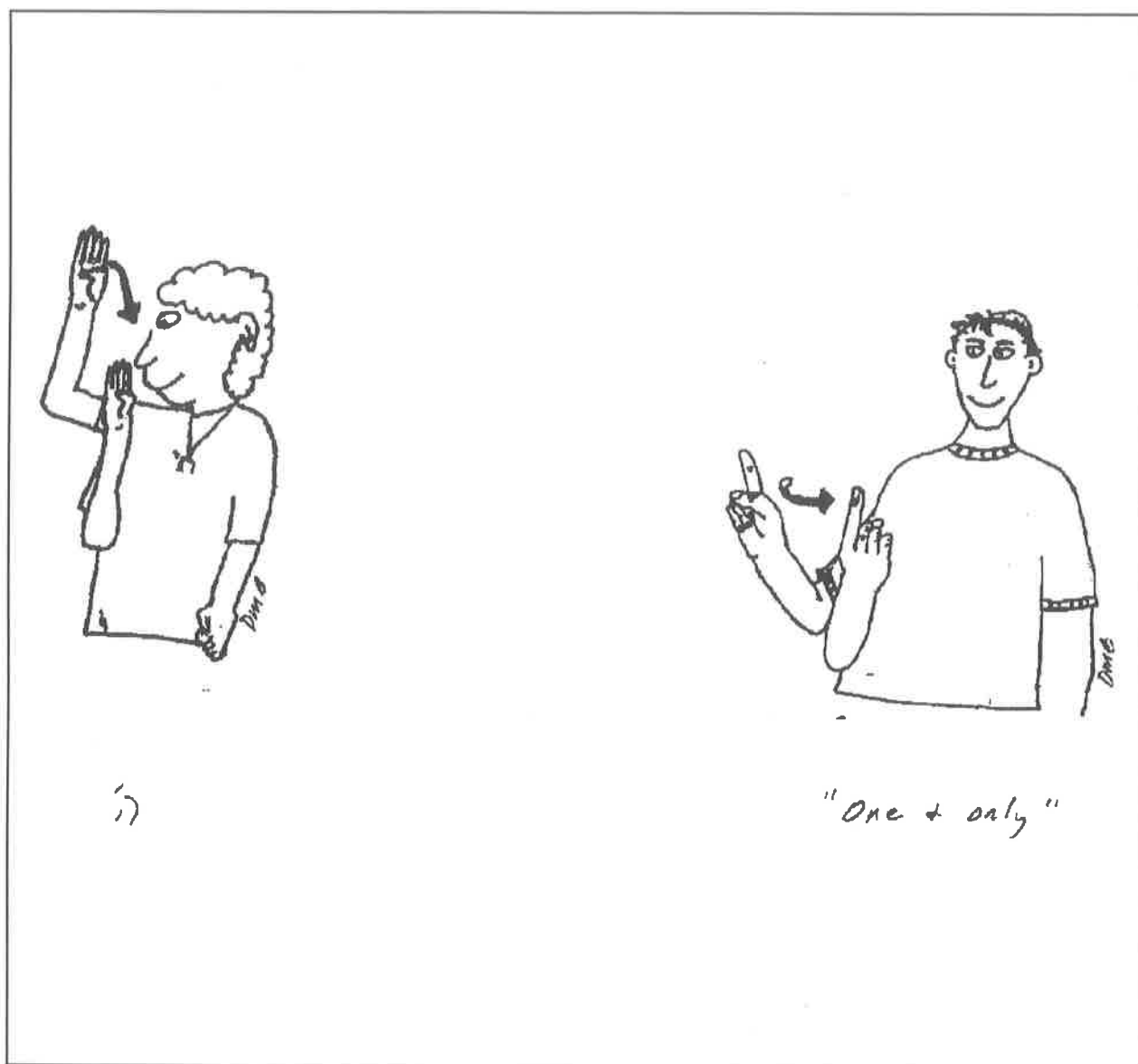


"Supreme being"

Move "L" shape hand  
(thumb & 1st finger out)  
from left shoulder to  
side, 1st finger  
pointing forward.

