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Moving Beyond HE:

The Influence of Jewish Feminism on Reform Prayer Practice

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Well Behaved Women Seldom Make History

The popular slogan on a well-worn bumper sticker caught my eye. Deeply engaged in research for this thesis project, this casual aphorism seemed to concisely summarize my thoughts about Jewish feminist theology. Indeed, the women I'd been studying were classic examples of radical female 'misbehavior' in pursuit of incredible change. Especially if one is so inclined to define such 'misbehavior' as a "matter of voice – of a woman insisting she be heard, [not only] paid attention to, but respected a being as fully human and necessary as a man."[1]

If ever there was a space for a well-defined behavior set for women, Jewish liturgy deserves a special prize. Traditional Judaism clearly lays out an understanding of appropriate religious behavior that affects both men and women. The tradition delineates different obligations depending on one's gender, particularly when it comes to formal prayer. Jewish law, while overall respectful of women, defines prayer as a masculine obligation and presents Jewish liturgy in an androcentric language. For better or worse, in a traditional worship experience, Jewish women are most definitely expected to be "well behaved."

And yet, the Jewish biblical narrative contains amazing stories of women whose daring actions against the traditional Jewish notion of "well behavior" make for some remarkable historical turns in the story of the Jewish people. One of these stories of feminine misbehavior will be ironically picked up by the rabbis to illustrate their

[1] Kathryn Harrison. "We're No Angels." *The New York Times*. September 30, 2007. Harrison's article reviews historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's book *Well Behaved Women Seldom Make History*, in which she examines the popularity of her infamous statement from a 1976 spring academic journal article.

philosophy of proper prayer behavior. The story of Hannah's perceived misbehavior at an ancient Israelite shrine serves as the biblical inspiration for prayer as developed by the rabbis of the *Talmud*.

Chapter One of 1 Samuel tells the tale of Hannah, a wife of Elkanah desperate for a child. In her family's yearly pilgrimage to the shrine at Shiloh, Hannah acts against the cultural worship norms of her time when she directly beseeches God. Her 'misbehavior' in pursuit of a most worthy desire sets up the story of the Davidic monarchy as Hannah request to God results in her ultimately becoming the mother of Samuel, the prophet chosen by God to anoint Kings Saul and David.

Like many barren women in the Hebrew Bible, the narrative portrays Hannah as an ordinary, sympathetic character remembered by God. She pursues an intimate connection with God but with a clear awareness of the privileges and responsibilities associated with that connection. Perhaps implicit within her portrayal exists the realization of just how difficult and diverse God relationships can appear. She is a woman will to go beyond the accepted, if somewhat uncomfortable, cultural norms in pursuit of this relationship.

> After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose. The priest Eli was sitting on the seat near the doorpost of the temple of *Adonai*. In her wretchedness, she prayed to *Adonai*, weeping all the while. And she made this vow: "*Adonai Tz'vaot*, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to *Adonai* for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head. As she kept on praying before *Adonai*, Eli [the priest] watched her mouth. Now Hannah was praying in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Sober up!" And Hannah replied, "Oh no, my lord! I am a very unhappy woman. I have drunk no wine or other strong drink, but I have been pouring out my heart to *Adonai*. Do not take your maidservant for a worthless woman; I have only been speaking all

> this time out of my great anguish and distress. "Then go in peace," said Eli, "and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked."[2]

Hannah's misbehavior indeed makes Jewish history. The *Talmud* records in *Berakhot* the rabbinic interpretation of Hannah's behavior. The rabbis establish her as their prayer exemplar, using her actions in the passage as a model for appropriate prayer behavior.[3]

Like Hannah, the misbehaving women of Jewish feminism possessed the purest of intentions. Desperate for a relationship with God, they pursue an alternative path with the hope that God would see the fullness of their femininity, even if the community of God's people still saw them as lesser. Unfortunately, like the misunderstanding of Hannah's behavior by the Israelite priest Eli, Jewish feminists take abuse from those who perceive something they had not quite taken the time to fully understand. Assuming the worst, many of the initial reactions in the Jewish community judge falsely the genuine feminist pursuit of equality as misbehavior, as something outside of God's plan. As time continues to represent, the evolution of Jewish prayer and the significant historical contribution that the feminist consciousness has brought about continues to cause the community to evolve.

The thesis project I embarked upon was designed to examine the impact of Jewish feminism on Jewish prayer and Jewish prayer practice. Given the scope of the project, I chose to explore this topic from the relatively narrow space of the Reform movement's recent liturgical innovations in liturgy as best represented by the 2007 publication of the movement's *siddur* (prayerbook), *Mishkan Tefillah*. In pursuit of that

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[2] 1 Samuel 1:9-17.
[3] BT Berakhot 31a

goal, I present my project findings in three concise chapters that 1) examine a number of Jewish feminist ideas regarding theology and prayer, 2) briefly investigate the history behind progressive Jewish community's prayerbook and its ongoing development, and 3) attempt to measure the impact of some of this evolutionary feminist thought in the liturgical expressions of progressive Jewish prayer.

Chapter One begins by briefly detailing the historical impact of feminism on progressive Judaism. In an effort to seek out women who 'misbehaved' in pursuit of increasing cultural awareness about the diversity representative of the Jewish community, I offer three clear voices regarding Jewish feminist theology's understandings of God, prayer and language. While there are many inspirational voices in this rich, burgeoning field, I sought women that had written extensively on the subject and whose views offered a potential path by which to approach the repair of Judaism's traditional androcentric presentation of God. The voices briefly outlined in this chapter bring both a diversity in the feminist understanding of God as well as help illuminate several key common characteristics of what I identify as markers with which the influence of Jewish feminism on prayer practice could be measured.

Chapter Two explores the historical understanding of the Jewish prayerbook, highlighting how Jewish feminist activism and ideals have worked to transform the modern progressive *siddur*. Briefly detailing the historical understanding of the cultural response and development of what could rightly be called the most well read Jewish book, I illustrate in brief a few early representations of feminist *siddurim* that served as examples in modifying Jewish prayer practice. I propose that examples of

transformational feminist awareness in progressive prayer practice most certainly present themselves in the prayerbook *Mishkan Tefillah.*

Remarkably my analysis in part has led me to the opinion that a key influence of the Jewish feminist consciousness lies in the actual process by which this *siddur, Mishkan Tefillah,* was created. Measuring that particular manifestation was not necessarily a key focus of the project but I discovered it is a subject I believe deserves additional study. While documenting the idea of a feminist process may prove more difficult than simply illuminating key characteristics of prayers as presented by *Mishkan Tefillah,* the creation of the *siddur* in many ways best demonstrates the Reform movement's theoretical commitment to changing the level of equality in prayer practice and theory.

Chapter Three presents the beginning of an analysis regarding the growth of progressive Jewish prayer in the wake of Jewish feminism. Inspired by the set of feminist influenced prayer markers as highlighted in Chapter One, I uncover some leading examples of these characteristics as presented by God language and the prayer structures of *Mishkan Tefillah.* Given the scope of my project, this analysis as such only skims the surface of what the *siddur* offers. Most decidedly, I discovered that the contents of Mishkan Tefillah provide a rich resource of Jewish Reform prayer ideology and practice. The contents illuminate both the progress made as well as the cultural and religious boundaries still unbroken. Some of these boundaries may continue to serve as a source of pain for many progressive worshippers. Ideally the conversation begun with *Mishkan Tefillah* will serve as a jumping off point for future discourse of liturgical evolutionary progress.

Chapter 1: Jewish Feminism and Prayer

Igniting the Spark

In 1963, suburban housewife Betty Friedan ignited a nation when she dared to illuminate American women's "nameless, aching dissatisfaction," a view she famously called "the problem that has no name."[4] Friedan's celebrated book, *The Feminine Mystique*, generated a movement that scholars have come to understand as the second wave of American feminism. The cultural phenomenon of feminism entertains multiple, complicated definitions, at best understood as a "complex movement with many layers."[5] American feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether provides a useful, broad definition in one of the essays exploring feminism and theology.

> It [feminism] can be defined as a movement within liberal democratic societies for full inclusion of women in political rights and access to equal employment. It can be defined more radically in socialist and liberationist feminism as a transformation of the patriarchal socioeconomic system in which male domination of women is the foundation of all social hierarchies. Feminism can also be studied in terms of culture and consciousness, charting the symbolic, psychological, and cultural connection between the definition of women as inferior mentally, morally, and physically, and male monopolization of knowledge and power.[6]

Friedan's intellectual analysis of these cultural norms and structured inequalities ignited Jewish women, perhaps because they constituted a cross-section of Friedan's target audience for *The Feminine Mystique*. Jewish women understood all too well the questions of a life lived on the margins of community. Progressive twentieth century Jewish leaders, even those who had actively embraced modernity, still held a view of

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[4] Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique*. 1963. Reprint. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company. 1997. Pages 79 and 57.
[5] Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton, eds. *Feminism and Theology*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 2003. Page 24.
[6] Ibid.

women as somewhat second-class citizens when it came to Jewish practice and authority. While official Reform movement doctrine recognized early on an equality of women and men in terms of religious privileges and duties, the reality of full access only begins to truly shift with the recognition that the fullness of the female experience still lacked real representation. Bright, passionate, Jewish women found themselves inspired by Friedan's analysis of the missing pieces of their lives. Combined with insight provided by other cultural observations from feminists who also dared to note modernity's continued lack of progress in the realm of real equality for women[7], these Jewish women discovered a permission to uncover Judaism's "nameless, aching dissatisfactions" within their spiritual lives and religious practice.

For women who understood themselves as standing on the margins of their spiritual and religious communities, feminism's probing of cultural equality opened a door towards the exploration of religious and legal equality they felt was missing from Judaism. The questions they began asking would transform modern Judaism as we know it, ushering in a post-modern evolution of Judaism. In addition, conversations sparked by feminist writers and thinkers would succeed in bringing back many Jews into religious life. As Orthodox writer and *halakhist* Blu Greenberg, reflecting about her public address at the First National Jewish Women's Conference in February 1973

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[7] Many brave voices speak out in the story of "second wave" American feminism. Some of the more recognizable names who share equal status with Betty Friedan as women responsible for helping to spark the "second wave" include writer Simone de Beauvoir whose book, *The Second Sex*, is considered a major work of feminist philosophy and journalist Gloria Steinem, a co-founder of *Ms. Magazine* who enjoyed a key leadership role in the women's movement.

recalled, "Feminism was an entry point for many women into Judaism and not an exit as other modern social movements had been."[8]

It would not take long before Jewish feminism became an important sub-movement within the larger feminist movement happening in the United States. Focusing on issues that directly affected Jewish women, in both their secular and religious lives, Jewish feminism challenged the lack of equality and access in the realm of Jewish law and religious practice. In addition, scholars of Jewish feminism created theoretical frameworks designed to advance ideas of gender equality in Judaism. The movement incorporated a goal of creating new opportunities for Jewish women concerning their experiences of Judaism and their leadership within the larger Jewish community.

In the early stages of the effort, Jewish women worked primarily to see and be seen in their Jewish communities. They wanted to emerge completely from balconies and kitchens in order to be viewed as whole Jews, unchained from an exempted status and included among those worthy of all Jewish obligations and responsibilities. Notable feminist Jewish voices challenge the gendered status quo for Jewish women with actions reminiscent of a revolution. In one of the first organized responses, Jewish women in New York City in 1972 formed a collective called *Ezrat Nashim,*[9] in order to make a major call for change in the Conservative movement of Judaism. At the same time, the challenge of a gender exclusive status in the Reform rabbinate would lead

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[8] This quote from Blu Greenberg's can be found in the recorded reflections about her participation in the First National Jewish Women's Conference. This reflection accompanies a copy of her first article on religious feminism published in the April 1976 issue of *Hadassah Magazine*. Both statement and artifact are located on the Jewish Women's Archive website at jwa.org/feminism/-html/JWA031.htm

[9] This phrase translates into English as "women's help." The phrase is also known as a common name referring to the women's section of a synagogue.

Hebrew Union College, Reform Judaism's seminary, to make history in 1972 by ordaining the first woman rabbi, Sally Priesand. Not only were women and men changing practices within movements but they were also experimenting with new practices outside of mainstream organized Judaism. Naomi Janowitz and Maggie Wenig created the first feminist *siddur*, *Siddur Nashim*, in 1976, offering feminine imagery for God as a viable addition to traditional images by reimagining prayers with radically altered notions of masculine God language.

Making Change Instead of Simply Making Room

The advances of feminist thought and challenge throughout the seventies and eighties created a new cultural landscape for American women. Beginning in the early nineties, the idea of third wave feminism emerges as a necessary and critical reworking of second wave feminism, which saw equality and access as its key goals. Like the various feminist movements out of which it grew, those involved in the feminist cultural shift continued their pursuit of empowerment for women on all fronts: social, political, economic and personal. However, the focus shifted from a movement primarily focused on activist issues to the individual women's experience and transformation of the worlds in which she lived.[10]

Third wave feminists seem to be asking, "How can women integrate and celebrate their multiple, complex and contradictory identities in the contemporary world?" The

[10] Dr. Rachel Adler considers second wave feminism's concentration to have been primarily focused on equality and access for women. She defines third wave feminism as being more concerned with transformation. It is this transformation potential that I find most compelling about feminist perspectives reading into Jewish tradition and understanding. Class notes of Modern and Postmodern Jewish Thought taught by Dr. Rachel Adler on April 14, 2011 at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles, California.

movement emphasizes personal empowerment of women as a way to enact social change for the betterment of all members of society. The transformational quality of third wave feminism frames the Jewish conversation surrounding theology and the Jewish relationship with God.

Many of these scholars seek to challenge the notions of mainstream contemporary Jewish thought regarding the reading of text and tradition, interjecting feminist critique and understanding into the equation. Their work focuses on improving the religious, legal, and social status of women within Judaism so as to open up new opportunities for religious experience for both Jewish women and men. Ellen Umansky, a Jewish feminist scholar, proposes that viewing Jewish feminism in this light advances a particular feminist vision of Judaism committed to imagining Jewish theology as being primarily drawn from the theologian's personal experiences.[11] She categorizes this personal theology as a "response theology."[12] According to Umansky, the Jewish feminist theologian contextualizes herself as both a woman, and a feminist woman at that, as well as a Jew. She works towards finding her story within Jewish stories and prayers, even if it sometimes means she needs to rework or reinterpret the traditional understanding of the stories and prayers in order to locate herself. The overall goal suggests that this perspective leads to transformation of Jewish practice and thought that seeks to ***include*** as opposed in ***exclude***. In doing so, this feminist reformulation

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[11] Ellen Umansky. "Jewish Feminist Theology." In Eugene Borowitz. *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide*, 2nd Edition. West Orange, NJ: Berman House: 1995. Pages 314-317.

[12] Ellen Umansky. "Creating a Jewish Feminist Theology: Possibilities and Problems" in Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, eds. *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*. San Francisco, CA: Harper One: 1989. Pages 187-198.

aims "to offer women and men a means of formulating their own articulated and unarticulated responses to the categories of God, Torah and Israel."[13]

Other Jewish feminist theologians differ in their approach regarding just how much of an individualistic viewpoint needs to be taken into account when encountering God. These scholars advocate for an approach using Judaism's own tools of tradition in order to advance gender equality in Jewish understanding. They seek solutions that balance tradition and modernity, focusing their efforts on innovating tradition to be more inclusive but not necessarily to supersede all of its communal foundations.

The field of Jewish feminist thought remains in its infancy especially when viewed alongside the larger context of modern Jewish thought. As the lens of a woman's perspective is thoughtfully applied, the impressive body of feminist Jewish scholarship continues a rapid growth encompassing a large portion of the Jewish community. The analysis no longer simply confines itself to the progressive perspective. Indeed there is a rich, growing body of Orthodox feminist literature, which seeks to further the cause of an egalitarian approach to Jewish practice that falls within the bounds of Jewish law.[14]

For the purposes of this work, I will not specifically address the work of all feminist Jewish thought. I have chosen to focus principally on Jewish feminist theologians whose primary context is a modern, progressive understanding of Jewish tradition. In addition, I contend that their work represents an intersection between second and third

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[13] Ellen Umansky. "Jewish Feminist Theology." Page 317.

[14] The Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA) is a major organization of this movement. Their self-described mission, as stated on the website, www.jofa.org: "JOFA seeks to expand the spiritual, ritual, intellectual and political opportunities for women within the framework of *halakhah*."

wave feminism. The intersection provides an opportunity to see how Jewish feminism moves from activism to transformation.

