Re-Envisioning Reform Jewish Prayer:
A Synthesis of Practice and Theory into Praxis

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Thesis Abstract

This rabbinic thesis synthesizes suggestions for transforming the prayer culture of Reform synagogues, drawing from the best of recent American Jewish history and 20th Century Jewish philosophical phenomenology. It exposes three simultaneous trends in Reform worship since WWII: increasing traditionalism, participation and spirituality, and shows how these three trends in Jewish life are inherently interconnected, and could support each other even more so in Reform Jewish prayer communities of the future. The thesis is comprised of three chapters. The first, entitled "A History of Prayer Practice: American Jewish Prayer Since World War II," recounts the recent history of American Jewish prayer through synagogue buildings, the havurah movement, and in tracing developments in the last three Reform prayer books. The second chapter, "Theories of Prayer: Mining the Philosophies of Berkovits, Heschel and Soloveitchik" discusses the ideal phenomenologies of "what ought to happen in prayer" according to three prominent 20th Century Jewish thinkers. The third chapter synthesizes best practices from the havurah movement, in accordance with the most recent prayer book, *Mishkan T'fillah*, with theory from the second. In it, I make suggestions for how these practices and theories can be practically infused into the Reform synagogue prayer culture. In it, I outline six suggestions for enlivening the synagogue prayer culture in ways that encourage Jewish growth, learning, leadership, spiritual focus and cultivation of the inner life in covenant with God, participation, and social action. Because my goal as a rabbi is to engage congregants by giving them opportunities to lead, grow, learn, and act within sacred community, this thesis provides a blueprint for creating a synagogue prayer culture that is itself a container for the shared leadership, Jewish and spiritual growth, learning and social action I aim to cultivate in all other areas of synagogue life as well.

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INTRODUCTION

In a recent article in the *Forward*, Jay Michaelson articulates what for me was the driving force in deciding to write a thesis on the problem with contemporary Reform Jewish prayer.[1] Michaelson suggests that Reform synagogue prayer, although egalitarian, is not, in fact inclusive at all because it does not inspire people to pray, or provide opportunities for learning and growth. In an effort not to alienate the stranger, Reform synagogues have, in effect, forgotten not to alienate Jews who want to *daven* (Yiddish for 'praying as a Jew'). The rabbi or cantor announces page numbers, says something between each prayer, and the "audience," a term I use purposely, looks on in a daze. The songs the rabbi or cantor sings often do not use the words of the prayer book at all. Synagogues have all but eliminated the learning curve for Jewish prayer. It is unclear that prayer skills would even be relevant in a Reform context. Whereas in many havurot and independent minyanim (other, non-Orthodox contexts for egalitarian prayer), "people who choose to accept the invitation [to study] obtain the rewards," Reform synagogues tend not to provide incentives to grow. Even if people learn or decide they want to engage the liturgy, the culture would not reward it. Much of what motivates this thesis is my own search for a prayer community that challnges Jews to grow.

Re-envisioning a culture of Reform prayer that matters and that provides accessible pathways into it requires a confrontation with many aspects of American Jewish history, prayer book development, philosophy, phenomenology, and Jewish education. How can we make good on the descriptions of ideal phenomenology of prayer, written by major 20th Century Jewish philosophers, and translate their vision into one that melds with the major

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[1] Jay Michaelson, "Rethinking Egalitarianism: Are We Leveling the Playing Field Too Low?" *the Forward*, New York, November 5, 2010.

trends of contemporary Reform Judaism: participation, spirituality and increasing traditionalism? The Reform prayer culture of the future requires a blend of theory and best practices, what Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman calls "praxis." It also involves education about why being and "doing" Jewish matter at all. Above all, re-envisioning Reform Jewish prayer means striking a new balance between participation and tradition. The history that follows will provide context for where we have come as we seek to re-align our priorities for prayer going forward.