*Adonay* (God): (slowly) starting at the shoulder, move one hand to the opposite waist/hip, as if drawing a diagonal across body where a sash might go

*Eloheynu* (Our God): one hand open flat, with fingers together: swivel that hand in scooping motions and end with the pinkie side against your chest (emphasizing that this is **our** God)



*Adonay* (God): (slowly) starting at the shoulder, move one hand to the opposite waist/hip, as if drawing a diagonal across body where a sash might go

*Ehad* (One): hold up one finger (symbol for one), and then make rings out of thumb and forefinger on each hand and link the two rings together (symbol for eternity)



## Appendix B

*The following article by Aviva Batya Bass was originally published in Gesher Vekesher: A Bridge and Connection, the JRF Education newsletter, Volume 4, Number 1, in January 1995. The article is reproduced here in full. Subscriptions to Gesher Vekesher may be ordered by calling JRF at (215) 576-0800, or by writing to JRF, Attention: Phyllis Zeeman, 1299 Church Rd., Wyncote, PA 19095.*



### A Tu Bishvat

### Lesson Plan for

**Ages Four to Six**

**Aviva Batya Bass, Rabbinical Student**

Tu Bishvat is the celebration of the New Year of the Trees, which occurs on the fifteenth of the month of Shevat, or around January or February of the Gregorian calendar. This holiday is an opportunity to place our increasing environmental concerns within a Jewish context and to recognize the importance that these issues have always had in our tradition.

When teaching children, we must appreciate the link that this theme has with secular holidays such as Arbor Day and Earth Day, holidays with which the children may be more familiar. However, it is equally important to stress what is uniquely Jewish about this holiday by emphasizing our connection to the land of the State of Israel and to tree-planting there. We do this by speaking about and sharing Israeli fruits that the children may not have tasted before and by teaching about specific mitzvot and about specific environmental references in the Torah, such as the rainbow in the Noah story in Genesis and the law to leave land fallow for seven years in Leviticus.

Since children, as well as adults, have varied optimum learning styles, it is important when teaching any unit to try to reach students at all sensory levels: sight, sound, touch, smell, and even taste. Also, children have a wide variety of interests and activities, through which learning may occur most easily. Fortunately, Tu Bishvat is a holiday which lends itself quite well to many different types of activities. This unit is an attempt to cover activities ranging from creative art, drama, and dance, to cooking and science.

### Aims and Focal Points

- To familiarize children with the concept that this is considered Rosh Hashanah L'Ilanot, just as humans have a Rosh Hashanah.
- To emphasize the importance of trees in our lives and why we should value them and work to protect them.
- To create a tangible connection with the State of Israel in the children's minds, both as our homeland to which our JNF money will go for tree-planting, and as a place where unique and wondrous fruits grow.
- To encourage an awe for the growth of plants, non-human animals, and humans as daily evidence of G-d's handiwork.
- To provide the children with a basic knowledge of environmental problems as well as methods of helping our fragile environment.

### Creative Art

#### *Bird-making for Shabbat Shira*

The concept of Shabbat Shira should be introduced on a basic level comprehensible to children. Introduce the word *shira* and explain that this is the shabbat when we read the part of the Torah about the song that the Israelites sang to G-d to give thanks for having crossed the Red Sea safely (give a very basic review of the story if they have forgotten). Ask the children what other creatures on our planet have the ability to sing and which also rely on trees to live in. Explain that since Shabbat Shira occurs near Tu Bishvat, and since we remember an important song we once sang, we remember the birds at this time of the year, because they also sing and because they also need the trees in order to live.

#### Materials Needed:

- Short cardboard rolls (like those used for toilet paper)
- Paint (optional)
- Colored construction paper
- Scissors, glue, crayons

What to do:

- For children of this age group, it is necessary to prepare stencils for the children to trace of the head, wings, and tail of the bird. Oak-tag is fine for this.
- Help the children trace your stencils onto construction paper in the color of their choice. Help them cut out these traced body parts. Let the children add eyes and more detailed feathers on the wings in crayon, if they wish.
- If desired, paint the toilet paper rolls and wait for them to dry.
- Cut slits in the front and back of the rolls in order to fit the head and tail of the birds.
- Fit the construction paper head and tail into the roll and glue the wings on the top.