Jewish Feminist Theology Is Theory and Action

A simple, straightforward definition of Jewish feminist theology is quite difficult for two reasons. First, the field is relatively new. Its scholarship, while practiced by many women who have been participating in the conversation since the early seventies, still occupies a relatively innovative space in cultural discourse. Second, Jewish feminist theology understands itself in much the same way as other Jewish theologies. The field reflects a praxis-oriented methodology, which is the integration of knowledge and action (i.e. theory and practice) by scholars studying the subject.[15] Feminist theology therefore, like the nature of God it seeks to explain, is a dynamic, ongoing process. A static definition is not possible.

Feminist theology in general came about as a method from which to consider Western religious traditions, practices, holy texts and theology from the feminine perspective. This perspective broadly links the idea of identity to one's theological point of view. The essay, *The Human Situation: A Feminine View*, written in 1960 by Valerie Saiving Goldstein while still a student of theology, substantially shifted the field. Goldstein "suggests that the analysis of 'the human condition' given by the modern male theologian was specifically from a man's point of view."[16] Her observation that men and women read God differently successfully brings the feminist lens into the longstanding

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[15] A practicality drives the field of Jewish feminism as noted by the co-editors of the anthology *Womanspirit Rising* suggesting that, "Even those Jewish thinkers who are most theoretical frequently express a practical concern." See the introduction of Rachel Adler's *Engendering Judaism*, in particular page 24, for additional information.
[16] Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton, eds. *Feminism and Theology*. Page 5.

discourse about God. Feminism will question and analyze religious cultural norms that promoted androcentric images of God. The resulting scholarship pushes progressive Western religious thought in the direction of a "naming towards God" as opposed to a "fixing of names upon God."[17]

Jewish feminist theology developed within these critical, constructive observations generated by feminist theology. Jewish women, influenced by the larger questions of feminist theological discourse, begin to consider how Judaism's gendered distinctions marginalized women and reduced their access to full participation within the Jewish community. The theology takes shape in the progressive Jewish world as this space responded most rapidly to the demands of feminism. Some of the field's most powerful voices emerge from this world where, prior to Jewish feminism's challenges, the problem of exclusionary Jewish thought was often dealt with by essentially excising those rituals from contemporary Jewish practice. The removal of the *mechitza* (a *halakhic* partition or barrier used to separate men and women during Jewish worship services) from American Reform synagogues in their worship space illustrates a prime example of this sort of practice. Such a move corresponded to a symbolic representation of the movement's more liberal interpretation of gender roles but did not necessarily lead to a significant immediate increase in women's access to worship. Jewish feminism reopens doors to the questions of access and equality that had been previously solved

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[17] Mary Daly. Excerpt from *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. 1993. In *Feminism and Theology*. Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton, eds. New York, NY: Oxford University Press: 2003. Page 47.

by ignoring certain Jewish practices.[18] The conversation that follows leads to an examination of Judaism's gender-specific historical understanding of itself.

A clearer understanding of Jewish feminist theology is perhaps best pursued through an investigation of the major subjects its practitioners have focused on in pursuit of equality and access. Using these major themes, Jewish feminists explored Jewish categories from a feminist perspective in order to move Judaism as a whole towards fuller, more honest discourse about women in Judaism, in practice and theory. Jewish feminist thought examines this evolution through a number of themes: God and the role of God language, access to Torah study and the authority of interpretation, the role of *halakhah* and its adaptability to modernity (i.e. the historical understanding of change).[19]

A prickly, controversial early question considered by Jewish feminists was the "centrality of male imagery for God."[20] From the early seventies onward, this theological barrier has been explored extensively both in a theological reconsideration of God from a woman's unique viewpoint and in the obvious practical consideration of how God language – both the words that refer to God and the liturgical words and images used to guide our conversations with and about God – promotes or obscures access to God. Early Jewish feminists called for a reshaping of God language through deconstructing the androcentric foundations of Jewish thought. Rita Gross addresses exclusive male

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[18] Riv-Ellen Prell. "The Vision of Women in Classical Reform Judaism." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. 50. 1983. Pages 575-589.
[19] Judith Plaskow. "Feminist Theology." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. Found on the Jewish Women's Archive website at: jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/feminist-theology.
[20] Ibid.

images and language in her 1976 article, *Female God Language in a Jewish Context.*[21] She acknowledges the theological inadequacy of all gendered pronouns but suggests prayer should alternate these images because while God does not have a gender, people who relate to God do have a gender. Lynn Gottlieb, a rabbi and progressive liturgist, encourages a re-naming of God with a myriad of metaphors. She advocated for feminists to claim *Shekhinah* as a feminine name for the divine, defining this female gendered version of a God name as "She-Who-Dwells-Within."[22]

God language, and its natural partner of liturgy, expanded as feminism grew beyond equality and second wave feminist thinking. The critique matured with Jewish feminists coupling the examination of traditional God language with a necessary reflective, reflexive concern about Judaism's ongoing relationship with the traditional theological images of God as constructed by the Jewish liturgical conversation. Approached with a sense of historical accuracy, traditional liturgy has pointed towards a narrative of change and evolution ever since prayer was ostensibly cemented into place by the ancient rabbis of the *Talmud.* Their interpretations of Jewish prayer customs suggested the practice could serve as a logical placeholder for the ancient Temple sacrifice, which had temporarily, at least in their eyes, become unavailable.

Prayer, of course, grows over Jewish history to become a major cornerstone of Jewish practice. It has also grown with the times, even when viewed with a clearly

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[21] Rita M. Gross. "Female God Language in a Jewish Context." In Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow. *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion.* New York, NY: HarperCollins. 1979. Pages 167-173.

[22] Tamara Cohen. "Women's Spiritual Awareness" in Jules Harlow, with Tamara Cohen, Rochelle Furstenberg, Daniel Gordis and Leora Tanenbaum. *Pray Tell: A Hadassah Guide to Jewish Prayer.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing. 2003. Page 209.

traditional lens. The original *Aleinu*, for example, a prayer found in the concluding section of the Jewish worship service, contains passages from the book of Isaiah. Many *siddurim* omitted these passages due to Christian censorship in the 1300s. While these challenging theological lines, which question the theological worth of other religions, have been restored in some traditional *siddurim*, many still omit the verse completely, as if it never existed.

Thus in the very act of engaging with the Jewish past, contemporary Jewish feminist thinkers raise theological questions regarding alternative images of God. As pointed out by feminist theologian Rachel Adler, Jewish liturgy embodies a contradiction regarding liturgical change and the impression of liturgical continuity. "A new liturgical field does not cover up over its predecessor and deposit a new layer. Instead, it breaks up and reassimilates shards and snatches of previous liturgies, cementing them into a new formation."[23] When a feminist theologian engages with the liturgical tradition it does not necessarily mean she will automatically reject the past as it has been written. Instead, the Jewish feminist calls for a feminine filling in, a re-reading of sources – both canonized and non-canonical sources, so as to locate advanced representation of women. She does so in the hope of helping to promote a renewed sense of women's equality within the liturgy.

Categories of Prayer – Feminist Style

"A central motif in Jewish feminist thought asserts that women's religious experience has somewhat different contours than that of men."[24] While the path of

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[23] Rachel Adler. *Engendering Judaism*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. 1999. Page 83.
[24] Eugene Borowitz. *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide*, 2nd Edition. West Orange, NJ: Berman House: 1995. Pg 313.

religious ritual may eventually lead to the same place, it should come as no surprise that women experience and understand things differently, not necessarily better or worse, than men. Feminist sensibilities support the belief that this difference should be celebrated as it clears away obstacles that falsely suggest a particular religious path of any given individual will look exactly like the path of their neighbor. While there are clearly similarities, differences add to our awareness of the multiplicity of ways one can experience a meaningful Jewish life.

Jewish prayer might be the most vibrant and stark theme with which to examine these contours that shape our religious experiences. The practice of prayer, which ideally takes place in a communal setting, simultaneously implies a deeply personal, individual moment. As suggested by Jewish philosopher Eugene Borowitz, "Jewish worship is by belief and practice uncompromisingly individualistic, and its future depends on the ever increasing ability of individual Jews to participate in the service and fulfill its expectations."[25] The God connection by definition requires a person to interact with ideas that can sometimes only be understood through internal processes. The personal, especially in Judaism, is prayer and prayer is personal.

This might be why the exclusive nature of traditional Jewish prayer creates clear problems for Jewish feminists. Jewish prayer, as understood from Judaism's very beginnings, was primarily shaped by and for men. Granted, exceptions to this idea exist, perhaps the most well known being the *tekhines*, women's prayers written in Yiddish mostly by women for women. Overall though, the cultural contexts in which liturgists

[25] Eugene Borowitz. "The Individual and the Community in Jewish Prayer." *Gates of Understanding: A Companion Volume to Shaarei Tefillah: Gates of Prayer*. Lawrence Hoffman, ed. New York, NY: CCAR Press. 1977. Page 58.

lived dictated communal prayer with an androcentric religious reality. This religious reality created considerable challenges when Judaism encountered modernity. As women became more visible and vocal in the secular world, Judaism clung to its ancient past not necessarily as an obstacle to evolution but as an articulated connection to the very foundational qualities of the collective Jewish past.

The problem encountered, and in many ways completely unavoidable in a world where feminism has altered the awareness of both men and women, then appears that gendered prayer, even if created under the most noble of circumstances, no longer fits the transformational role prayer purports to play in a Jewish life. Can a prayer transform a worshipper if the very essence of the words recited lack the flexibility to recognize the diversity with which God created humanity? What happens to a worshipper's personal integrity when they recite words that fail to acknowledge their true identity? The awareness brought about by Jewish feminism cannot help but to demand a liturgical change for God language. As pointed out by Rachel Adler, "A prayer that belies or misrepresents our experience or understanding violates integrity and insults God."[26]

Jewish feminist theology will openly acknowledge "an understanding of theology ... rooted in personal experience."[27] This idea is not new in Jewish thought. Because of Judaism's lack of a universal foundational dogma, Jewish thinkers have long recognized the personal narrative quality of Jewish theology.[28] The serious critique theology will undergo when it encounters feminist thought acts as a wake-up call for some in the

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[26] Rachel Adler. *Engendering Judaism*. Pages 61-62.
[27] Ellen Umansky. "Jewish Feminist Theology." Page 314.
[28] Ibid.

progressive Jewish world. Does Jewish prayer in its unaltered androcentric form perhaps recognizes only half of the Jewish world's personal God narrative?

For some an expanded definition categorizes Jewish feminist theology as Umansky's responsive theology, a theology that "emerges out of an encounter with 'images and narrative of the Jewish past' and from the [unique but quantifiable] experiences of the theologian."[29] Other feminists disagree suggesting instead that the communal emphasis of Jewish practice must be given equal weight within discourse surrounding liturgical change versus continuity. Given the uniqueness with which many Jews approach their relationship with God, Jewish feminist theology, as does its older sister Jewish theology, reflects a diversity of approaches to God. Prayer serves as a potential connection moment used by Judaism to forge a God experience ideally for all Jews who wish to experience the divine. Jewish feminist theology records as such several different approaches that can be used to engage and re-envision the language of liturgy and the access it establishes for the worshipper.

For the purposes of the ongoing conversation regarding the use of these feminist approaches to prayer and God, my goal in the remainder of this chapter focuses on an attempt to illuminate several agreed upon characteristics of Jewish prayer and God language influenced by Jewish feminism and Jewish feminist theology. These categories should by no means be understood as comprehensive but perhaps as representative of a strategies that points towards an ideal worship situation where women pray with men, and men pray with women, using God language that respects individual diversity as well as communal foundations. In addition, my goal in analyzing recent examples of

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[29] Ibid.

progressive liturgy as a reflection of Jewish feminist influences and perhaps also as a feminist inspired process does not include a desire to replace all other theological authority. On the contrary, I want to suggest that the influence of Jewish feminism has transformed and widened a progressive Jew's access to prayer. To that end, I've chosen three Jewish feminist voices whose ideas about God and prayer best present a progressive, feminist theological framework designed to transform prayer experiences for all participants. I will briefly outline these theologies in order to highlight several commonalities that can be utilized as criteria for determining the potential influence of Jewish feminism on prayer representations found in progressive Jewish prayerbooks.

Voices of Progressive Feminist Theology

Judith Plaskow

Judith Plaskow begins her investigation of the challenges facing Jewish prayer practice by examining the traditional images of God in order to confront out the "unyielding maleness of the dominant Jewish picture of God."[30] Her analysis reveals a God with a deeply gendered bias. With a careful unpacking of the narrow, androcentric language Judaism uses to identify and describe God in traditional Jewish liturgy, Plaskow reveals the exclusionary nature of these metaphors for God. Moreover, she problematizes the symbolic nature of the metaphors and their effect on a worshipper. "Religious symbols do not simply tell us about God. ... They also shape the world we live in, functioning as models for human behavior and the social order."[31]

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[30] Judith Plaskow. *Standing Again At Sinai.* San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row: 1990. Page 123.
[31] Judith Plaskow. *Standing Again At Sinai.* Page 126.

Plaskow proposes that a danger of image idolization resides in exclusive graphic representations of the nature of the divine. Symbols and metaphors projected exclusively run the risk of becoming less of "a pointer towards God but rather a specific identifier of God."[32] Given the repetition employed by liturgy, prayer can form a particular portrait of God that emphasizes only a gendered, hierarchical deity. Such a portrait severely limits the diversity with which worshippers can interact with God.

The analysis recommends that the pluralistic community deserves to encounter more creative, imaginative ideas when it comes to images of God. Plaskow points out the inherent hierarchical dilemma of simply replacing male God imagery with female God imagery as many early feminists sought to do after centuries of experiencing what they considered as an unapproachable, overwhelmingly dominant image of God as Other. In this vein, a feminist consciousness should instead open up the Jewish community to the potential generation of a new language for God, with an acknowledgement of humanity's limited capacity to use language to speak about the unknowable quality of God.[33]

Plaskow considers what might make God language feminist but perhaps not exclusively feminine. She proposes that the strength of this version of God language reflects a creation of "divine power as not something above and over us but in and around us."[34] Language of this nature also better expresses the communal aspects of God, as Plaskow promotes a theological understanding that God is most often experienced in a communal setting. She seeks a "Jewish feminist understanding of God

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[32] [32] Judith Plaskow. *Standing Again At Sinai.* Page 127.
[33] [33] Judith Plaskow. *Standing Again At Sinai.* Page 134.
[34] [34] Judith Plaskow. *Standing Again At Sinai.* Page 140.

[that] ... advocates and appreciates a plurality of images for God ... including traditional metaphors. ... [These God metaphors must additionally represent] the diversity of Jewish community."[35]

Additionally compelling for Judith Plaskow is the notion that in order to "transform traditional conceptions of God in a deep and far-reaching way" we must focus our "efforts on a wider movement aimed at ... reconceptualizing God."[36] She prefers a less hierarchical representation of God, "replacing images of domination with a different understanding of the divine-human relationship.[37] Plaskow puts forth compelling arguments that Jewish tradition has a vast myriad of God metaphors which could be co-opted to create necessary space = for each worshipper to "name the God of their [unique] experiences."[38] These ideas reflect the dynamic nature of God and the diversity of possible metaphors for Jewish people seeking a connection with said dynamic God.

Rachel Adler

With similar purpose but a quite different approach, Rachel Adler makes her case for an inclusive liturgy that values and incorporates each gender's role by "affirming the [essential] maleness or femaleness of self"[39] each individual brings to worship. Being perhaps somewhat more of a pragmatist than Plaskow, Adler first analyzes how a process for transformation might occur before casting a notion of how Jewish feminist theology might advance this transformation. In doing so she

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[35] Judith Plaskow. *Standing Again At Sinai.* Page 154.
[36] Judith Plaskow. *Standing Again At Sinai.* Page 143.
[37] Judith Plaskow. *Standing Again At Sinai.*. Page 166.
[38] Judith Plaskow. *Standing Again At Sinai.*. Page 169.
[39] Rachel Adler. *Engendering Judaism.* Page 66.

enumerates three essential tasks necessary to bring about a transformational change within liturgy: 1) an acknowledgement of women, 2) a joint, equal involvement of both men and women in the "creation and transformation of prayer" and 3) an admission that the current "exclusively masculine language for God" has been totalized.[40] She argues that this enormous task will involve more than simply creating word substitutions. In reality, the process itself requires an almost complete paradigm shift of considerable complexity. This particular evolution, as Adler will outline, may prove to be quite challenging. Her approach suggests that such change must begin at a grassroots level and exacts high demands from the involved community.

