

Notes from the Cantor – January/February 2008

2008 WELCOMES NEW REFORM PRAYERBOOK AT TEMPLE SINAI

By

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During the last few years our services have included the use of multiple prayer books. On alternate Friday night services, we have used either *Kabbalat Shabbat* or *Shir Chadash*, both of which are our own creative liturgies; during the Saturday early morning Sharing Shabbat service, we have used a draft of the new Reform prayer book, *Mishkan T'filah*, and during the B'nei Mitzvah services we have used the Reform movement's prayer book, *Gates of Prayer*.

Beginning on January 4, we will be praying from *Mishkan T'filah* during all of our Friday night, Saturday Sharing Shabbat services, and Festival services. This is the first major Reform prayer book to be published since the Central Conference of American Rabbis published *Gates of Prayer* in 1975. Over the next few months, both the Rabbi and I will be offering teachings about *Mishkan T'filah*. In the meantime, read below for the basics of *Mishkan T'filah*.

1. What is the translation of the title of the new prayer book?

“Mishkan t'filah” means sanctuary of prayer. The word, “mishkan” is based on a verse from Exodus that actually appears over the Ark in our sanctuary: “And let them build me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst.”

2. Why do we need a new prayer book?

The creation of any new prayer book does not happen in a vacuum. Rabbi Elyse Frishman, editor of *Mishkan T'filah*, said that this prayer book “began truly with a survey, not of theology and clergy, but of laity.” This survey revealed that there was a need for a new prayer book that had meaningful God language, both poetic and literal translations, transliteration, and gender sensitive language. The survey also revealed that meaningful worship is connected to the layout and user

friendliness of a prayer book. *Mishkan T'filah* is based on the concept of an integrated theology and is a reflection of the diversity of 21st century Jews, living both secular and “religious” lives. The goal of *Mishkan T'filah* is for each person to find their voice as individuals and as a community by using the *keva* – fixed texts as a foundation.

3. What are some key changes in this prayer book as compared to *Gates of Prayer*?

- Inclusion of transliteration
- Non – linear layout: a two page spread offers multiple choices of a specific prayer
- Includes commentary and sources of many of the prayers
- Side margins that highlight the name of the prayer and indicate where this prayer fits into a specific rubric
- Hebrew textual changes

The way to come to know and feel “at home” with a new prayer book is by using it – by coming to services and holding it in your hands. Essentially, by using it as a sacred text that joins us together in prayer as individuals, as part of the Temple Sinai community, and as part of the larger Reform community. Familiarity and “making friends” with *Mishkan T'filah* can create comfortable and meaningful worship that has the power to transform.

I invite you to come to services and experience *Mishkan T'filah* for yourselves. For those of you who want more detail and an array of articles about this prayer book, you can go online to www.urg.org/mishkan as well as the summer 2006 issue of *Reform Judaism* magazine.