This idea and many other interesting projects can be found in *Jewish Holiday Crafts for Little Hands*, by Ruth Esrig Brinn with Judyth Groner and Madeline Wikler (Kar-Ben Copies, 1993).

*Orange Juice Pitcher*

This activity is meant to emphasize the importance of the slogan, "reduce, reuse, recycle." While doing this art project, stress that this is to reuse something that otherwise would have been wasted. This is a good opportunity to introduce the mitzvah of *bal taschit*.

Materials Needed:

- One one-quart juice or milk container
- Pictures of trees and fruit, cut from a magazine
- Glue
- Clear plastic spray (you can get this at a craft store)
- Oranges (preferably Jaffa oranges from Israel, if possible)
- Kitchen knife
- One plastic or metal juicer

What to do:

- Have the children cut out pictures of fruit and trees from magazines at home and bring those pictures to class. (Send a note home to their parents!)
- Wash the container and completely dry the outside.
- Arrange the pictures on the container, covering all of the outside. Glue them to the container, one at a time, overlapping them slightly.
- Spray the pitcher with the plastic spray for a protective finish. Let it dry.
- Cut the oranges in half. Squeeze each half with the juicer, removing the pits.
- Pour the juice into the pitcher and serve as a part of a snack.

This and other crafts can be found in *Jewish Holiday Crafts*, by Joyce Becker (Bonim Books, 1977)

Other craft ideas might include building a bird-feeder from a milk carton, making tree centerpieces from paper towel rolls and construction paper, and creating a placemat for each child using magazine cut-outs for a collage, glued on oak-tag and laminated. This placemat could then be used during the model seder, should you choose to have one.

**Drama and Dance**

Most children love to "make believe" and possess fantastic imaginations with which to act out a given role-playing situation. They also usually enjoy body movement and dance, as they discover many pretzel positions they can get into. To give them an opportunity to explore both these facets of expression, it is important to include drama and dance as part of this unit.

*Role-Playing*

- Explain that forests are being cleared every day to meet the demand for wood and wood-products. Ask the students to identify what objects around the room are made from wood.
- Ask the children what animals live in the forest and what they need in order to survive.
- Ask the children to pretend that they are one of these animals, and that they have just learned that their forest is going to be destroyed. Have them crawl, hop, and slink around the floor, in character, discussing with the other animals what they should do, because they are going to lose their homes.
- At the end of this activity, discuss with the children how they felt during the role-playing. Ask them what they think that people can do in order to prevent this tragedy. Discuss recycling, reusing products, and planting trees.

*Movement*

- Discuss with the children what it means to grow. What things grow? What determines how it will grow? Do you grow? What things have changed physically in you during the past year (lost teeth, etc.)? What makes things grow? (Here you may want to talk about G-d.)
- Put on a tape or CD of a new-age recording artist. (Windham Hill Records has great recordings of this nature. I recommend George Winston, Michael Hedges, or Ray Lynch.)
- Explain to the children that they are to pretend that they are seeds of a plant or a tree, and that they are to grow as that plant or tree would during the song. Posting photographs of the various stages of seed growth on the bulletin board helps for reference. (Guide them along with phrases such as, "Okay, we're really little now, like seeds. Get really small and in a little ball," or, "Now you're going to sprout. Sprout just a little. Now more. Good.")

With both of the above activities, it is important that you have appropriate space to "spread out" and "let loose." Also, it is preferable that you participate with them. In the first activity, you could portray the animal or human who comes to tell the animals that their home is going to be destroyed. In the second activity, you could be the sun and rain that comes to help them grow. The best way to spark their creativity is to use your own. Explore.

## Music

A great tape of Jewish children's music has been produced by Rabbi Jack Gabriel entitled *Astonishing is G-d*, which was presented at CAJE in 1991. This cassette includes songs about various holidays and about Jewish history. One of these songs is called "Tu Bishvat, Tu Bishvat," set to the '50's song "Lollipop." It discusses environmental responsibility and the importance of trees. You can get the children to sing the chorus, which is very catchy.