In pursuit of these goals, Adler lays out a set of complex questions a community needs to address as it pursues a transformation of "language, theology of ritual and the nature of ritual and ritual change."[41] She advises that the path of transformation must first pass first through a "thicket" of deeply entangled, deeply engrained widely held assumptions about the nature of God and prayer. A community committed to Adler's approach will likely find itself needing to give up some older ideas in order to make room for new developments.

Adler's thicket metaphor works quite well in this context. The development of a new, or better yet renewed, language of Jewish prayer may require a impressive cutting out of ideas that have ceased to serve a community desirous of real inclusivity. This cutting away, even with acknowledgement that much of what needs to be excised 'died' long ago (or needs to die in order to permit real growth) is still extremely painful.[42]

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Rachel Adler. *Engendering Judaism*. Page 75.
[42] Ibid.

Adler carefully cautions that the 'interwovenness of prayer' makes for a delicate business of real transformation.

Rachel Adler's suggestions for a possible plan designed to move through the thicket begins with an approach to the actual experience of worship. The suggestion makes good sense as a starting place when considering how to transform God language, as the changing nature of the worship service logically points to the possible missing 'words' and sentiments of liturgical language. Clearly the inclusion of women in progressive liturgy changed the needs of language. The Reform movement's early adoption of providing a space for women as "honorary men" did not adequately address the issue. Adler notes that, "Real inclusion can only occur when women cease to be invisible as women."[43]

Adler's analysis of the worship experience reminds all of us that prayer is always more than the words in the prayerbooks. Those words need to mean something as they ideally are used to move worshippers from one place to another higher place. The rituals Jews have come to understand are, according to Adler and others, much more representative of something than the actual events in which they are recited. They reflect a cultural understanding of ourselves as one's worship style often echoes one's communal affiliation.[44] There exists the real possibility that a changing of style will create a redefining of community. That, of course, can be quite threatening to those who feel strongly that the community is not necessarily in need of change.

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[43] Rachel Adler. *Engendering Judaism*. Pages 62-63.
[44] Rachel Adler. *Engendering Judaism*. Page 76.

Ritual change feels dangerous because displacing the old removes a sense of predictability, which is what draws participants to worship in the first place.[45] "Ritual moves people powerfully and non-rationally, independent of the intellectual content."[46] An additional assertion provided by Adler highlights the performative nature of prayers. For example, traditional Jewish liturgy involves the use of particular *berakhot,* which contain certain holy words designed to do specific holy things. When we take away these words, do we take away the possibility for the holy action to occur?

Adler's answer in the sphere of liturgical change can be found within her examination of theology, which she consider "implicit in the God-language we choose or reject."[47] She advocates for an embracing of otherness in God language but with modifications that reflect our diversity.

> "For me, the chief reason [for otherness] is that the otherness of God is compellingly real and infinitely precious. Eradicating otherness, breaking down all boundaries between the self and other, self and God, God and world simultaneously eradicates relatedness. How is it possible to have a covenant without an Other?[48]

She makes the otherness essential for creating a relationship with God. Instead of moving beyond a transcendent God, Adler expands the notion of transcendence by altering an understanding of the dynamics of a God relationship. Regarding a possible solution for the problems considered by many regarding gender-specific metaphors for God, Adler offers an expansion of the metaphor pool in which we swim. Adler suggests that our metaphors, which are to be found in Jewish stories, act as clothing for the body

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[45] Barbara Myerhoff. "A Death in Due Time: Construction of Self and Culture in Ritual Drama." *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle.* John MacAloon, ed. Philadelphia, PA: Institute for the Study of Human Issues. 1984. Pages 149-178.
[46] Rachel Adler. *Engendering Judaism.* Page 77.
[47] Rachel Adler. *Engendering Judaism.* Page 88.
[48] Rachel Adler. *Engendering Judaism.* Pages 91-92.

of God. "The dilemma will not be solved by rejecting or dismissing stories but by telling more stories, clothing the nakedness of God as we become more aware of it."[49]

An examination of where to seek out clothing for a feminist-inspired version of the God story moves Adler to propose looking beyond the feminine names found in some of Judaism's earliest traditions. Given that the issue has been born into a contemporary mindset, she sets up a possible answer borne out of modernity. "One source of fresh and contemporary imagery that can be imported into theology and prayer can be found in [contemporary Jewish] literature created by Jewish men and women." These poets "steal the language of tradition, wresting it away from masculine theologies of spirit and transcendence and resituating it in embodied, sensuous gendered experience."[50]

Marcia Falk

Marcia Falk, in contrast to both Adler and Plaskow, uses feminist theology to propose feminist prayers that fit her definitions. Some consider Falk a liturgist as opposed to a theologian but her new versions of blessings in many ways reflect theological assertions set out by Falk and other feminist theologians. She uses liturgy to "give voice to what she has identified as a theology of immanence."[51] If we see Plaskow and Adler as feminist theologians who suggest a new approach to liturgy and the God-language that defines liturgy, then Marcia Falk can be understood as a feminist liturgist who recommends a newish approach to theology.[52] Where Adler and Plaskow provide

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[49] Rachel Adler. *Engendering Judaism*. Page 96.
[50] Rachel Adler. *Engendering Judaism*. Page 101.
[51] Ellen Umansky. "Jewish Feminist Theology." Page 328.
[52] Falk's methodology is not entirely new. It is reflective of a feminist Reconstructionist approach. See the Reconstructionist siddur *Kol Haneshamah* for additional information.

an approach for using a feminist theoretical framework that could move a comprehensive community towards the creation of a unified feminist-responsive God-language, Falk takes a bold leap over that theoretical framework by actually creating a liturgy that reflects her understanding of a feminist-inspired theology.

Falk's most significant contribution comes from her 1996 publication of *The Book of Blessings*, which is, by and large, a prayerbook with a rich and complex commentary. Reflective of her liturgical re-workings collected and considered for many years, Falk's prayerbook recounts her own theological development as well. Falk's introduction to the overall book and its prayer sections as well as her thoughtful, insightful commentary take the worshipper through her evolving process of writing new blessings reflecting traditional themes. This process initially grew out of her personal discomfort with patriarchal God images found within traditional liturgy.

Falk rejects anything formulaic about prayer, suggesting that prayer deserves the same variety of approaches feminist theology demands for God language and images.[53] This rejection does not seem to be about the *keva* per se but more about a rote quality that can bleed into *keva*. "I firmly believe that no convention of prayer ought to become completely routine, lest it lose its ability to inspire authentic feeling."[54] In rejection of formulaic prayer, Falk finds herself in good rabbinic company with Rabbi Eliezer's *mishnaic* opinion that fixed prayer does not equate with genuine supplication.[55]

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[53] Marcia Falk. *The Book of Blessings: New Jewish Prayers for Daily Life, the Sabbath, and the New Moon Festival.* San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins Publishers. 1996. Page xviii.
[54] Marcia Falk. *The Book of Blessings.* Page xvii.
[55] Mishnah Berakhot 4:3-4

Falk's personal theological narrative certainly reflects her own evolving theological explanation of God. Through an unpacking of the predominance of Jewish liturgy's tendencies to use androcentric God language, Falk proposes that simply substituting female God imagery does not fully resolve bigger questions about the nature of God. What Falk objects to most strongly concerns the theology of Otherness posited by all anthropomorphic God-language. She asks why Jewish philosopher Martin Buber's 'I-thou' address of divinity has been given exclusive authority in Jewish prayer.[56] Falk perceives the divine as outside of an otherness construct, adopting Mordecai Kaplan's theological concept that God is neither personal nor supernatural. She notes, "I would describe my own experience of the divine as an awareness, or a sensing, of the dynamic, alive and unifying wholeness within creation – a wholeness that subsumes and contains and embraces me, a wholeness greater than the sum of its parts."[57]

Like others, Falk understands the limitation of traditional metaphors and calls for an expansion of the possible names by which Jews call God. Where she potentially differs is in her assertion that we need to move beyond these anthropomorphic notions of God. In her understanding, God is better understood as process as opposed to being. This idea will render the use of gendered images of God somewhat irrelevant.[58]

While Falk does not necessarily completely reject a God of relationship, she considers the belief of a relational transcendent God one that promotes relationship patterns built on dualism and a powerful-powerless hierarchical model. This God

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[56] Marcia Falk. *The Book of Blessings.* Page 419.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ellen Umansky. "Jewish Feminist Theology." Page 330.

concept does not adequately account for the wholeness with which she experiences the world. As an advocate for a theology framed by personal experiences,[59] Falk puts forth her experiences of God that move God beyond being conceptualized and addressed in personal terms. Her images reflect experiences of God that she considers "better represented by nonpersonal images, as well as by other, less direct modes of expression that do not attempt to [always] locate divinity in specific images."[60]

Falk's belief that "there is no single answer to the questions of how to speak authentically in prayer"[61] can be readily seen in the diverse offerings presented in *The Book of Blessings*. Falk's blessings portray her desire for and awareness of connection – to God, to each other, to ourselves, to the earth and its creatures. Essentially Falk seems to understand this divine connection "in less obvious, less predictable ways.[62] Rather than seeing herself as someone providing new images or words for God language or even alternatives to the traditional prayers, Falk wants to "set in motion a process of ongoing naming that would point toward the diversity of our experiences and reach toward a greater inclusivity within the encompassing, monotheistic whole."[63]

The dilemma of Falk's message, which is perhaps also reflective of its authenticity, might be that the God images she offers in her new blessings are all images constructed as a reflection of her own personal experience. Can a worshipper with experiences radically different from Falk's interact with the God images she portrays with her blessings? As far as a consideration of Jewish continuity, Falk does name her

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[59] Marcia Falk. *The Book of Blessings*. Page 514.
[60] Marcia Falk. *The Book of Blessings*. Page 422.
[61] Marcia Falk. *The Book of Blessings*. Page 423.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Marcia Falk. *The Book of Blessings*. Page xvii.

experiences from within Jewish tradition. Drawing on a remarkable capacity with both the Hebrew and English language, she plants each new prayer in a foundation filled with the rich soil of the Jewish holy language, Hebrew. This planting, best observed by those who are familiar with Jewish liturgy, as well as traditional texts and the nuances of the Hebrew language, is done after harvesting the essential prayer ideas from traditional liturgy. She reworks blessings with new images of God that link a particular theological metaphor to the specific occasion being considered by the blessing. Falk's prayers move beyond anthropomorphic metaphors by using metaphors that can have a more neutral perception. Her use of multi-vocal images drawn from nature or the creation puts forth a theology of immanence combined with a language of immanence.

A case in point can be seen by briefly examining Falk's rendition of *Hamotzi'ah*[64], her interpretation of the *Hamotzi*, the blessing over bread prayer, which is most commonly recited at the beginning of a Jewish meal. In looking for an image to replace "the rabbinic-Lord-God-king" image she finds present in the traditional opening phrase "*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam*" (Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe), Falk derives a new image from Deuteronomy 8:7 which portrays the various sources of water that come from the land. She composes "*eyn ha'chaim*" (wellspring or fountain of life) from this verse and uses it to connect with a figurative meaning of source. "In the wellsprings that rise from the land, pouring their waters back into the land, I found what seemed to me the perfect metaphor [for a source]. ... In the springing up of the fountains, I saw an arc of motion that mirrored the description

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[64] Marcia Falk. *The Book of Blessings*. Page 18-19.

in the traditional blessing of *Hamotzi*, the psalmist's image of bread drawn from the earth."[65]

Criteria for Examination of Feminist Prayer

These voices of feminist theology reflect the remarkable work done through a desire to craft Judaism as more inclusive in ritual practice as well as ideology. While they are by no means the only voices working towards the promotion of a God-language that reflects feminist ideology, their voices are representative of a larger dialogue about how to construct a feminist responsive God-language from a diverse feminist theology that seeks to illuminate the nature of God and the various ways Jews attempt to encounter God.

In spite of the differences, Jewish feminist thinking does present some commonalities. These commonalities provide a way to characterize the attempts at renewing or re-imagining Jewish prayer so that it becomes more reflective of the tremendous diversity of experience and voice present in all of Judaism today. By illuminating these commonalities we can light a path towards examining prayers within the largely accepted *matbeah* of Jewish liturgy in order to make prayer more accessible to everyone. These commonalities point towards an embracing of differences as a way to enhance our experiences of each other and ultimately of God.

As I understand the complex picture of Jewish feminist thought, I offer the following characteristics with which to evaluate the myriad offerings of new and renewed Jewish prayerbooks and their contents. By no means do I consider this list as an absolute definition by which one could tag a prayer as feminist or not. On the

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[65] Marcia Falk. *The Book of Blessings*. Page 429.

contrary, since a monolithic definition of Jewish feminism is impossible, so too a monolithic definition of Jewish feminist prayer limits a subject that by its very nature should be considered as multi-dimensional. Like the field from which it emerges, Jewish feminist prayer looks to broaden the approaches to God, not limit them. To suggest a single definition then defeats the point all of the feminist voices have been making.

Markers of Jewish Feminist Inclusive Prayers and Blessings

1. ***Language Modifications***: Almost all-feminist influenced liturgical change reflects a response to androcentric God language. These language modifications can be seen in the use of specific words and images for and about God. Language modifications show up primarily in three similar but not necessarily the same places within Jewish liturgy.
    a. Use of Gender Neutral Language for God
    b. Use of Feminine and Masculine Language for God in Hebrew and English Translations
    c. Use of Feminine and Masculine Language for God in English Translations
2. ***Connection to Tradition***: Most Jewish feminist theologians make the case for a clear connection to Jewish tradition and a respect for the need for Jewish continuity. This connection reflects a respect for prayer within Jewish tradition. In addition, the connection seeks to broaden the scope of tradition in order to rediscover words and images that have may have been lost over the centuries.
3. ***Inclusive Process of Prayer Creation/Recreation***: Without exception, the drive to make Jewish liturgy more representative of the diverse voices that will use it to engage with God needs to include a process by which a multiplicity of voices emerge

as both authentic and capable of contribution. Prayers and blessings offered as inclusive should ideally be reflective of any voice that could possibly pray them.

4. ***Respects Multiple Theological Voices***: Prayers that reflect a feminist theology must by definition respect that feminist theology does not necessarily agree on just one way to experience God. As such the voices and images projected should be diverse and dynamic with room for ongoing expansion.

Chapter 2: The Making of a Prayerbook

In 1975 in the midst of second wave American feminism, the Reform movement introduced a new prayerbook. The prayerbook, entitled *Gates of Prayer*, sought to replace the ubiquitous movement prayerbook, *The Union Prayerbook*, a reflection of Reform prayer ideology since the very beginnings of the movement's American presence in the late 1800s. The prayerbook, published in 1892, was without a doubt a reflection of early American Reform Judaism. The contents stood as a testament to the tenets of what many refer to today as Classical Reform Judaism.[66] This understanding of Judaism, as proposed by the movement's 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, sought to differentiate an American version of Judaism, one not necessarily tightly aligned with the traditional mind-set of Eastern European Judaism, which Reform thinkers viewed as remarkably un-American.

A quick glimpse at 1892 *The Union Prayerbook* reveals a Jewish worship service much different than previously seen in traditional Jewish prayerbooks, most notably with regards to the elimination of Hebrew as the primary language of prayer. This *siddur* (prayerbook) portrayed as well an ideology aspired to a new dawn of American Judaism. It sought to privilege innovation over historical tradition and excision of the old in favor of the new. Traditional concepts such as the belief in a personal Messiah, a desire for a return to Israel or the understanding of Jewish chosen-ness were smoothed

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[66] I use the term Classical Reform Judaism to identify the historical phase and identity of Reform Judaism as first espoused by the Central Conference of American Rabbis' 1885 Pittsburgh Platform. The term represents a philosophy, worship style and synagogue culture that has largely disappeared from contemporary practices of Reform Judaism.

over in favor of a universalistic theology focused on modifying Judaism in order to make it more palatable for the rapidly assimilating American Jew.

