

Introduction

This *siddur* is based on the premise that children have deeply spiritual lives and that our role is to help them find a language to give that spirituality form and expression. Their surprise and delight at the wonder and mystery of the world is already a kind of prayer. We want to capitalize on this innate prayerfulness of children and connect the spontaneous prayer of the heart with the prayer language of tradition developed over several millennia of Jewish experience.

Mordecai Kaplan once remarked that asking why a person prays is like asking why he or she breathes. Both are a part of what it means to be a human being. Abraham Joshua Heschel taught, “It takes two things to make a prayer come to pass—a person and a word. The very essence of prayer is the blending of the two.”

In this *siddur*, we help to make the activity of praying as natural as breathing, to blend the words of tradition with the mind and soul of the child. We invite children to speak the words and sing the songs that moved the generations and to give their own voice to what moves them, to express the longings of their hearts. We hope to keep them rooted in their tradition and also to lift them up, to connect them to something everlasting.

Stories from Jewish sources and folklore introduce the different sections in the service, because we believe that children can best access the meaning of prayer through stories. Children respond to the language and flow of narrative. They are able to enter a story and find their own place within it. When we encourage them to explore their own relationship to the narrative, we help them to become aware of their own spiritual experience and to explore their spiritual questions.

The questions in *Siddur Kol Hano'ar* invite children to engage in a conversation with prayer and with its meaning to them and their lives. The questions presume that we will take children's thoughts and concerns seriously, and that we are interested in what our youngsters are thinking about life's big questions.

The translations, stories and poetry in this *siddur* are intended to be clear enough to be understandable, poetic enough to be inspiring, concrete enough to be connected to a child's experience and open to a continuing conversation. They are meant to serve as resources to help the service leader enrich the prayer experience.

Our children's lives are filled with noise. Whenever there is a silence, we rush to fill it up. We need intentional quiet to remain in touch with what is eternal, with the spirit. The *siddur* is designed to make space for silence. Through art and guided meditations, children will have the opportunity to slow down, to take a deep breath and reflect, to commune with the self in the midst of community. Sometimes, inviting the children to close their eyes and to listen to the words of the meditations will help invite the reflective process that is so much a part of the prayer experience.

We have included the writings of renowned poets, such as Chaim Nachman Bialik and Leah Goldberg, as well as the imaginings of children from synagogues across North America. In this way, we hope to communicate that prayer is an evolving tradition in which our children are not merely descendents but ancestors.

This prayer book is designed to be used in an intergenerational context. It was supported by many grandparents across North America who have dedicated *Siddur Kol Hano'ar* to their own grandchildren. Their hope, along with ours, is that its words, pictures, poetry and stories will serve as an inspiration to all who pray from its pages.