Of course, it is great to have the children sing songs which are easier for them to learn in their entirety, such as "Mah Osim B'Tu Bishvat," printed in *First Steps in Learning Torah with Young Children*, by Ruth Musnikow (Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, 1993). There are also many good source materials listed in *The Jewish Preschool Teacher's Handbook*, by Sandy S. Furfine and Nancy Cohen Nowak (Alternatives in Religious Education, 1981).

## Science

No unit about the environment would be complete without a science component. Ideally, this would include the actual growing of plants and vegetables. Unfortunately, this may not be possible in supplementary school settings, where people may not be available to water the plants every day. If this is possible, an excellent source of easy planting tips for various easily-grown vegetables may be found in *Jewish Holiday Crafts* (see above). Here are some additional ideas for this portion of the unit.

- Take out various fruits and nuts, jars and containers of different sizes, and a scale. Ask the children questions concerning mass, weight, and volume of the fruits and nuts. "Which weighs more, this peach or this pile of nuts? Which will fill more of this container?" Demonstrate how something can weigh more but actually take up less volume than something else.

- Take a field trip to the zoo. Ask the children about the animals' natural habitats, what they need in order to live, how they are provided for in the zoo, etc. This is a good way to introduce the concept of *tza'ar b'alei chaim*. If a field trip is not possible, provide a list of questions for the children to discuss with their parents and ask the parents to take their own children to the zoo. Or, ask the children if they have pets. If so, discuss their pets. What do they need in order to live? How do the children make sure that they are provided for every day? How do they grow?
- Weather providing, go on a nature walk, either on a field trip to an arboretum or state park, or just outside on the school grounds. Notice all kinds of plants and animal life, including the worms, ants, and caterpillars (which the children may be more likely to notice than you are, given their lower height and greater observance of detail!)
- Set up a scavenger hunt outside, if weather permits, or even inside the classroom.
- Go outside and clean up around the school. Make sure that you set aside those objects which are recyclable.

## Cooking

Children of this age love cooking. They love the idea that they have contributed to something that they can taste for themselves later. The only problem is that the kitchen can be a very hazardous place for young children, and they need to be watched very carefully. Recipes for Tu Bishvat Candy and Candied Citrus Peel are available in *First Steps in Learning Torah with Young Children* (see above).

## Games

- Nut-identifying Game (from *First Steps in Learning Torah with Young Children*)—Bring several different types of unshelled nuts to class (peanuts, walnuts, etc.). Put each one in separate containers and tell the name of each. Put two different types of nuts in a bag and shake them. Have each student take out the nut and tell what type it is (you may want to leave the nuts in the containers as a reference). Then add to the bag one more type of nut, until all of the varieties have been added. You can also have the children try to identify the nuts by touch.



- **Recycle! An Environmental Board Game**—Make a trail game layout on a piece of oak-tag paper. Label the goal, which should be considerably larger than the rest of the spaces, "Recycling Center." Get a die or spinner, and find miniatures of four types of recyclable objects, such as a glass bottle, a newspaper, a soda can, and an aluminum can (from a crafts store). To expand the game to include more players, add more pieces.

On the board itself, have a space large enough for index cards to rest on, and put a question mark on the space. On the trail, create various incidents having to do with recycling or the environment ("You planted a tree. Go ahead three spaces." or "You threw away a newspaper, instead of recycling it. Lose one turn.")

Every so often, put a question mark on a space, corresponding to the question mark where the index cards are. Make up index cards with question marks on the back of them and write easy questions about Tu Bishvat or recycling on the other, such as "You just finished a can of soda. What should you do with it?" and include a reward for the correct answer, such as "Move ahead three spaces." To enable other adults to play this game with children, put some sort of code number or letter on an answer sheet. For an incorrect answer, the player just stays where he/she is until the next turn.

This is an easy game which can be adapted easily to fit any age group. The players take turns rolling the die or moving the spinner, answering questions when landing on those spaces. The player who makes it first to the recycling center wins.

The only problem with this game is that an adult is necessary to monitor the game, because many children of this age group cannot yet read, and the questions must be read to them. To help alleviate this problem, use drawings on the game board as often as possible.