The Union Prayerbook would undergo several revisions over the years as the progressive American Jewish community realized that elimination of certain core ideals often came at the cost of Jewish unity and continuity. Many of these revisions parallel the overall evolution of the Reform Movement, which can be seen most readily through a study of movement's platforms, broad ideological statements issued by the movement's partner organization, the Central Conference of American Rabbis. The CCAR, as it is generally known in Jewish circles, is the "oldest and largest rabbinic organization in North America."[67] It presents itself as a longstanding voice of the liberal American Jewish community.[68] As is often the case in progressive associations that consider part of their charge a responsibility to challenge and respond to the ideas of their time, the CCAR statements were both a response to the voices they heard in their communities but also a prophetic charge designed to inspire and propose necessary change for their communities. Thus, as the movement evolved, so did the prayerbook.

With such ideological and theological evolutionary stances as guiding principles, the mid-seventies release of *Gates of Prayer* as both a response to the times and a prophetic challenge to the larger Jewish community must have struck some members of the rapidly changing movement as a less than ideal reflection of Reform progress when

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[67] As reported on the *About The CCAR* page of the Central Conference of American Rabbis website located at http://www.ccarnet.org/about-us/.

[68] As reported on the organization's website, www.ccarnet.org, the "CCAR achieves its core Mission by empowering Reform Rabbis to provide religious, spiritual and organizational leadership; by enhancing rabbis' personal and professional lives; and by amplifying the voice of the Reform Rabbinate in the Movement and Jewish community on social, ethical and religious issues of the day.

analyzed with the lens of a feminist critique. The Reform movement put itself forth as a religious leader actively promoting women's religious equality with men. The God language of *Gates of Prayer* did not seem to reflect that stance of equality. The liturgical dissonance particularly with regard to God language must have stuck out like sore thumb for Reform feminists. Where was the Reform movement that educated and ordained the first female rabbi? Where was the Reform movement that removed the *mechitzah* in order to invite men and women to pray together?

As announced by a *New York Times* article on October 11, 1975, *Gates of Prayer* was designed as a replacement for *The Union Prayerbook*.[69] Editor Chaim Stern and the CCAR committee charged with its creation strived to make prayer more accessible to modern worshippers, anticipating that the new *siddur* would accurately represent the progressive Jews who occupied the pews of an American Reform synagogue of the seventies. In an era ripe with transformation and expansion of progressive ideas, especially when it came to women and women's place in society, one would have expected more from the movement's articulated commitment to religious equality for women.

The prayerbook update, as reported by the *Times* article, reflected the community's desire for more Hebrew, a re-connection with the state of Israel and language more accessible to modern worshippers and their modern sensibilities. But its retention of language that still represented an exclusively androcentric notion of God must have stunned feminist worshippers. And while *Gates of Prayer* did not completely ignore the call for gender inclusivity, choosing for example to translate references to

[69] Irving Spiegel, "Rabbis Announce New Prayer Book: Translations Modernized in Reform Group's First Revision in 80 Years." *The New York Times*. October 11, 1975.

'people' with gender neutral terms (i.e. *Avot* becomes 'ancestors' or 'generations' as opposed to 'fathers') the *siddur* still maintains the use of the masculine pronouns and employs a hierarchical, authoritative God. At best, this categorizes women as "honorary men," which as feminist religion scholar Riv-Ellen Prell suggests makes them deviant men."[70]

A History (of Sorts) of Liturgy

As much as Judaism concerns itself with law and ritual, an equal amount of Jewish tradition derives itself from customs and stories. Consider the following parable about Jewish prayer's primary purpose.

> Once there was a poor, ignorant boy who took care of the sheep. The only thing he had ever learned was the *aleph-bet*. All day long he would sing the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The sheep enjoyed hearing their shepherd's song, for he had a sweet voice.
> Sometimes the boy and his father would go to the synagogue on Shabbat. They would sit in the back where the unlearned men sat. The young boy could not read the prayers. He could not sing the songs. He sat there listening and feeling happy just to know that he was part of the Jewish people. That much his father had taught him, for the father himself did not know many of the prayers. The boy's mother had taught her son to recite the *aleph-bet*. She had learned the alphabet from her own mother. The boy loved to repeat the letters over and over. He loved the sound of each one.
> One Shabbat, the boy went to the synagogue with his father. He listened to the cantor chant the beautiful prayers to God. He listened to the rabbi speak such wonderful sounding words. He looked at all the men in their prayer shawls praying and speaking directly to God. This boy, too, wanted to express his feelings of love for God.
> Suddenly the boy began to recite the *aleph-bet*. A first he spoke softly, but then his voice became louder and louder. His father stopped him. "Be quiet!" he commanded in a loud whisper. "You don't know how to read the prayers. Stop talking nonsense. Show respect! You're in the synagogue."
> The boy sat quietly, but after a while he began again. Again the father stopped him. This time he put a hand on the boy's mouth and said, "The rabbi will hear you and throw us out for what you are doing. Sit without making a sound or I'll take you home."

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[70] Riv-Ellen Prell. "The Vision of Woman in Classical Reform Judaism." Pages 575-589.

> So the boy sat quietly. But how long could he sit there when all around him he saw and felt the holiness of the day? All of a sudden, the boy started to recite the alphabet again, even louder than before. Then, faster than his father could catch him, he jumped up from his seat and ran to the *bimah*.
> "*Rebono shel Olam*, Sovereign of the Universe, I know I am only a child. I want so much to sing the beautiful prayers to you, but I don't know them. All I know is the *aleph-bet*. Please, dear God, take these letters of the alphabet and rearrange them to form the words that mean what I want to say to you and what is in my heart."
> When the father, the rabbi, and the congregation heard the boy's words, tears formed in their eyes. Then they all joined him in reciting, "*aleph, bet, gimmel, daled, hey, vav* ..."[71]

This traditionally influenced tale of spontaneous God language illustrates the belief that prayer from the heart generated by a worshiper's genuine experience matters more to God than the rote recitation of beautiful words. The Hebrew Bible's record of Jewish prayer reveals this respect for spontaneity. Jewish prayer starts from a genuine place of spontaneity. Prayers expressed by Judaism's great Biblical characters almost universally depict this sort of God conversation. Their prayers, be it Moses' request to heal his sister Miriam,[72] Hannah's request for a child,[73] Ezra's supplication upon learning about the conduct of the Israelites[74] or David's poetic praise in Psalms[75], seem to emerge in unique moments.

Built into the very fabric of early Judaism, this spontaneous, creative prayer style accompanies ancient Jewish worship. Up until the destruction of the Second Temple, Jewish prayer likely resembled the Biblical moments referenced above. Words of praise

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[71] Peninnah Schram. "The Boy Who Prayed with the Alphabet." *The Hungry Clothes and Other Jewish Folktales: Folktales of the World.* Sterling Publishing: New York, NY. 2008. Pages 66-67.
[72] Numbers 12:12
[73] 1 Samuel 1:10-12
[74] Ezra 9
[75] See Moshe Greenberg. *Biblical Prose Prayer: As a Window to the Popular Religion of Ancient Israel.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 1983.

or requests of God were likely more spontaneous as the primary form of worship in ancient Israel revolved around Temple sacrifices.[76] Multiple theories exist about the exact role prayer played in the world of the ancient Temple. Rabbinic sources account for a Second Temple 'liturgy,' referred to as a *ma'amad*, involving squads of Israelites from various towns who prayed Psalms at the Temple during a sacrifice.[77] Additionally significant evidence documents the practice of penitential prayers during the Second Temple period.[78]

So while the *Talmud* as well as the Jewish law codes of Maimonides and Joseph Caro contains outlines of liturgy as well as a myriad of *halachah* (law) associated with the *mitzvot* of regular prayer, the *siddur* with its clear *keva* (structure) and well-defined liturgy evolves over time. There even exists a rabbinic prohibition related to the writing down of sacred text, particularly with regards to law.[79] Before the prayerbook, "every synagogue housed its own prayer practice, every *Shaliach Tzibbur* (prayer leader) had his own version of the texts. In fact, every single service might well [have] featured innovative language, by design or by default, as the same prayer leader might forget what he had done yesterday, or improvise anew the theme of a prayer that captured his attention for the moment."[80]

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[76] Hayim Halevy Donin. *To Pray As a Jew: A Guide to the Prayer Book and the Synagogue Service*. Basic Books: New York, NY. 1991. Pages 10-11.
[77] Mishnah Ta'anit 4
[78] Rodney Alan Werline. *Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press. 1998.
[79] BT Gittin 60b
[80] Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed. *My People's Prayerbook, Volume 1: Traditional Prayer, Modern Commentaries – The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing. 1997. Page 3.

The ninth century marked a dramatic liturgical change for Jews with the advent of the first Jewish prayerbook. Rav Amram, a rabbinic leader of the community of Barcelona, Spain produced *Seder Rav Amram* (also known in the literature as *Yesod ha-Amrami*). His writings contain the first known systematic arrangement of Jewish liturgy. Amram's listing of prayers and blessings as well as laws and customs related to prayers become the basis for Judaism's order of prayers composed by other early medieval Jewish leaders.[81]

The status of oldest *siddur* manuscript known to Jewish scholarship belongs to Sa'adia Gaon, a rabbinic figure known most prominently for his philosophic works and leadership of one of the Babylonian learning academies. Sa'adia Gaon's *siddur*, like that of Rav Amram, transcribes the prayer rituals of Jewish life, including weekdays, Shabbat and festivals. His *siddur* also contains explanations of laws pertaining to worship written in Arabic, the lingua franca of his community. An additional feature of Sa'adia Gaon's *siddur* is his liturgical poetry.

It will be the *Machzor Vitry* written by Simcha ben Samuel of Vitry that comes to resemble the traditional *siddurim* as understood by Jewish worship today. A follower of Rashi, Simcha ben Samuel's prayerbook contains not simply the order of prayers in specific Jewish worship moments but includes liturgical text for the year's cycle of worship experiences. As with the other "orders" of prayers, ben Samuel includes legal material relevant to liturgy.[82] Granted the flexibility and creativity related to Jewish prayer likely continues even as these set "orders" become common within the Jewish

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[81] Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed. *My People's Prayerbook, Volume 1: Traditional Prayer, Modern Commentaries – The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*. Pages 7-9.
[82] Ismar Elbogen. *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*. Raymond P. Scheindlin, trans. Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia, PA. 1993. Pages 8-9.

world. As Judaism spreads throughout the world, prayer, like other Jewish traditions, will additionally subject to regional differences. Early Jewish prayerbooks reflect these regional differences and traditions. Such differences in rite, in *nusach* (melodies) and specific regional *minhagim* (customs) remain today in Jewish liturgy. They reflect the diversity and creativity found throughout the ages.

The advent of the printing press in the fifteenth century generates a major paradigm shift for Jewish liturgy.[83] This shift will create both the most positive and most stifling of changes in Jewish worship. The printing press provides access unlike ever before to Jewish worshippers as literacy opens up a brand new intellectual reality in Western culture. However, the printing press will turn the spontaneous foundations of Jewish prayer on its head. Jewish liturgy scholar Lawrence Hoffman notes that "Once a given set of prayers existed on printers' plates, it became hard to change them; specific forms of prayers were thus soldered into the Jewish spiritual regimen, as if given to Moses on Mount Sinai."[84]

Today's world Jewish community probably counts more Jewish prayerbooks and prayer philosophies than Jews who actively pray. These *siddurim* run the gamut, from the most "traditional" to the most "liberal" to those that best represent progressive liturgy: *siddurim* with "traditional" Jewish prayers, many composed over one thousand years ago by great medieval poets, alongside contemporary Israeli poetry inspired by sacred text interacting with modernity. A well-versed Jewish worshipper could use a different *siddur* every day.

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[83] Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed. *My People's Prayerbook, Volume 1*Page 9.
[84] Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed. *My People's Prayerbook, Volume 1*Page 10.

The Reform Movement's Prayer Ideology

The Reform movement, which saw itself as an expression of an identity both modern and Jewish,[85] definitely used its movement prayerbooks as a concrete example for "offering its ideological and theological basis for religious change."[86] "Ideological beliefs along with changes in ritual and practice have been reflected in American Reform Prayerbooks from the early 19th century through today."[87] The liturgical innovations seen in the prayerbooks of the early American Reformers would reflect their radical notion that the modern Judaism would be best represented by ethical monotheism.

The movement's first widely accepted prayerbook, *The Union Prayerbook*, first published in 1892, was a modified version of the prayerbook *Minhag America* authored by Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, best known for helping to establish much of the underlying organizational structure of the Reform Movement including Hebrew Union College and the Central Conference of American Rabbis.[88] The book would be recalled and re-released in 1895 with even greater ideological changes. This version, a reflection of the movement's heavy emphasis on ethical beliefs and a minimization of traditional ritual,[89] could be seen as the liturgical partner to the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform document that Reform rabbis produced in order to articulate the movement's collective beliefs and

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[85] Dana Evan Kaplan, ed. *Platforms and Prayerbooks: Theological and Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers. 2002. Page ix.
[86] Dana Evan Kaplan, ed. *Platforms and Prayerbooks*. Page x.
[87] Dana Evan Kaplan, ed. *Platforms and Prayerbooks*. Page xi.
[88] Historians view Wise's *Minhag America* as a variation on Jewish tradition. David Einhorn's *Olat Tamid* was viewed as a radical departure from tradition. *The Union Prayerbook* meets nicely in the middle of these liturgical innovations.
[89] Dana Evan Kaplan, ed. *Platforms and Prayerbooks*. Page 4.

religious positions. These beliefs included the understanding that modernity had eliminated, or at least significantly modified, a Jews need to strictly adhere to Jewish tradition as dictated by the preceding centuries of Jewish law and its interpretation. These radical ideas can be seen in the 1885 Platform's fourth clause:

> We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress, originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation.[90]

As such the prayerbook used to further the modern Jew's spirit needed to be one that clearly excised such foreign and particularistic behaviors, at least in the eyes of the American Reformers. *The Union Prayer Book* does not disappoint in this respect as it removes many traditional concepts including mentions of a Messiah or resurrection, all references to the ancient sacrificial rite, and the uncomfortable idea of Jewish chosen-ness, choosing instead to elevate the universal foundations of Judaism that could be found in other monotheistic religions.

While this prayerbook was adopted by many of the synagogues that chose to affiliate with the newly formed Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the content of the book did not escape criticism, particularly from those in the movement who felt the early reformers had swung the pendulum of liturgical reform too far to the left. The radical removal of much ritual Jewish tradition left many worshippers wanting as the

[90] The fourth clause of the CCAR's 1885 Pittsburgh Platform as reported on the *Platforms* page of the Central Conference of American Rabbis website located at http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/declaration-principles/.

slow re-embrace of tradition began to move back into the movement, most readily seen in the movement prayer books, beginning as early as the 1920s.[91]

Feminist Liturgy and *Siddurim*

The paradigm shift created in American society by the feminist movement, as suggested in Chapter One, dramatically affected the Reform movement. This dramatic effect can be clearly seen in the plethora of feminist liturgy created in parallel with the raising of a secular American feminist consciousness. The American feminist consciousness created not just theoretical ideas but drove change intended to make a pervasive impact on people.

As Jewish feminists began to understand their Jewish world, one of the most striking areas they applied this consciousness became the sphere of liturgy. In particular, feminist liturgy responds to the totality of androcentric language, particularly with regards to the names of God. This language revival became a catalyst towards change and the feminist consciousness continues to play a key role today in liturgical conversations. The challenges of exclusively masculine God language drives many of the radical changes seen in progressive Jewish liturgy since the publication of *Gates of Prayer*. In the years between *Mishkan Tefillah* and *Gates of Prayer*, the response to the lack of attention given to God language can be seen by the emergence of a remarkable number of progressive *siddurim* that begin to thoughtfully address this issue.

Among the fundamental philosophical issues that define Jewish prayerbooks, the issue of women has moved front and center in recent years. The discourse surrounding

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[91] Dana Evan Kaplan, ed. *Platforms and Prayerbooks.* Page 5.

Jewish women and prayer is not entirely new, as the matter of women and prayer concerned the ancient sources. The rabbis of the Talmud consider women as not exempt from prayer altogether but simply exempt from public prayer, linking women in general as not obligated to many of the *mitzvot* that are specifically related to time.[92] The variety of reasons provided by Jewish sources, including the suggestion that women do not need to pray because it takes them away from their more important domestic household duties, can be rightly interpreted as a masculine viewpoint determined to keep their society's hierarchical power structure as one that elevated men over women.