CHAPTER I:

A History of Prayer Practice: American Jewish Prayer Since World War II

"Understanding religion in any context requires both understanding broad historical/ sociological history and the performance of its ritual activities."[2]

i. Recent History of Reform Jewish Prayer

With the return of millions of veterans to American shores, the period following the Second World War saw unparalleled growth and prosperity, and a variety of social changes. The rise of suburbia was one of the most pronounced shifts, as many "white folks" moved away from urban centers and into new neighborhoods, where they established churches and synagogues, schools and community centers.[3] Jewish families, who often came from densely populated Jewish urban neighborhoods, sometimes moved to streets where neither next-door family was Jewish. Entering into and thriving in the middle-class became the new "religion" of American Jewry. Because religious participation and education were central middle-class suburban values, Jews affiliated with synagogues at the highest rates in American history to date. In the 1950's, affiliation rates among Jews approached 60%, far lower than those of their Protestant and Catholic neighbors, but higher than they had ever been before and have ever been since.[4] Conservative Judaism was the biggest winner in this period, which saw the construction of over one thousand new synagogue centers nationwide. But the Reform movement also grew sizably, as the movement changed to include Jews of Eastern European descent (in addition to their old-time German-Jewish core membership), and attracted new members through an agenda of social action. Orthodox Judaism was the biggest loser in this period, as suburban life was made difficult by strict adherence to Jewish law-- which

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[2] Riv-Ellen Prell, *Prayer and Community: The Havurah in American Judaism*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989, 14.

[3] For more on the racial category "white folks" in 1950's America, and how Jews were and were not seen as belonging to this category, see Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998.

[4] Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004, 277.

prohibits driving or carrying on the Sabbath, and according to the Orthodox, prohibits using appliances that one has to turn on and off throughout the day. Suburban synagogue architects were often the same architects that designed suburban churches; and indeed, this period can be characterized by increasing similarity in the norms of suburban church and synagogue life.

With the focus on living as middle-class "white folk," the American Jewish post-war generation was intent on completing the social acceptance (and corresponding acculturation) that their historical moment provided. As Jonathan Sarna points put, antisemitism was on the decline.[5] Even as many country clubs, societies and universities still enforced exclusion or quotas on Jewish membership, these forms of outright discrimination against Jews were finally becoming taboo. Indeed, Judaism became the third "major American religion" after Protestantism and Catholicism in this period. This set up an interesting situation wherein Jews comprised 3.8% of the total American population, but were essentially responsible for one third of America's religious identity.[6] Even though American Jews socialized with non-Jews throughout the workday, many experienced a "5:00 shadow," which meant that neighbors were less welcoming toward them in the private sphere than they were in the professional sphere.[7] Thus, Jews sought to create community among themselves. While there were initial efforts at organizing strictly cultural and social organizations, because religion was another central feature of suburban life, and with this, religious education, suburban Jews turned to synagogues as the main centers of Jewish community, culture, and religion. As Sarna writes, in the synagogue's "style, its emphasis on light and modernity, its accommodation to the automobile, and its orientation toward women and youth the post-war synagogue became more than just a Jewish house of worship. It symbolized the suburbanization of Judaism itself."[8] Because so much of the synagogue's purpose was to

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[5] Ibid, 276.
[6] Ibid, 276.
[7] Ibid, 283.
[8] Sussman, "the Suburbanization of American Judaism," in Sarna, 291.

accommodate Jewish acculturation, what resulted was a complicated mix of what people needed and thought they needed as 'good suburban Americans.'

The introduction and adoption of electrical appliances that made life "easier and more advanced," practically a motto of suburban America in the 1950's—affected not only home observance of the Sabbath, but new norms within the synagogue as well. The widespread use of modern public address systems (i.e. microphones), for example, allowed synagogues to move the Torah reading, which had once been conducted in the midst of the synagogue so people could hear it, to the front of the room. In fact, all of the functions now moved to a raised platform at one end of the hall. This move relegated congregants to a more passive role as observers rather than active participants during worship services, and created more distance between the worshippers and the Torah. [9]

In the realm of ritual, Marshall Sklare, a preeminent Jewish sociologist of his day, in seeking to understand the pattern of ritual observance he detected, offered five criteria important for "retaining Jewish ritual in the home." He concluded that the highest ritual retention rates occur when: 1) the ritual lends itself to redefinition in modern terms; 2) does not demand social isolation or a unique lifestyle; 3) fits into the religious culture of the larger community, providing a 'Jewish' alternative when there is a perceived need; 4) is child-centered; and 5) is performed annually or infrequently.[10] All of these observations suggest that high rates of affiliation at synagogues in the 1950's probably did not correlate to higher rates of religiosity, per se. American Jews in the post-war period were, by and large, more interested in acculturation into middle-class, suburban America than they were interested in revitalizing Jewish religious expression.