## Stories

- *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein
- "Joey Meets Ossie," and "The Climbing Tree," from *G-d's Wonderful World*, by Morris and Lenore Kipper (Seingold Publishers, 1973)
- "The Strawberry Plant," from *Hear, O Israel: About G-d*, by Mollie Cone (UAHC, 1973)
- *Curious David*, by Esther Adler (JNF Department of Education, 1994).

## Model Seder

To give your students a full appreciation of Tu Bishvat, create a model seder for them. This can be a school-wide activity, with components geared to all age groups represented in the school. You can also write little poems or other various parts for the children to read at the seder. Make sure to invite the parents also. They can help to keep things under control, and will enjoy the experience themselves. If you live in a warm climate, having the seder outdoors adds to its significance. The Havurah of South Florida holds an annual Tu Bishvat seder in the Everglades, which is really spectacular. However, most climates do not offer such a luxury in late January or February.

For more information about Tu Bishvat, see Arthur Waskow's *Season of Our Joy* and Michael Strassfeld's *The Jewish Holidays: A Guide and Commentary*. These are excellent resources for all of the holidays and a real must for any Jewish teacher's bookshelf. For an example of a Tu Bishvat Seder for children, see Harlene Appelmen's *Tu Bishvat Seder* (Kar-Ben Publishers).<sup>20</sup>

## Appendix C

*The following article by Shelly Melzer was originally published in Reconstructing Jewish Education: A Process Guide, edited by Jeffrey L. Schein (available from JRF).*

# Suggested Learning Activities for the Reconstructionist Teaching Model

by Shelly Melzer.

The following activities are especially suited to the different stages of the planning model for Reconstructionist curricula. These resources reflect an eclectic selection of techniques that have worked well in my own teaching. In the "Peoplehood" section many of the techniques may be new. I have annotated rather heavily. The other three sections draw on a more familiar set of strategies so I have annotated lightly and instead referred to helpful relevant resources.



### PEOPLEHOOD: THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE

Educational Challenge: Creating Focus.

1. Let the students know what the objectives of the unit are, how long it will last, and what some of the activities will be. Put this information on a poster so students can refer to it over the course of the unit.

2. Use a "pre-test" to assess students' knowledge of the subject to be studied. Make it clear that the purpose of this test is to find out what they know about the subject, not to determine a grade. Point out what knowledge will be gained by the end of the unit. You may want to have students take the same test at the end of the unit so that they can compare the test results.

3. Create a "web of knowledge": Have students tell you anything they know about the subject. Write this information randomly all over a poster. When students have exhausted their knowledge, have them suggest how one piece of information might be connected to another. Draw connecting lines on the poster. Continue until students have no more suggestions. You will have created an interconnected web of information. The students probably know more than they think they do about the subject; point this out to them. Encourage them to become "experts" in the field by the end of the unit. The "Web of Knowledge" can also be effective as the culmination of a unit.

4. Tell a story and lead a discussion.

5. Problem-solving exercise.

6. Drama or simulation.

7. Set induction: Find an analogy for the subject from the students' own experience and then use this familiar subject as a bridge to the new material. For example, for students to understand some of the implications of the sukkah, ask if they have ever stayed outside overnight in a tent. Have them describe what it felt like, how it was different from sleeping in their home and so on. Tell them they are going to be studying the sukkah, and ask how living in a sukkah might be like camping in a tent.

8. Synectics: This is an imagination exercise which again serves the purpose of forging links between the known and unknown. Let's use the sukkah again. Ask students to fill in the sentence: a sukkah is like \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. Write their responses on a poster. Have the students choose one of these analogies to pursue. Let's use the analogy of the tent once again. Have them compile a list of adjectives which describe a tent. Write these on the poster. Then have them find pairs of adjectives from the list which seem to contradict each other, for example, a tent may provide security but also be fragile. Have students suggest other nouns that can be described with these two contradictory adjectives. For example, democracy can also provide security but be fragile. List the suggestions on the poster. Have the class choose one of the suggestions, and conclude the exercise by having them compare it to the sukkah. For example, the sukkah is like democracy because \_\_\_\_\_.