A historic analysis reveals a smattering of Jewish leaders, perhaps more than Jewish history can prove, who believed that women deserved and needed just as much of a relationship with God as men. Taking to heart the rabbinic notion that one of prayer's purposes entailed requesting compassion from God, some medieval rabbis proposed the idea that women simply needed a different prayer book than the one used by men. Rabbi Meir Benbenishti, a sixteenth century Jewish leader, proposed over 500 years ago in what some call the first 'feminist' siddur, that perhaps preventing women from prayer occurred because "men [were] concerned that prayers are too long and so women will neglect to care for their children."[93] Benbenishti took upon himself the task to conceive of a *siddur* specifically for women based on his interpretation that Jewish women did indeed have an obligation to pray but perhaps not with the same words as men. His *siddur*, called *Seder Nashim* and written in Ladino to accommodate the reality

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[92] Mishnah Berakhot 3:3

[93] Itamar Marilus. "500 Year Old 'Feminist' Siddur Reissued in Hebrew." *Ynetnews.com* on August 24, 2012. Accessed at ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4269327,00.html

that many women of Benbenishti's time may not have known how to read Hebrew, features many traditional prayers as well as an explanation of *halakhot* (Jewish laws) that pertain specifically to women as well as other laws that provide general guidance on living a Jewish life.

Perhaps *Seder Nashim*'s most radical feature involved its removal of one of the more troubling misogynist Jewish prayers, "*shelo asani isha.*" This prayer, recited as part of the traditional morning blessings found in *Birchot Haschachar*, specifically thanks God for not making the worshipper a woman. Benbenishti does not offer an alternative, choosing simply to excise prayers he determined do not pertain to women's prayer needs. In addition, Benbenishti's *siddur* includes a Passover *Haggadah* written in grammar suggestive of an exclusive Seder ritual conducted by women for women.[94]

More modern versions of Jewish feminist *siddurim* also propose that women's voices should be raised in prayer. They add the suggestion that women's experience of God and prayer could additionally alter and enhance the Jewish worship experience for men. Not necessarily buying into Benbenishti's implicit suggestion that women's prayer should be equal but separate, several significant progressive *siddurim* take issue with the traditional, androcentric wording of many Jewish prayers. These prayerbooks seek ways to alter exclusive God language while still retaining a sense of respect for Jewish tradition

These prayerbooks beg the question as to just how much inherent flexibility one can find in Jewish texts. In the eyes of many Jews, even those that proudly wear the

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[94] Another notable 'feminist *siddur*' from the similar period dates to 1471 and was written by Rabbi Abraham Farissol for an Italian Jewish groom to give to his bride on their wedding day. This example alters "*shelo asani isha*" (who did not make me a woman) to "*she'asani isha v'lo ish* (who made me a woman and not a man)."

mantle of progressive, feminist *siddurim* test the outer limits of how to balance tradition and modernity when it comes to Jewish liturgy. Coming on the cusp of the early second wave feminism, a non-published but widely printed women's *siddur* created by two women from Brown University's Hillel community in 1976 tested the liturgical waters of change. Naomi Janowitz and Maggie Wenig's *Siddur Nashim: A Sabbath Prayerbook for Women* was among the first contemporary attempts at creating a prayerbook that embodies a feminist consciousness while still holding onto the foundation structure of Jewish liturgy as understood by tradition. These women altered the liturgical landscape for modern day liturgists by creating a Jewish woman's focused experience of prayer. While the siddur does not offer the Hebrew prayer texts, through their use of the English translations of God metaphor and pronouns, Janowitz and Wenig seek to transform Judaism's long-standing conception of God as masculine and of prayer as something experienced only by men. The pages refer to God as a mother, use the female pronoun almost exclusively and equate the matriarchs with the patriarchs.

An additional *siddur* that emerges as one most likely greatly influenced by America's nascent feminist movement will be a progressive Shabbat siddur published by Congregation Beth El in Sudbury, Massachusetts in 1975. This *siddur*, entitled *Vetaher Libenu* (Purify our Hearts) transpires from a group of concerned congregants at Congregation Beth El who "questioned why the rich fabric of our psalms and prayers has been woven exclusively of masculine threads recalling monarchs, lords and fathers,

despite the unequivocal statement of the Torah [from the story of creation], 'And God created mankind [sic] in God's image, male and female created God them.'"[95]

The prayerbook, similar to the ideas presented in Janowitz and Wenig's *Siddur Nashim*, proposes that traditional Jewish liturgy needed to be "re-woven" so that the text becomes even richer once it became inclusive of the female and the feminine.[96] Drorah Setel's review of the prayerbook candidly reveals a claim that these types of changes make Jewish worship more of a true communal experience and not one that forces women to continue using their "instinctual ability to silently edit the material ... in an attempt to include themselves among the men."[97]

These alterations reflect the feminist sensibility that God does not belong exclusively to men. Some claim that many of these early feminist prayerbooks aimed too high, seeking to draw attention to women with an over-emphasis that could be perceived as elitist. A more honest read might correctly call this 'over-emphasis' a necessary corrective calling attention to the fact that women's experience of Judaism and God had for so long been absent from the *siddur*. Focusing on language as a way to raise consciousness and affect change becomes a hallmark in the discourse surrounding inclusive liturgy within the progressive Jewish community, for if language truly defines a culture, then the culture created from a stance of real gender equality must strive to reflect everyone who comes to pray, men and women on equal footing. "Language does not merely reflect experience, it is also capable of constructing future understanding

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[95] Drorah Setel. "Feminist Comments on a New Siddur." *Shema*, Vol 11/No 218. October 2, 1981. Pages 142-144. This statement is from the preface of *Vetaher Libenu*, which Setel quotes in the *Shema* article.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.

and action."[98] So, if progressive Judaism believes in the feminist driven idea that an androcentric God alienates at least half of the Jews who come to pray, not to mention countless others who may not consider themselves existing at all within these black and white categories, there must be a process for ongoing evolution of any form of exclusive prayer language.

Early feminist prayer books caused a revolution of awareness within the progressive Jewish community as a feminist sensibility began to drive liturgical innovation. This innovation should not be viewed as one that desired to simply replace the masculine attributes of God with one that highlighted instead the potential feminine characteristics of God. While many Jewish feminist theologians and liturgists explored this pathway as they sought to uncover and rediscover the feminine idea of God as well as underscore women's legitimate right to Jewish heritage and tradition, the advent of Jewish feminist thought as it progressed was to create just the next stage of prayer evolution in a long history of Jewish prayer innovation. The next phase takes on language alteration in order to include but not exclude.

These struggles as defined above can be seen in three *siddurim* that emerge in the nineties as indicative of progressive Jewish worship communities desire to craft a liturgy representative of a woman's full expression as a woman alongside and integrated with a man's full expression as a man. These *siddurim* may not necessarily call themselves feminist per se but the influence of feminism can clearly be seen in each *siddur*'s struggle with language, both the language of community and the language of

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[98] Ibid.

God, and each *siddur*'s attempt to propose a solution that creates inclusion and a new cultural awareness of the essence of one's gendered experience.

Perhaps the most benign of these efforts comes in the form of the Reform movement's 1994 edition of *Gates of Prayer for Shabbat and Weekdays* that specifically offered itself as a "gender sensitive" edition. This prayerbook adds the names of the matriarchs to prayers, in particular within the *Avot v'Imahot*, the first blessing found in the *Amidah* section. An additional contribution to the progression of Jewish liturgy observed in this *siddur* is that it removes the majority of English masculine terms that refer to God in both Hebrew prayer translations as well as alternative readings (i.e. Lord, King, Father). *Gates of Prayer for Shabbat and Weekdays: A Gender Sensitive Prayerbook* will continues as well along the return trajectory of the movement's re-embracing of Hebrew. It chooses to offer the book in the Hebrew style of opening and provide Hebrew transliteration for many of the prayers on the same pages as the prayers themselves, a departure from the original editions of *Gates of Prayer* that relegated the transliterations to the back of the book. The continued use of Hebrew provides a unique complication for Jewish liturgy as the ancient language presents quite challenging gender constructs with regards to grammar. *Gates of Prayer: A Gender Sensitive Edition* chooses to alter only English text with regards to gender and leaves the Hebrew masculine constructs intact.

Marcia Falk's *The Book of Blessings*, published in 1996, tackles the issue of exclusive language from both sides of Jewish prayer. Falk's beautiful *siddur* turns traditional liturgy upside down as she re-writes prayers in both Hebrew and English from her unique theological perspective, which understands God as an immanent force

within the universe.[99] Falk deserves accolades for pushing liturgy beyond its comfort zone even in communities that consider themselves progressive. She comes at liturgy with a unique view, which she clearly states in her introduction to her prayerbook, "I firmly believe that no convention of prayer ought to become completely routine, lest it lose its ability to inspire authentic feeling."[100] It appears that Falk did not necessarily intend for *The Book of Blessings* to replace the traditional prayerbook, preferring instead to "set in motion a process of ongoing naming that would point toward the diversity of our experiences and reach toward a greater inclusivity within the encompassing, monotheistic whole."[101]

Falk's prayer book is seen by many as a challenge, perhaps even an outright rejection, of traditional liturgy given that she frankly abandons many formulaic phrases found in Jewish liturgy, choosing instead to recreate using only the themes found in each prayer. Falk's challenge to traditional liturgy can be best understood by the brilliance with which she reforms liturgy using an approach that bases itself within a deep knowledge of Jewish text and exceptional skill as a Hebraist. Falk's renderings of prayers are not simply created out of her experience or based solely on her personal theology. There is a considerable amount of tradition incorporated within her liturgical poetry. Perhaps the problem for most worshippers lies in the fact that many of the metaphors she uses for God, which emerge as images from the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish sources, are unfamiliar to them. Many progressive Jews possess a tragically limited knowledge of text. While Falk does provide a useful commentary on each prayer

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[99] See Chapter 1 for a brief overview of Marcia Falk's theological perspective as portrayed by *The Book of Blessings*.
[100] Marcia Falk. *The Book of Blessings*. Page xvii.
[101] Ibid.

she rewrites, by removing all of the familiar language, she leaves worshippers without a historic handle on which to connect themselves and their Judaism. For example, gone is the familiar opening formula "*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam.*" Falk opens each of her prayers uniquely and uses a "cluster of images" for the divine. This collection of diverse images illustrates beautifully her understanding of "the presence of the divine in the whole of creation."[102]

Another *siddur* worth mentioning as one deeply influenced by Jewish feminist thought includes the Reconstructionist siddur *Kol Haneshamah* issued in 1996. The prayerbook's editor David Teutsch instituted changes in the liturgy that were brought about by feminist insight and critique.[103] Teutsch reflects that men who argue that references to God in the Hebrew grammatical constructs for males do not necessarily imply the maleness of God fail to recognize the "pain of exclusion."[104] Feminist concerns were clearly addressed in *Kol Haneshamah.* The argument, according to Eric Caplan who has written extensively about the Reconstruction liturgical ideology, offers that the Reconstructionist Prayerbook Commission debated not about whether or not it should respond to legitimate feminist concerns regarding the language liturgy but more specifically which "responses to the feminist critique of language would prove most successful" for their congregants and synagogues.[105] This *siddur* tackles language from both sides of the liturgical aisle but in a much less radical way than Falk's complete reconstruction of liturgical language.

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[102] Marcia Falk. *The Book of Blessings.* Page xviii.
[103] Eric Caplan. *From Ideology to Liturgy: Reconstructionist Worship and American Liberal Judaism.* Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press. 2002. Page 220.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Eric Caplan. *From Ideology to Liturgy.* Page 221.

Kol Haneshamah illustrates a potential model for a genuine balance between tradition and modernity. Much of traditional prayer is left intact in the Hebrew original with the metaphors for God expanded primarily in English translations as well as alternative readings that the *siddur* offers for many prayers. *Kol Haneshamah* does not completely abandon what, according to comments by David Teutsch, it considers as its responsibility to struggle with alternative formulas for blessings which often begin and end with the androcentric clause, "*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Haolam* – Blessed are You (male 2nd person construct) our God, King of the Universe." The *siddur* acknowledges the theological pain that this phrase may have inflicted upon generations of worshipers. The beginning of each service offers several different alternative formulas with which to approach this clause including feminine language as well as neutral language (or as neutral as Hebrew can be). This *siddur* does not include the alternatives for this clause in all of the prayer offerings reasoning that such a dramatic change would affect both their congregants' willingness to accept the prayerbook as well as the sacred quality of Jewish tradition. The exception to this occurs with the blessings during *Birchot Hashachar* where the traditional phrase '*melech haolam* – king of the universe' has been replaced by '*chei haolamim* – 'life of all the worlds, an appellation for God found at the end of the *Yishtabach* prayer.[106]

A New (Feminist) Process Produces a New Reform *Siddur*

In 2007, the Reform movement adopted its new prayerbook, a 20-year project that ultimately heralded itself as a progressive *siddur* "intended to offer something for everyone — traditionalists, progressives and everyone else — even those who do not

[106] David A. Teutsch, ed. *Kol Haneshamah: Daily Prayerbook*. Wyncote, PA: The Reconstructionist Press. 1996. Pages 14-19.

believe in God."[107] The prayerbook was a monumental effort resulting in not only in a new prayerbook that works hard to represent the Reform movement's ongoing honest dialogue and negotiation between tradition and innovation but reflects the next evolution of the movement's ongoing feminist influence and representation. The prayerbook entitled *Mishkan Tefillah: A Reform Siddur*, purposely moves the movement's ritual and practice pendulum swing back towards tradition albeit with a progressive sense of self. Instead of rejecting tradition outright, which some mistakenly accused the early reformers of doing, *Mishkan Tefillah* seems to prefer to create the space for real conversation about Jewish prayer within Jewish tradition.

The format itself reflects a new way of thinking about how modern Jews can understand and engage with traditional liturgy. It is, according to Rabbi Elyse Frishman who both contributed years of her time participating in the liturgy committees and ultimately served as editor of the *siddur* once it went into production, a paradigm shift that creates for the first time multiple theological voices on almost every page of the *siddur*.[108] The controversy over the left-hand side as well as the decision to initially promote two women as editors sparked much conversation during the transformative process of creating the siddur as well as introducing it to worshippers more familiar with the linear, theme-based services provided by *Gates of Prayer*.

The two-page prayer spread was Frishman's innovation. It presents four versions of each prayer on the two-pages. On the right hand side of the spread a worshipper finds the prayer in Hebrew with a transliteration accompanying the

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[107] Laurie Goodstein. "In New Prayer Book, Signs of Broad Change." *The New York Times*. September 3, 2007.
[108] Phone interview with Rabbi Elyse Frishman. December 4, 2012.

Hebrew in order to accommodate worshippers less comfortable with the Hebrew itself. This right hand side includes an English translation of the prayer that generally can be considered a more literal translation than other versions of Reform prayerbooks. These translations for the most part do not seek to interpret (although there is always some interpretation in any translation) but primarily provide the worshipper with more or less accurate English version of the Hebrew prayer.

The left hand side seeks to balance centuries of Jewish tradition with more contemporary concepts by offering poetic, interpretive versions of each prayer based on the prayer's basic themes. Two alternatives are given and generally reflect theological voices that push against a more traditional theological viewpoint. In addition to alternatives and a more literal rendering of the English translation, the *siddur* provides both historical and spiritual commentary on Jewish prayer and prayer practice. In this way, the *siddur* becomes at once both a tool for the worship experience and education about Jewish prayer.

Said changes reflect the reality of the tremendous diversity found within the movement and takes care not to necessarily privilege anyone. Frishman suggests that *Mishkan Tefillah* wants to make clear the notion that diversity is not simply tolerated but indeed welcomed.[109] *Mishkan Tefillah*'s publication embraces a new understanding of diversity by presenting multiple versions of liturgy on the same page. The presentation could be seen to imply that holding multiple viewpoints creates not dilution but strength. Indeed as Jewish feminism fought for not just a seat at the liturgical table but for the right and responsibility to own that seat as an equal, valued

[109] Phone interview with Rabbi Elyse Frishman. December 4, 2012.

partner, the overall theological perspective of *Mishkan Tefillah*'s can be seen to have had an influence from the ideas of feminism. Inspired by feminism's commitment to add women's voices to the cultural mix in a way that values their unique essence and experience, *Mishkan Tefillah*'s theological message seems to suggest that an equitable worship experience "allows every worshipper [whether male or female] to feel that there is a gateway" to Jewish worship.[110] The last chapter of this project examines this influence of feminism on *Mishkan Tefillah* in order to begin highlighting specific examples of feminist influenced liturgical innovations.

[110] Phone interview with Rabbi Elyse Frishman. December 4, 2012.

Chapter 3: Feminist Influence Into Feminist Action – A Case Study

Structure Versus Spontaneity

Controversies over the language of Jewish prayer appear as ancient as the *Talmud*. Jewish worship culture embraces this ongoing dispute between structure and spontaneity[111] as seen in texts about *tefillah* and the particular words a Jew uses during *tefillah*. *Mishnah Berakhot* 4:3-4 reflects an early version of this dispute:

> Rabban Gamliel taught: Each day one must pray the eighteen blessings of the Amidah. Rabbi Joshua taught: Each day one must pray a shortened form of the eighteen blessings of the Amidah. Rabbi Akiba taught: If one's prayer is fluent, one prays the eighteen blessings, if not, one should pray the shortened version. Rabbi Eliezer taught: One who makes prayer fixed (*keva*) – this prayer is not ***genuine supplication*** (*tahanunim*).

The addition of Rabbi Eliezer's concern about making the words of prayer fixed, or formulaic, in this *mishnah* primarily devoted to promoting Gamliel's call for a certain structure within prayer could be perceived as a challenge to Gamliel. According to the opinion of Eliezer, prayer should never become mechanical lest it risk the possibility of not being heard. In the Talmudic prayer mindset of which this passage documents, an aversion to rigor and fixity, especially in the realm of prayer, abounded. Eliezer's opinion that this sort of rigidity created a potential for unacceptable prayer was held by other rabbinic voices including Rabbi Yossi who suggests that one should say something new everyday in prayer.[112]

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[111] Rabbi Jonathan Sacks makes reference to this idea in an online article essay regarding *parshat Sh'mini*, which was adapted from his book *Covenant and Conversation: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible.* (http://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/parsha/from-structure-to-continuity-to-spontaneity)

[112] Yerushalmi Berakhot 8b

Reform Judaism's current understanding of the necessary tension between structure and spontaneity reflected in the above rabbinic texts can be seen most readily in its newest *siddur, Mishkan Tefillah*. The Hebrew word *siddur* is perhaps best understood according to its most literal English translation, which is "order." A *siddur* contains the "order" or "*fixed order*" of prayers that Jews recite during the course of daily worship services. Jews have prayed using this same structural core since antiquity, although the actual wording of the prayers remained fluid. The Jews of antiquity and the early medieval period depended on a prayer leader to order the worship service until a Babylonian *Gaon* (religious leader) named Amram "prepared a complete list of prayers and the rules of how they were to be performed" in approximately 860 CE.[113] In this moment, the first Jewish prayerbook was born. The traditional liturgy Jews pray today has not changed much since the tenth century when the tradition of creative prayer improvisation found itself largely eradicated due to a belief that the Jews of the medieval world were "spiritually unworthy" of generating the tremendous literary depth of prayers created by their predecessors.[114]

The Reform movement's prayer ideology rejected this notion of creative "spiritual unworthiness" from its earliest beginnings. As the religious movement defined and committed to an ongoing conversation with modernity, Reform Judaism's prayerbooks over time react again and again against the idea that Jewish prayer no longer needs ingenuity. Reform ideology instead contends that Jewish liturgy should not be defined only by the texts recited in the course of worship services. Liturgy as

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[113] Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed. *My People's Prayerbook, Volume 1*. Page 8. Amram's prayerbook receives a slightly fuller explanation in Chapter Two of this project.
[114] Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed. *My People's Prayerbook, Volume 1*. Page 16.

found in Jewish prayerbooks includes the prayers Jews recite but also echoes the drama of the ongoing Jewish experience. Reform Jewish liturgy reflects how Reform Jews understand themselves culturally and contextually in both the secular and religious worlds they occupy. The depiction of Jewish liturgy seen in the Reform movement's *siddurim* implies a progressive relationship with prayer. It chronicles how Reform Jews hold prayer in balance with traditional elements in order to fully embrace modern culture.

In this light, *Mishkan Tefillah*, the Reform movement's most recent prayerbook published in 2007, becomes more than simply the Reform movement's newest contribution of progressive liturgy. It reflects the Reform movement's complex, decidedly enlightened dance with Jewish liturgy from a progressive religious ideology. Much more than just the "order" of fixed prayers that play out in an experience of Jewish worship, *Mishkan Tefillah* is a tool for a Jewish worship experience in a progressive context. Within its pages, a worshipper can witness and participate in a reflection of the Reform movement's journey of its relationship with God and how prayer becomes the vehicle with which to facilitate that relationship.

Given that the *siddur* may be the most well known Jewish book for many Jews, most recognize its significance in the Jewish worship experience. Perhaps less well recognized however, the *siddur* represents an additional cultural role as a receptacle of Jewish history and experience. As Lawrence Hoffman's teaching reflected in the introduction of *Mishkan Tefillah* reminds, "The book is less text than pre-text for the staging of an experience. We are returning to the age of orality, where performance

matters more than the fixed words."[115] But these fixed words and our delicate negotiations with these fixed words, the so-called *keva* ("fixed order") of Jewish liturgy, are a reflection of the cultural contexts in which we live and navigate. Reform Judaism's history includes an evolutionary prayer ideology that uses the movement's *siddurim* as both a guidebook for its prayer practice as well as a cultural reflection of said prayer practice.

A key moment in Reform Judaism's prayer evolution can be viewed through the influence of Jewish feminism on these prayer practices. As a result of Jewish feminist voices over the last forty years, the Reform movement actively embraced and enacted the expressed desire to make real room for women in the Jewish worship experience. Opening up the prayer experience meant not just breaking down the real physical divisions between men and women in a Jewish service. The opening created a clear awareness of the troubling spiritually gendered divisions that existed even within a religious ideology that had long advocated for a modern negotiation with prayer. The awareness raised by Jewish feminist critique would bring not just the ideas of women and prayer into the conversation but actual women and their voices joined as well as led the conversation. These new voices shattered an uncomfortable silence about the gendered presuppositions Judaism has long held about God and how every Jew gains access to an intimate relationship with God. The critique, as offered by Chapter One of this project, proposed not simply an awareness but called for a transformation of Jewish practice.

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[115] Elyse D. Frishman, ed. *Mishkan Tefillah: A Reform Siddur*. New York, NY: CCAR Press. 2007. Page x.

A Methodology of Examination

The remainder of this chapter features the beginnings of an analysis of the influence of Jewish feminism and Jewish feminist theology on the prayers and ideas put forth in *Mishkan Tefillah*. In my research I strove to determine how *Mishkan Tefillah* presents progressive Judaism's evolving prayer ideology, an ideology that appears to work diligently in its attempts to hold both modern progress and ancient tradition in balance with each other. At the heart of my study, I consider the prayers as presented by the two-page spread of *Mishkan Tefillah*. These Hebrew prayers, their English translations and the unique translation alternatives produce a unique blend of both ancient and modern as *Mishkan Tefillah* includes as much of traditional liturgy as could be tolerated by the prayerbook's editorial committee.[116] Surrounding *Mishkan Tefillah's* newest, most current depictions of a prayer, my methodology placed around these most recent texts previous versions of these prayer texts from progressive Jewish prayerbooks produced primarily in the last forty years. My initial outcomes propose that there exists in *Mishkan Tefillah* a new type of progressive conversation about

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[116] I use the word tolerate here specifically because I believe that *Mishkan Tefillah* includes some of the more traditional elements of Jewish prayer with a conscious recognition that these elements may be ideologically or theologically troubling for modern worshippers. The inclusion of these elements seems to reflect the committee's and perhaps the movement's recognition that the progressive conversation between traditional liturgy and modern interpretation requires compromise from both angles. I am of the belief that this particular compromise strategy can be considered as one deeply influenced by the role of Jewish feminism and feminists in the process of creating *Mishkan Tefillah*. Jewish feminism at its core called for a renewed reflection of everything in Judaism, both the conscious and the unconscious. It allowed tradition a new seat at the progressive Jewish table in a way unseen before in Reform Judaism. As reflected during an interview with committee member Rabbi Richard Levy, the committee recognized that "nothing in the tradition should be foreign to us." This outlook facilitated previously excluded sections of traditional Jewish liturgy to return to Reform worship practice with a renewed understanding of how to hold difficult theological ideas in balance with modern ideologies.

prayer, one deeply influenced, but not exclusively, by Jewish feminism and Jewish feminist theology.

A key question that guides many of the findings presented in the chapter involves the names used for God during prayer. This issue may be one of the most controversial and salient topics in liturgical conversations today. Jewish feminist theologians deserve some well-earned respect for bringing this issue to the forefront. As Jewish feminist educator and writer Tamara Cohen notes, "an early and still ongoing Jewish feminist endeavor has been the reinterpretation of traditional images of the divine and the addition of new female images to complement the male images."[117] The problem, however, does not deal exclusively with the challenge of the overtly androcentric language with which traditional prayer names God. Cohen additionally proposes "the images themselves convey an understanding of God that violates contemporary feminists' beliefs and sense of the divine."[118] The critique called into question a cultural norm that promoted a hierarchical relationship of domination. The question of gendered language opens up a much larger conversation about theology and the nature of the relationship one wishes to encounter with God.

Mishkan Tefillah works diligently to affirm a language that speaks in answer to some of the above questions. It may be suggested that the *siddur* most accurately reflects the ongoing need for a continued conversation in the progressive Jewish community about the language of prayer. More than anything else, *Mishkan Tefillah*

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[117] Tamara Cohen. "Women's Spiritual Awareness" in Jules Harlow, et al. *Pray Tell.* Page 213.
[118] Ibid.

proposes to open up the door to the possibility of an "integrated theology"[119] which *Mishkan Tefillah* editor Rabbi Elyse Frishman describes as "not only multivocal but polyvocal – [designed] to invite full participation at once, without conflicting with the *keva* text."[120] This type of approach could create conversations with and about God where the language strives to reflect the tremendous diversity in Jewish tradition. Perhaps in recognition of the early Jewish feminist response to what they understood as a totalization of masculine language for God, *Mishkan Tefillah* attempts to rebalance the liturgical pendulum in favor of a liturgy that recognizes and lifts up both the traditional and the modern, the transcendent and the immanent. In addition, if one looks closely at the pages of prayer offered by *Mishkan Tefillah*, just underneath the surface exists an ongoing conversation about prayer, the worship experience and the work of Jewish liturgy as needing ongoing expansion.

A worshipper can engage with this ongoing conversation by shining the lens of Jewish feminism onto the *siddur*. This reflection helps to illuminate the influence of feminism and Jewish feminist theology in particular as a way of understanding one aspect of the creation of *Mishkan Tefillah*. It should be made clear at this time that I do not intend to suggest that Jewish feminist theology is the only representative theology present within the *siddur* of *Mishkan Tefillah*. On the contrary, *Mishkan Tefillah*'s theological voice incorporates multiple voices within the *siddur*. The application of a feminist lens, similar to the application of the myriad hermeneutic lenses used to

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[119] Term coined by Editorial committee member Rabbi Elaine Zecher in reference to her work with *Mishkan Tefillah*. She used the term during an interview about her involvement with the siddur on November 30, 2012.
[120] Elyse D. Frishman. "Entering Mishkan T'filah." *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly*, Fall 2004.

interpret the narrative of the Hebrew Bible, merely helps illustrate the feminist voice within the *siddur* and its interaction with other theological voices.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will highlight three examples of instances that I contend can be understood as reflections of Jewish feminist voices and feminist theologies within *Mishkan Tefillah* as a whole. These instances illustrate how Jewish feminism expands the prayer narrative, becoming at last a part of the fabric or mosaic of the liturgical experience. These attempts to heal the hurt caused by the ongoing images of the bifurcated gendered God of tradition create for the worshipper a more humanistic, holistic experience. God language under Jewish feminist influence comes closer to the theological notion of 'One'-ness by encouraging gender flexibility and balance in the words by which one names and speaks with God.[121] Feminist theologian Rachel Adler advocates that feminist methodologies and questions enrich the conversation and hold us accountable to familiar, seemingly comfortable ideas of gendered inequality.[122]

Jewish Feminism at the Progressive Liturgical Table: Three Instances of the Jewish Feminist Influence in *Mishkan Tefillah*

The instances under examination in *Mishkan Tefillah*:

1. The Two-Page Prayer Page
2. Renewing and Reclaiming Names of God
3. Prayer Editing versus Prayer Elimination

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[121] Tikva Frymer-Kensky. "On Feminine God Talk." *The Reconstructionist*, Spring 1994. Pages 48-55.
[122] Rachel Adler. *Engendering Judaism*. Pages xiv-xxviii.

1. The two-page spread

Mishkan Tefillah's editor Elyse Frishman explains the two-page spread of *Mishkan Tefillah* as a radical notion.[123] In particular the prayer activism of which Frishman speaks comes primarily from the left side of the page which displays alternative English renditions of the right side's more traditional prayer, where the prayer can be found in a relatively traditional Hebrew version alongside a fairly literal translation, at least more so than seen in previous movement *siddurim*. As opposed to its predecessor *Gates of Prayer*, *Mishkan Tefillah*'s "radical" page layout attempts to display the diversity of theology seen within the Reform movement on every page of the prayerbook. Instead of multiple service offerings that each suggest a particular theology, *Mishkan Tefillah* works to create a consistent, multi-vocal theology that purposely incorporates numerous ways to connect with God over the course of a worship service.[124] The layout reflects an effort designed to make room for everyone on the page, as perhaps a way to echo the movement's ideological stance of inclusion.

Rabbi Peter Knoebel, an early member of the CCAR *Siddur* discussion group and the chair of both the *Mishkan Tefillah* Editorial Committee and the *Siddur* Publishing Team reflected that this idea of inclusion stood as a key principle early on in conversations about creating a new prayerbook.

> Two principles that govern the Reform movement today are equality of women and men and the inclusion of gays and lesbians, Jews by choice, non-Jewish spouses of congregants, and those who face specific physical or mental challenges. The new prayerbook will need to reflect the Reform movement's commitment to inclusion and accessibility.[125]

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[123] Phone interview with Rabbi Elyse Frishman on December 4, 2012.
[124] Phone interview with Rabbi Elyse Frishman on December 4, 2012.
[125] Dana Evan Kaplan, ed. *Platforms and Prayerbooks*. Page 161.

These ideas about actively embracing the diversity of the Reform movement can be found in the 1999 Pittsburgh Principles, which states clearly "We affirm that every human being is created *btzelem Elohim,* in the image of God, and therefore every human life is sacred. ... We are an inclusive community, opening doors to Jewish life to people of all ages, to varied kinds of families, to all regardless of their sexual orientation, to *gerim,* those who have converted to Judaism, and to all individuals and families, including the intermarried, who strive to create a Jewish home."[126]

It is noteworthy that the report generated by the CCAR *Siddur* group, a taskforce charged with preparing a set of recommendations for the new *siddur*, highlighted "feminism as an important lens through which plans for the new *siddur* should be examined."[127] The members of the group studied together multiple Jewish theological viewpoints and ideas in preparation to create the guidelines that would open up the movement to an honest examination of the diversity portrayed by its members as well as the theological ideas reflected in this diversity. Frishman recalls that Rabbi Knoebel was very adamant about everyone having a broad knowledge of feminist theology.[128]

The report called for a recognition that "God language is a reflection of theology" while recognizing that how "we image God will depend in part on whose voices are included in the text."[129] *Mishkan Tefillah* includes women's voices because women matter. As *Lilith* founder and editor Susan Weidman Schneider indicates, "Though

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[126] From the Israel section of CCAR's 1999 Pittsburgh Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism as reported on the *Platforms* page of the Central Conference of American Rabbis website located at http://http://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/statement-principles-reform-judaism/.
[127] Dana Evan Kaplan, ed. *Platforms and Prayerbooks.* Page 161.
[128] Phone interview with Rabbi Elyse Frishman on December 4, 2012.
[129] Dana Evan Kaplan, ed. *Platforms and Prayerbooks.* Page 161.

language about God cannot really tell us about the nature of God, it can tell us a great deal about those who create and use the God language."[130] *Mishkan Tefillah*'s language reflects the movement's commitment to an equality of men and women in Jewish life. The *siddur* is mindful of pronouns, taking care to side with neutrality so as to invoke a sense of inclusivity. It makes sure as well to recognize that Judaism had both male and female ancestral leaders, recalling both the biblical matriarchs along with the patriarchs. In addition, the language of *Mishkan Tefillah* offers multiple perceptions of God, including a transcendent God, a naturalist God, and a partner God among many other ideas.[131]

Taking a look at an example of the two-page prayer spread, Frishman's observation of the paradigm shift caused by the left hand side of the *siddur* can be drawn out by a comparison to the more traditional right side. An examination of a familiar prayer from the *Shema U'virchotecha* prayer unit can help illuminate the shift Frishman indicates occurs with *Mishkan Tefillah*'s "radical" layout.