Write the reasons they suggest on the poster. Ask the students what they have learned through this exercise. You may want to expand the metaphor through a creative writing assignment or an art project.

This exercise is also appropriate at the conclusion of a unit when students have learned more about the subject.



**EVOLVING RELIGIOUS  
CIVILIZATION:  
THE PAST DEVELOPMENT**  
Educational Challenge: Expanding  
Meaning.

1. Individual or small group research culminating in: written or oral report, exhibit, travelogue, model, newspaper article, skit, filmstrip, bulletin board display, lesson, game, worksheets and test for classmates, etc.
2. Mock excavation.
3. Museum field trip.
4. Newspaper of the past; good source and model is *Chronicles*, Jerusalem Rueveni Foundation. The *Chronicles* follows a "you were there" format.
5. Guest speaker—real or imaginary (have someone act out a character).
6. Debate value of various positions.
7. Mock trial.
8. Illustrate time lines.
9. Role playing. See simulation on teaching about faith after the Holocaust in *Creative Jewish Education*, Schein and Staub, RRC Press.
10. Mock convention or summit.
11. Games such as one in which the board progresses through time or across different modes of Judaism.



**LIVING IN TWO  
CIVILIZATIONS:  
CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSION**  
Educational Challenge:  
Finding Relevance.

1. Conduct a survey.
2. Interviews.
3. Do an internship, become an apprentice. Keep a journal about the experience.
4. Attend life cycle events or holiday celebrations in own and other communities.
5. Find newspaper articles. New monthly publication "News of the World" by Schafzin and Schafzin is helpful for 5th-9th graders and Noah's Ark is valuable for younger students. Shofar magazine is helpful for 3rd-9th grade.
6. Synectics (see "Peoplehood" section of this article).
7. Drama. A.R.E. has two volumes - *Sedra Scenes* and *Bible Scenes* which are very helpful in this connection.

8. Essays: personal response.

9. Discussions, teacher or student-led.

10. Modern midrash. See Norm Newberg's article on the *akeda* (sacrifice of Issac) in *Creative Jewish Education*, Schein & Staub, Reconstructionist Press.

11. Values Clarification exercises. See the *Jewish Experiential Book*, by Bernie Reisman, Ktav and Rocky Mountain IV: *There is a Season*, A.R.E.

12. Art project.



**CONTINUITY WITHIN  
CHANGE, CHANGE WITHIN  
CONTINUITY: POINTING  
TOWARDS THE FUTURE**  
Educational Challenge: Achieving  
Flexible and Affirmative Closure.

1. Social action project. See *Tikkun Olam* section of this volume.

2. Rewrite or supplement prayers or rituals. See adult education unit on prayer in RRA edition of guide.

3. Brainstorm modern applications.

4. Problem-solving exercise; act on the solutions. Talk with members of synagogue/school committees who have to wrestle with some of the same dilemmas on behalf of the school or synagogue.

5. Task force.

6. Goal setting. Think about projects which can be done in conjunction with other students in the school.

7. Evaluation (in groups or individually, orally or in writing).

8. Create new ritual objects.

9. Use new found skills. See "Torah-thon" in *Tikkun Olam* section of this volume.

10. Post-test.

## Appendix D Contributors

Aviva Batya Bass is a fourth-year rabbinical student at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (RRC) and has taught religious school at a number of synagogues in Philadelphia and Miami. Her curriculum "A Tu Bishevat Lesson Plan" is published in the *Reconstructionist Curriculum Resource Guide*.

Dr. Leila Gal Berner is the spiritual leader of Reconstructionist Congregation Bet Haverim in Atlanta, Georgia. She is also Assistant Professor in the department of religion at Emory University and serves as the chair of the advisory board of the Center for Jewish Ethics at RRC. She is a commentator for the *Kol Haneshamah* prayerbook series and has written many published articles on prayer and spirituality.

Rabbi Joseph M. Blair was ordained at RRC in 1996 and currently serves as the Director of the Hillel Foundation at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. He is the former editor of *Gesher Vekesher*, the JRF Education Newsletter and the co-editor (with Jeffrey Schein) of *Windows on the Jewish Soul: Resources for Teaching the Values of Spiritual Peoplehood*.