Ma'ariv Aravim:

The *Shema*, Judaism's prayer that perhaps comes closest to any sense of a Jewish dogma, affirms Jewish belief in one God and of God's unity in the universe. *Mishnah Berakhot* 1:4 teaches about the blessings that surround the *Shema*, one of Jewish liturgy's central prayers within the service framework.

"In the morning, the two blessings said before the *Shema* are "who forms light" (*Yotzer Or*) and "with an abundant love" (*Ahavat Rabbah*); afterward is the

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[130] Susan Weidman Schneider. *Jewish and Female: A Guide and Sourcebook for Today's Jewish Woman.* New York, NY: Simon and Schuster. 1985. Page 80.
[131] Elyse D. Frishman. "Entering Mishkan T'filah."

blessing "True and certain" (*Emet v'Yatziv*). In the evening, the two blessings said before the *Shema* are "who brings on evenings" (*Ma'ariv Aravim*) and "with an eternal love" (*Ahavat Olam*). Afterward are the blessings "true and faithful" (*Emet v'Emunah*) and "lay us down" (*Hashkiveinu*)."[132]

The prayers surrounding the *Shema* speak primarily of creation, revelation and redemption; they surround the Jewish affirmation of faith in one God with the philosophical ideas that support such a faith affirmation. The first blessings associated with the *Shema*, *Yotzer Or* as recited in the morning service and *Ma'ariv Aravim* as recited in the evening service, reflect the understanding of God as creator. As suggested by the above *mishnah*, these blessings differ depending on what time of day they are recited. *Yotzer Or* speaks of the coming of the light and blesses God as the creator of that light. *Ma'ariv Aravim* as a parallel prayer praises God for creating and bringing on the darkness. Both of these blessings traditionally include praise for God as the one who specifically orders the universe with words and deeds.

The Hebrew version of *Ma'ariv Aravim*, the evening version of the blessing, as found on the right-side of *Mishkan Tefillah* looks exactly like any other version of *Ma'ariv Aravim* found in most Ashkenazi influenced prayer-books. Reform movement prayerbooks historically include an intact version of the *Ma'ariv Aravim* prayer since almost the first establishment of Reform prayerbooks by Abraham Geiger and Isaac Mayer Wise in the late 1800s. "Virtually all twentieth-century Reform *Siddurim* reflect

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[132] Mishnah Berakhot 4:1

the model established by Geiger and Wise."[133] The inclusion of the prayer can be considered a reflection of Reform Judaism's ongoing desire to be in conversation with the history of Jewish tradition as the Reform movement has long included this short, almost basic, prayer in its entirety,[134] albeit not always in the Hebrew.

The translation represented underneath the Hebrew version of the prayer in *Mishkan Tefillah* begins the unveiling of the struggle to balance modernity and tradition that *Mishkan Tefillah* deems as a core value, a value rooted firmly in Jewish feminism as well. In general, the prayerbook contends that the translations offered can be considered more literal than in previous prayerbooks. "On the right side of the page is the Hebrew *keva* text with a faithful translation and transliteration."[135] The caveat here might be that while the translations in general offer more accuracy, it could be suggested that there can be seen a softening of the commanded nature of the language the Hebrew version likely intends. For example, here in *Ma'ariv Aravim*[136] the Hebrew word '*bidvaro*' in the prayer phrase '*asher bidvaro ma'ariv aravim*' should be literally translated as 'with His word,' which seems to suggest that God's actual words are what create the experience of evening, as humans understand it. *Mishkan Tefillah* translates this phrase as "who speaks evening into being" whereas more traditional translations of this prayer phrase offer "who at thy word bringest on the evenings"[137] or "who by His

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[133] Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed. *My People's Prayerbook, Volume 9: Traditional Prayer, Modern Commentaries – Welcoming the Night: Mincha and Ma'ariv.* Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing. 2005. Pages 52-53.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Elyse D. Frishman. "Entering Mishkan T'filah." .
[136] Elyse D. Frishman, ed. *Mishkan Tefillah: A Reform Siddur.* New York, NY: CCAR Press. 2007. Page 6.
[137] Philip Birnbaum. *Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem: Daily Prayer Book.* New York, NY: Hebrew Publishing Company. 1949. Page 192.

word brings on evening."[138] The literal translation in *Mishkan Tefillah* acknowledges God's wisdom and knowledge in the arranging of all that is creation but the version in *Mishkan Tefillah* reflects a more softened understanding of ultimate commandedness than seen in more traditional translations.

Reform's ongoing discomfort in general with commandedness and obligation could be an influence here as well. While the movement acknowledges appreciation of *mitzvot* (commandments) in that they create the "means by which we make our lives holy"[139] there continues to an appreciation of the differences of opinion regarding how to understand said obligations. The 1999 Pittsburgh Principles says, "We are committed to the ongoing study of the whole array of *mitzvot* and to the fulfillment of those that address us as individuals and as a community. Some of these *mitzvot*, sacred obligations, have long been observed by Reform Jews; others, both ancient and modern, demand renewed attention as the result of the unique context of our own times."[140]

The Jewish feminist notion of obligation offers an additional multi-faceted approach to understand the wrestling occurring here with the language of commandedness. Many Jewish feminists ask a big question regarding one's relationship with Jewish responsibilities. *Mishkan Tefillah*'s translation could be viewed as an overall theological approach designed to take the sting out of the commanded language, which

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[138] Nosson Scherman, ed. *The Complete Art Scroll Siddur*. New York, NY: Mesorah Publications. 1985. Page 257.
[139] From the Torah section of CCAR's 1999 Pittsburgh Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism as reported on the *Platforms* page of the Central Conference of American Rabbis website located at ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/statement-principles-reform-judaism/.
[140] Ibid.

reflects a feminist approach, albeit not an exclusively feminist approach and one certainly not shared by all Jewish feminist theologians.

The left side of *Mishkan Tefillah* offers alternative readings that reflect the central theme of *Ma'ariv Aravim*. These readings, by and large, offer different theological interpretations of the prayer. And while "not every theology is represented on a page-spread; over the breadth of the liturgy, all are included."[141] Clearly given the limitations of this analysis it remains difficult to confirm the accuracy of the above statement but the very presence of multiple versions of the prayer alter dramatically the concept of a prescribed theology as seen in other *siddurim*.

Within *Mishkan Tefillah*, the blends of old and new bounce off of each other on these pages. For example, the weekday evening service of *Mishkan Tefillah* offers poetic alternatives to the Hebrew *keva* right side. These alternatives reflect the polyvocal theology several of the *Mishkan Tefillah* editorial members strove to put into place as the prayerbook evolved. The idea of choice of which the Reform movement prides itself comes alive in these pages. A worshipper praying *Ma'ariv Aravim* is no longer dependent on a singular interpretation of a prayer. For this prayer page of *Ma'ariv Aravim* in the weekday service, the first alternative offers all of the metaphor of thoughtful creation but almost without even a mention of the nature of commandedness seen a more literal translation of the traditional version.

> Our praise to You, Eternal One, who brings the evening evermore:
> wisely parting the gates of time, ushering in the seasons;
> arraying with care the star-spangled sky;
> unfurling light, then darkness, then light.
> gently You fold the day into the night,
> *Adonai Tz'vaot* is Your Name!

[141] Elyse D. Frishman. "Entering Mishkan T'filah."

Living God, Your reign arches over us, Your light is everlasting.
Our praise to You, Eternal One, who brings the evening evermore.[142]

The Creator being praised in this interpretation of *Ma'ariv Aravim* can be likened to an exquisite, talented decorator who longs to make even more beautiful an already beautiful room or idea. This creator does not command the beauty into existence as a king commands but rather "arrays with care," "unfurls," and "folds." The message of sovereignty comes not out of an experience of power but as a protective embrace. The God depicted here seems more relatable, in partnership – perhaps as a wise mentor or teacher who does not necessarily correct her students but rather perfects. The reading supports the Jewish feminist critique about the inherent dangers in promoting only certain types of relational hierarchical power structures. "Judith Plaskow asserts that we need not conceive of God's power as domination, and she urges us to think carefully about the type of power we ascribe to God."[143]

The second alternative reading promotes this integrated, polyvocal theological approach even further.

Ever-living God, Your majesty is proclaimed
by the marvels of earth and sky.
Sun, moon and stars testify to the power of Your wisdom.
Day follows day in endless succession
and the years vanish from our sight,
but Your sovereignty endures.
Though all things pass,
let not Your glory depart from our lives.
Help us to become co-workers with You
and fill our days with abiding worth.[144]

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[142] Elyse D. Frishman, ed. *Mishkan Tefillah: A Reform Siddur.* New York, NY: CCAR Press. 2007. Page 7.
[143] Tamara Cohen. "Women's Spiritual Awareness" in Jules Harlow, et al. *Pray Tell.* Page 214.
[144] Elyse D. Frishman, ed. *Mishkan Tefillah: A Reform Siddur.* New York, NY: CCAR Press. 2007. Page 7.

This prayer version moves away from a transcendent God and more towards an immanent God, one who endures in everything and in whom everything endures. Creation itself stands in this alternative offering as evidence of the nature and oneness of God as "sun, moon and stars testify to the power of Your wisdom." The message in this version of the prayer seems to suggest that the life of God's creations, particularly the ones endowed with a taste of knowledge should focus on adding to this brilliance. The theology offered in this prayer comes not simply in an acknowledgment of God as creator but in an experience of God as creator.

By contrast the theological offerings of *Gates of Prayer* could be considered prescriptive as opposed to descriptive. Those familiar with *Gates of Prayer* know all too well that the theological underpinnings come via a particular service as opposed to the more free-flowing, appreciation of diversity found in the theological ideas suggested by *Mishkan Tefillah*. *Gates of Prayer* asks the prayer leader to select a theological approach to a worship experience, as each service, more or less reflects a theological theme. "To begin with, there is an abundance of services, ten for Sabbath evening, six for Sabbath morning and so on. ... It is not expected that everyone will use all the services."[145] The English translations of prayers as seen in the various services of *Gates of Prayer* take that themed theological approach in the interpretations.[146]

The first weekday evening service of *Gates of Prayer*, which begins on page 31, appears closest to the structure and content of a traditional *siddur*. Thus *Ma'ariv Aravim*

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[145] Lawrence Hoffman, ed. *Gates of Understanding: A Companion Volume to Shaarei Tefillah: Gates of Prayer*. New York, NY: CCAR Press. 1977. Page 157.
[146] Lawrence Hoffman, ed. *Gates of Understanding*. Pages 171-176.

can be found as an intact Hebrew prayer alongside a relatively accurate English translation. The translated phrase "*asher bidvaro ma'ariv aravim*" receives a relatively literal translation with "whose word brings on the evening," choosing to neutralize the masculine pronoun by not translating it in this particular example. The most striking contrast in comparison with *Mishkan Tefillah*'s translations can be seen in the use of masculine nouns for the name of God, "Lord," as well as masculine pronouns often associated with God's actions. This traditional translation leaves little room for discussion about the gender of the being responsible for creating the world. Metaphors aside, it seems hard for the progressive worshipper to completely ignore ideas like "His wisdom ... His understanding ... and His will." As pointed out by Jewish scholar, theologian and feminist Tikva Frymer-Kensky, this masculine liturgical message overwhelms the theological message that God has no human form.[147]

Other translations of *Ma'ariv Aravim* find their focus dependent on the overall theme of a particular service. For example, the *Kabbalat Shabbat* version of *Ma'ariv Aravim* found in the service promoting religious naturalism, which offers a "general tone ... of humanism ... [and] contains passages which belie any simplistic label" [148] contains English phrases like "A vast universe: who can know it? "and "Ordering the stars in the vast solitudes of the dark, yet whispering in the mind that You are closer than the air we breathe."[149] A version used in the weekday service beginning on page 72 uses a slightly modified English translation based on the combined themes of *Ma'ariv Aravim* and *Yotzer Or* originally found in the Union Prayer Book. Another weekday

[147] Tikva Frymer-Kensky. "On Feminine God Talk." Page 48.
[148] Lawrence Hoffman, ed. *Gates of Understanding*. Page 172.
[149] Chaim Stern, ed. *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook*. New York, NY: CCAR Press. 1975. Page 147.

service that begins on page 92 completely removes the Hebrew version of *Ma'ariv Aravim* and replaces it instead with Talmudic passages alongside English responses that pick up the creation theme. Other services offer the *Ma'ariv Aravim* prayer in translation using mystical overtones[150] that employ a recurring image of light alongside adaptations from Psalms or use an unusual approach that avoids theological language altogether in the English translation. This version is "phrased so as to allow for the possibility of a multiplicity of subjective interpretations by individual worshippers."[151] The word God disappears altogether using as a reading that begins, "There was silence; there was a voice."[152]

The gender sensitive version of *Gates of Prayer* released in 1994 offers less choice with gendered Hebrew and a translation that obscures the challenges of gendered God language. This siddur modifies primarily the phrases related to the names of God and does away with masculine pronouns. For example, the basic weekday evening service offers "We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the Universe" over "Praised be the Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe" and offers the second person pronoun You in place of He or His, "with wisdom You ... with understanding You ... Your will."[153]

2. Renewing and Reclaiming Names of God

One of the key arguments highlighting the feminist theological conversation concerns the gender insensitive language of liturgy. Without a doubt, the language of

[150] Chaim Stern, ed. *Gates of Prayer.* Pages 158-175.
[151] Lawrence Hoffman, ed. Gates of Understanding. Page 173.
[152] Chaim Stern, ed. *Gates of Prayer.* Page 209.
[153] Chaim Stern, ed. *Gates of Prayer for Shabbat and Weekdays: A Gender Sensitive Prayerbook.* New York, NY: CCAR Press. 1994. Page 2.

the traditional prayerbook comes across as "uniformly male" with the clear assumption of God as male and those who speak with God in prayer as primarily male. The language problem exists in both the Hebrew original as well as vernacular translations over time. The clearest example can be found in the opening and closing prayer signature of many Hebrew blessings. "*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Haolam*" which a traditional, literal English translation would render as "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe." In addition, traditional translations point almost exclusively to the masculine pronoun and use gender specific nouns. These translations abound with He, His, Man, Father and King.

Traditionalists argue that using an exclusive male appellation for God is not meant to suggest that God is exclusively male. The male appellation results, according to many, simply because of the gender specific nature of Hebrew nouns and verbs. "Hebrew prayers are sexist as Hebrew is a gender-specific language."[154] Hebrew has taken the fall for many a theoretically progressive worshipper's inability to accept the potential feminist suggestions concerning God language. As Rabbi Jules Harlow proclaims, Hebrew is the language of revelation and "a decision to pray with gender neutrality, an idea taken up by many feminist liturgists and theologians, denies the worshipper of an opportunity for an experience of prayer revelation.[155]

In addition, most modern Jewish theologians rightly claim that God is genderless and that "words and names describing God are not meant to be taken literally."[156] This

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[154] Jules Harlow, with Tamara Cohen, Rochelle Furstenberg, Daniel Gordis and Leora Tanenbaum. *Pray Tell: A Hadassah Guide to Jewish Prayer*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing. 2003. Page 206.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.

positive spin, however, does not really carry much weight for many progressive Jewish worshippers. In spite of the assertions of the theological spin-doctors, language creates culture and helps to solidity socially acceptable realities. The continued use of an "exclusive male appellation" compels many to think of God as falsely male. And frankly, who can blame them as many Jewish worshippers hear only exclusive masculine words for God from a young age. When the six year old, who understands language without religious sophistication, hears repeatedly that God is "King of the Universe" can we really be surprised at the adult version's desire to hold onto this primal security blanket of God as supreme masculine being endowed with ultimate authority.

This liturgically gendered foundation of God can leave adult worshippers to wrestle and reconcile their childhood notions, often without any real theological foundation, as they work to thoughtfully comprehend the complex Jewish notion that God is beyond gender. And for those who ascribe to a relational theology, this "beyond-ness" makes God fairly difficult to reach, as most worshippers understand that creating a relationship with the Divine depends on one's ability to personalize God.

One of the Jewish feminist endeavor's main objective centers primarily around the "reinterpretation of traditional images of the divine and the addition of new female images to complement the male images."[157] Jewish feminists go about accomplishing this task using multiple pathways that include creative English translations, modifying liturgy in both Hebrew and English to be more inclusive, as well as creating both new images from God, that were often drawn from sacred Jewish texts, as well as new liturgy. Jewish feminists did not originally conceive of these endeavors expanding the

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[157] Tamara Cohen. "Women's Spiritual Awareness" in *Pray Tell.* Page 213.

notion of God. Indeed the Reform movement has a significant history of radically altering Jewish prayer as a way to distinguish its progressive approach to Judaism and the place of the Jew in modern society. "Yet the [language of liturgy] changes begun by Jewish feminists may ultimately prove more comprehensive and far reaching than any previous revolution."[158]

One can see the fruits of the feminist prayer language revolution in *Mishkan Tefillah*. The *siddur* illuminates for the worshipper how to liturgically balance gender-neutral language for God that creates inclusion and promotes a diversity of worshippers as well as theologies. It bears mentioning that there exists a distinct difference in feminist language choices related to God. Liturgists have a choice to use either "degendered language" or "inclusive language." These choices are best explained by Rabbi Paula Reimers who proposes that degendered language "replaces a gender specific term with a non-specific one" whereas inclusive language "adds a feminine term where only a masculine term had been previously used."[159] For example, in the case of the translation of "*avot*" which literally means "fathers," a degendered choice would be "ancestors" whereas an inclusive choice would be "fathers and mothers." *Mishkan Tefillah* does not seem to come down on one side of this particular argument, choosing instead a middle ground offering both degendered and inclusive God language.

In Jewish prayer, God is called by multiple names. The most important of these names is the four-letter name represented by the Hebrew letters *Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh* (YHVH). Many refer to this name as the tetragrammaton and suggest that it may be derived from the Hebrew verb Heh-Yud-Heh that means "to be." Jewish tradition

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[158] Tamara Cohen. "Women's Spiritual Awareness" in *Pray Tell.* Page 206.
[159] Tamara Cohen. "Women's Spiritual Awareness" in *Pray Tell.* Page 211.

teaches the tetragrammaton as the highest example of God's proper name. Given this level of holiness associated with the name, tradition further teaches that the letters should not be written or said in full. When reading the name rendered by the tetragrammaton, Jews vocalize it with the Hebrew word *Adonai*. *Adonai* literally translates into English as "master." Most traditional *siddurim* use "Lord" as the English translation for this word. In addition, most Jewish texts do not render the written tetragrammaton of *Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh* given that these texts cannot be disposed of by regular means.

Mishkan Tefillah takes an notable approach to its translation of God's most recognizable name, *Adonai*. The proper name of God rendered on the right hand side of the Hebrew *keva* page uses the double *yud* to represent the tetragrammaton and appears in the translation as *Adonai*. This lack of translation could be seen as a way to circumvent or avoid this difficult, controversial question as the word does not translate easily into a gender-neutral vernacular word. Rabbi Richard Levy commented about the translation of the tetragrammaton in *Gates of Prayer: A Gender Sensitive Prayerbook* remarking that the potentially gender neutral English word "Eternal" used in this above *siddur* lacked warmth and evoked little relationship for someone who desired a close connection to the divine.[160] This *siddur* also used the word "One" in addition to "Eternal" to translate the tetragrammaton. It could be argued that this word does little as well to create the possibility for a relational moment. Granted, these English translations were considered an improvement over the consistent use of the word "Lord" to translate the tetragrammaton found in *Gates of Prayer*. "Lord" is at best a title

[160] In person interview with Rabbi Richard Levy. November 26, 2012.

for a being with considerable authority, control or power over others. It connotes masculinity in spite of the dictionary's suggestion that this is a title given to a person.

Elyse Frishman concurs with Richard Levy that the word "Eternal" does not emit any warmth. She remarked that she understands the Hebrew word *Adonai* as neutral and that it was felt in the end that a translation was not needed.[161] There exists great irony here because the Hebrew word *Adonai* taken at its literal core comes across as masculine and hierarchical. Similar to the English word "Lord" it does not suggest a name per se but rather a title. Frishman's suggestion that people no longer translate this word *Adonai*, while perhaps not entirely true for all Jewish worshippers, allows *Mishkan Tefillah* to make a bold leap when it comes to names of God, particularly in its use of name of God that has caused great debate in the Jewish feminist world.

One might suggest that refusing to translate *Adonai* strikes a unique balance between tradition and modernity in *Mishkan Tefillah* regarding the names of God. One could construe this display as a reclaiming of a traditional word without all of the gendered contexts that have been placed on it over the centuries. Doing so theoretically grants worshippers permission to seek their own name for God in the multiple moments they come across the tetragrammaton in a worship experience. Individuals using *Mishkan Tefillah* can understand *Adonai* as an opportunity to seek a name for God for themselves. It brings to life the passage in Exodus 3:13-14 where Moses asks of God's name. God's response of "*eheyah asher eheyah*" ("I am that I am") contains ambiguity alongside permission to call God by names best suited to an individual believer.

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[161] Phone interview with Rabbi Elyse Frishman. December 4, 2012.

The un-translated God name *Adonai* of *Mishkan Tefillah* does however possess a missing educational piece. While I do propose that one can read this particular name as a feminist inspired attempt at reclaiming a Hebrew appellation, more might be needed in order to bring worshippers into the desired thoughtful conversation and consideration of integrated, polyvocal God images *Mishkan Tefillah* proposes to support. I imagine that many a worshipper misses the opportunity here that they possess the freedom of individual, personal translation.

In addition, Mishkan Tefillah chooses not to expand the boundaries of the God naming arena as far as other progressive *siddurim*. For example, the Reconstructionist siddur *Kol Haneshamah*'s decision to use many of names for God in its English translations of the tetragrammaton more directly educates worshippers about the possible appellations for God. In addition, *Kol Haneshamah* uses offers alternative formulas for blessings, including introducing a possible name for God, *Yah*, which may have been known as a feminine appellation on some ancient level.[162]

3. Editing versus Eliminating

The Paragraphs of Shema

Reform Judaism has a long history of revising liturgy as a response to its understanding of its religious and moral ideology. This tradition of revision includes a clear mandate to edit as well as excise traditional liturgy that challenges progressive worshippers beyond even their 'comfortable-discomfort' theology zones. This ideological permission to edit and excise pertains to language, as previous examples related to overtly gendered texts reveals, as well liturgical texts related to ethical and

[162] David A. Teutsch, ed. *Kol Haneshamah: Daily Prayerbook*. Wyncote, PA: The Reconstructionist Press. 1996. Page 5.

religious ideology that proves just too difficult to defend, even from a metaphorical standpoint. The second paragraph of the *Shema*, a selection of biblical verses from the eleventh chapter of Deuteronomy, remain among some of these liturgical texts that simply stray too far from the inclusive, progressive message promulgated by the Reform movement. The decision to include or not include this traditional second paragraph of the *Shema* created quite a controversy within the Reform community during the creation of *Mishkan Tefillah*. The controversy, as well as the final decision not to include the traditional text of the paragraph even as an alternative, illustrates an interesting cases with which to examine the feminist notion of inclusion with traditional balance when certain modern sensibilities clearly overrule a traditional prayer foundation.

The *Shema* ranks as one of the oldest pieces of liturgy found within the modern worship service. Hoffman reports that, "The Mishnah records a version that may have been said in the [ancient] Temple period."[163] The very first topic handled in the *Mishnah*, Judaism's first collection of Jewish law, examines the proper time associated with the recitation of this collection of biblical verses best understood as a Jewish faith affirmation. The rabbis ask, "From what time may one recite the *Shema* in the evening?"[164]

Traditionally, there are three sections associated with the *Shema*, as well as three blessings that correspond to the sections. As presented in conventional *siddur*, the prayer begins with a line from Deuteronomy (6:4) followed by a line scholars contend could have originated in the ancient Temple service. The next three paragraphs

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[163] Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed. *My People's Prayerbook, Volume 1.* Page 20.
[164] Mishnah Berakhot 1:12

consist of verses from the Hebrew Bible that may have also been recited during the Temple service. These selections were Deuteronomy 6:5-9, Deuteronomy 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41.

The earliest versions of Reform prayerbooks omitted both the second as well as a majority of the third paragraph of *Shema*, in line with a conclusion by early reformers that these sections of the *Shema* were later additions to the original liturgy along with a desire to considerably shorten the Jewish worship service. Additionally, Reform thinkers eliminated the use of the *tallit* in worship so the mentions of *tzitzit* in the third paragraph were not applicable to a Reform worshipper. Both the *Union Prayer Book* and *Gates of Prayer* "follow the example of David Einhorn's 1894 *Olat Tamid* by including as their *Shema* only the first paragraph (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) along with the conclusion of the third paragraph (Numbers 15:41)."[165]

The removal of the second paragraph as well as parts of the third by the early Reformers additionally reflected an ideological discomfort with the theological message presented in these verses. In those verses, the theology suggests a God of obligation, who acts in relationship with humanity in a dichotomy of reward and punishment. This idea remains an uncomfortable notion for many progressive Jews, especially Jews who theoretically believe in many of the *mitzvot* but whose practice does not always match their theory. Progressive Jews seem to prefer the loving God depicted in the other sections of the *Shema*.

David Ellenson commenting on the historical evolution of the siddur in general uses modern commentary from the most recently published Reconstructionist siddur

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[165] Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed. *My People's Prayerbook, Volume 1.* Pages 101-102

Kol Haneshamah to accurately describe the ideological problems found in Deuteronomy, Chapter 11's theological message. "Its detailed description of 'the bountiful or devastating consequences of Israel's collective relationship to the *mitzvot* offers a superlative theology that many contemporary Jews find difficult.'"[166] Progressive Jews, even those pulled by the powerful historic message of traditional liturgy, are simply not comfortable with the problematic concept of reward and punishment. One can see a similar literal message of discomfort from the editors of the Conservative movement's *siddur Sim Shalom*, which publishes a note in the back of its *siddur* a reminder to the worshippers that argues the second paragraph should not be taken literally. Clearly many Jews cannot quite accept the challenging theological message presented by these verses that suggests a God who manipulates natural order depending on whether or not the 'Israelites' live out the prescribed moral and religious behaviors dictated by traditional *mitzvot*.

At first glance, pages 66-67 of *Mishkan Tefillah* appear to contain the "classic" Reform adaptation of the *Shema* and its sections. A worshipper familiar with *Gates of Prayer* but less familiar with traditional liturgy might incorrectly make the assumption that little has changed in Reform ideology regarding this central, complicated unit of prayer. However, when a worshipper stops to read a bit closer, she discovers that these pages actually aspire to accurately represent the ongoing conversation and evolution of this prayer in Reform liturgical practice. One wonders, however, how many worshippers raised on the Reform version of this prayer actually stop to join the conversation.

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[166] Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed. *My People's Prayerbook, Volume 1: Traditional Prayer, Modern Commentaries – The Sh'ma and Its Blessings*. Pages 105 and 108.

As Reform liturgy continues to evolve its understanding and practice, these particular prayer pages of ***Mishkan Tefillah*** seem to be working subtly to display the value tensions that perhaps accompanied the committee's decision to first provide the Reform foundation of this prayer, which some might argue has become a sort of "Reform dogma." Was it out of respect for this "dogma" that moved the editors of this prayer-book to start with the familiar on these pages and present the additional traditional options as almost peripheral elements? A worshipper needs to look closely to see the ideological movement back to traditional themes and practices from the excluded paragraphs represented on the left-hand alternative readings. I was particularly struck by the language found in the second alternative reading on page 67 that puts forth many of the obligation and consequence ideas found in the second paragraph of the traditional *Shema*. Was this a conscious comprise to allow a worshipper to actually pray, at least in the vernacular, all three paragraphs of the *Shema*?

I also wondered about the tension between the *keva* and *kavanah* of this page. By presenting the familiar "Reform version" do the pages miss the fanfare opportunity the remarkable decision to re-include the entire third paragraph of the *Shema* deserves? While this paragraph may not represent as radical a theology as the second, the insertion still represents a clear ideological change that might get missed by a less knowledgeable worshipper. The "continue to page ..." does not seem to do the justice to the decision or provide a real educational moment. Especially in a prayer that many Jews seem to know almost by heart, what is a *siddur's* responsibility to draw the

worshippers out of their rote recitation and into the possibility of discovery and deeper meaning?

Conclusion: Jewish Feminist Takeaways – Today and Tomorrow

Feminist theologian Rachel Adler maintains in *Engendering Judaism* that, "Progressive Jews understand Judaism as an evolving system, constantly reshaped and renewed through its relations with its changing historical contexts.[167]The Jewish feminist consciousness sparked by the historical context of second and third wave American feminism sparked a revolution, a revolution whose effects can be observed less than fifty years later. The transformation of Reform religious prayer practice, as the examples of influences of Jewish feminism and theology reflected on the pages of *Mishkan Tefillah* suggest, has rapidly moved the progressive American Jewish community to a new reality of religious equality.

The markers of feminism's influence, as proposed by Chapter One, are almost a cultural given in progressive *siddurim* like *Mishkan Tefillah*. Androcentric God language no longer exclusively reflects progressive Jewish prayers. While the majority of the language changes remain in the vernacular, gendered language does not dominate the God images and metaphors of progressive prayerbooks. Additionally, progressive prayerbooks actively reflect a reconnection to Jewish tradition in the name of Jewish continuity. Lost images have been rediscovered, ancestral names have been expanded and traditional prayers have been reinstated. This reconnection broadens tradition so that it invites diversity instead of opposing it.

These changes continue to widen the circle of participation in the Jewish community. As more and more Jewish voices emerge as authentic, it generates a

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[167] Adler. Page 24.

realization that expands our consciousness of other 'others' within the Jewish community. Every day new Jewish prayerbooks come into being that recognize and embrace not just gender but sexuality, race, and even skepticism. A notable example is the publication of *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* by Congregation Sha'ar Zahav in San Francisco, California. This twenty-first century prayerbook takes inclusion to the next level, offering egalitarian LGBT inclusive translations and God language that moves beyond gendered categories.

Its quite possible that the early Jewish feminists, those women who 'misbehaved' in the name of progress, never imagined they could affect change so rapidly. There are those who proclaim that the process of feminist influence has actually became passé, claiming that the work of raising awareness and making transformation is complete. And yet, our celebration for the gains should necessarily remain tempered with cautious optimism while we figure out why some changes still prove impossible to transpire.

Why, for example, are traditional Hebrew words of prayer so difficult to eliminate? Many progressive Jews admit to a lack of identification with the actual words of Hebrew prayer but find themselves tethered to these ancient words that conjure up words that may linger just outside of their theological consciousness. As suggested previously, neutral translations do not diminish the power of the Hebrew gendered word but rather obscure it from our reality. Many Jews still wrestle with the dominant image of *melech* (king) even when it is softened by a neutral translation. Additionally, *Adonai* still means 'master' in spite of *Mishkan Tefillah*'s attempt to lessen the sting of ultimate dominance by essentially un-translating the word.

A further question raised revolves around a *siddur's* responsibility to present a coherent theology. Does *Mishkan Tefillah*, in pursuit of its integrated, polyvocal theology, do so at the expense of the worshipper's need for theological coherence? Jewish feminist theology moves for an expansion of God metaphors and theology but it does not ask individuals to grasp all of the images together at once. While Jewish prayer should indeed invite interpretation, how many theological themes can a worshipper be expected to hold in tandem? And what happens when a worshipper does not see the theological themes of their life on a particular page of the *siddur*? Do they pause and wait until their God idea shows back up? *Mishkan Tefillah* misses an educational moment by not making clear that it is impossible for a worshipper to hold all of the theological positions presented by the *siddur* at the same time. Frishman contends that, "this is the distinction of an integrated theology. Not that one looks to each page to find one's particular voice, but that over the course of praying, many voices are heard, and ultimately come together as one."[168]

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* proclaimed that "you can have it all, just not all at the same time." American Jewish feminists took risks in order to make progress. That progress is our legacy and our responsibility. If God is reflected in our diversity, the struggle for an encompassing recognition of our unique, emerging diversities must continue. Not having it all at the same time means a dynamic process of compromise and balance, ever striving for equity with the realization that what works for one may not always work for another. When we share in this power to make change,

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[168] Elyse D. Frishman. "Entering Mishkan T'filah."

our visibility forever shifts. As Adler teaches, we then "become fully visible not only to one another but [finally] to ourselves [as well].[169]

[169] Rachel Adler. *Engendering Judaism*. Page 66.

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