Daniel Mordecai Silberman Brenner is a fifth-year rabbinical student at RRC. A musician, comedian, and published poet and playwright, he has performed with the Theater Ariel in Philadelphia and has taught religious school and directed camp programs for students from pre-school to high school.

Barbara Carr is the education director as well as a long-time teacher for Congregation Dor Hadash in San Diego, California. She is the author of "Why Parent-Child Classes?" (*Gesher Vekesher*, October, 1994) and the recipient of the 1996 JRF Master Teacher Award.

Dr. Elliot Dorff is Provost and Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Judaism. His publications include *Jewish Law and Modern Ideology*, *Conservative Judaism: Our Ancestors to our Descendants*, and *A Living Tree: Materials on the Jewish Legal Tradition* (with Arthur Rossett).

Mindy Eilender has served as a teacher, Director of Education, and Jewish family educator and has published articles on Jewish topics as well as Jewish family education programs. She has worked for many years to develop Jewish education programs targeting the needs of Jews with disabilities and has served on the executive board of the Central Agency for Jewish Education of Greater Fort Lauderdale.

Rabbi Jeffrey Eisenstat is the rabbi for Congregation Ramat Shalom in Plantation, Florida. He has served as an instructor for education courses at RRC and as rabbi and director of education and camp programs for Congregation Brit Shalom in State College, Pennsylvania. His articles have been published in several JRF education publications.

Rabbi Sheryl Lewart Shulewitz is the Associate Executive Director of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation. She is the editor of the *Jewish Alive & American Resource Guide*, an adult education course curriculum piloted by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College.

Toba Spitzer, a senior rabbinical student at RRC, has worked as a formal and informal educator in both the United States and Israel. She is the author of "New Explorations in Shemot" a feminist curriculum on the book of Exodus, which will be available from JRF this winter.

Barbara Stark is a member of the board of directors for West End Synagogue, a Reconstructionist congregation in New York City. She has been closely involved in West End's efforts to expand their family programming.

Barbara Wechsler Staub, formerly a science teacher at the Solomon Schechter Day School of Philadelphia, is presently investigating career paths as a physician working with disabled children. She is the co-author (with Selma Roffman) of *Ha Siddur Sheli (My Prayer Book)* (forthcoming, United Synagogue of America Commission on Jewish Education).

Rabbi Jacob J. Staub is Vice President for Academic Affairs and Director of the Department of Medieval Civilization at RRC. He is the co-author (with Rebecca T. Alpert) of *Exploring Judaism, A Reconstructionist Approach* and the co-editor (with Jeffrey Schein) of *Creative Jewish Education: A Reconstructionist Perspective*.

Rabbi David Emil Sulomm Stein, who completed study at RRC in 1991, serves as editorial assistant for *The Reconstructionist* magazine and is the editor of *A Garden of Choice Fruit: 200 Classic Jewish Quotes on Human Beings and the Environment* (Shomrei Adamah, 1991). For the past three years, he has worked as rabbi with Congregation Beit Tikvah in Baltimore, Maryland.

Dr. David A. Teutsch, President of RRC, serves as Editor-in-Chief of the *Kol Haneshamah* Prayerbook Series. He is the author of "Moral Development and Jewish Education: Setting Some Limits" and "Breadth and Depth: The Challenge of Adult Jewish Education."

Rabbi Eric Traiger, a 1995 RRC graduate, is on the middle school Jewish studies faculty at the Harry B. Kellman Academy in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, and is a staff member of Camp Ramah in the Poconos. He is the Associate Editor of *Siddur Lev Yisrael*, which will be published by Ktav in the spring of 1997.

Deborah Waxman is currently a rabbinical student at RRC. She has taught religious school, facilitated family education programs, and developed adult education sessions on a variety of topics. Her curriculum "Lying Day" was published in the *Reconstructionist Curriculum Resource Guide*.

Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg is currently the rabbi for the Jewish Community of Amherst in Amherst, Massachusetts. She has contributed to a variety of periodicals on the subjects of parenting, spirituality and politics, and feminism.