Another problem with the post-war synagogue was scale. While affiliation rates were relatively high, most members did not attend services every week. The most by far showed

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[9] Sarna, 291.

[10] Sklare and Greenbaum, *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier*, 57; cf. Sklare and Vosk, *The Riverton Study*, 11 in Sarna, 278.

up for the High Holy Days—Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Thus, the official membership of these synagogues was always much larger than any given crowd at Shabbat services. The scale and impersonality of the community, therefore, became increasingly pronounced.

ii. A New Model for Egalitarian Traditional Jewish Prayer in Participatory Community

The havurah movement began in the 1960's in response to what many experienced as the conflation of suburban America and Judaism in the post-WWII-period. The havurah movement sought to recover a measure of authenticity, through directly grappling with and owning Jewish tradition—both ethnically and religiously. Whereas suburban Judaism relegated the relevance of Judaism to religion alone, making Judaism fit a mold of American religious expression, pioneers of the havurah movement sought to explore Judaism on its own terms, without regard for acculturation within white America. The 1960's were about pluralism, not homogenous American culture. To that end, young Jews sought to rediscover a full Jewish identity that integrated religion with people-hood:

> What the havurah movement's creators did understand was a desire among Jews for religious experience on a new scale. Havurot never replaced synagogues for the majority of Jews, but they did underscore the need for community and participation that was made difficult by large, second generation synagogues. They were the first generation of acculturated Jews to question the value of decorum of uniformity and restraint, and, as such, they dramatically reconceptualized the place of Jews in American society as merely conformists to a homogenous culture. They emerged from the American counterculture to reshape, almost single-handedly, the issues of identity that pervaded post-war American Judaism."[11]

Havurah members were also interested in forming relationships of meaning with other members of the group, and making prayer and study work for them spiritually and intellectually-- and, all the while, being Jewish on their own terms. The synagogue felt spiritually dead to many of them. Authentic Jewish expression required forming small communities for prayer, Torah study, Jewish fellowship and civil engagement outside of synagogues. According to Riv-Ellen Prell, one havurah member named James Sleeper characterized suburban synagogues and Judaism as "a spiritual Hiroshima which had been

[11] Prell, 318.

the setting for the transformation of the Hebrew spirit into an increasingly dispensable appendage of middle class culture."[12] American Jews in that period, according to the havurah generation, were more interested in living middle class American values than asserting unique ways of life as Jews: "The [suburban congregational synagogue] attempted as much to create a Jewish identity within a middle-class framework as it sought to create a middle-class identity within a Jewish framework."[13] Religious involvement was widespread because it was one, (relatively small) aspect of middle-class suburban life.

In starting havurot, minyan members faced a perpetual contradiction: advocating for Jewish continuity while rebelling against their own families' form of Jewish expression. The rebellion was understood not to be against Jewish life at large, but rather, against their parents' construction of it. Young activist Jews were unique in this regard among their counter-cultural peers: in clinging to an idealized past, and in seeking continuity through rebellion. In the words of Riv-Ellen Prell, "[havurah members] believed that the past held the key to who they would be."[14] Indeed, the same self-conscious "back to roots" impetus in the civil rights movement that affected African-Americans and women reminded Jews of their ethnic difference as well. Just as American Jews were disproportionately represented among white protesters for civil rights,[15] they would later fight for the rights of Soviet Jews to immigrate to America from the Soviet Union. Also, the 1967 War in Israel against several Arab neighbors increased ethnic pride among all generations of American Jews. While, in the 1940's and 1950's, "synagogues were seen as a statement to our parents and the non-Jewish community... to demonstrate that we Jews are here and we will remain,"[16] members of the emerging havurah movement did not believe such "statements" continued to be necessary in this generation (the third generation since the massive wave of Eastern European Jewish

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[12] James A. Sleeper and Alan L. Mintz, eds. *The New Jews.* New York: Vinatge Books, 1971, 7 in Prell, 83.
[13] Prell, 63.
[14] Ibid, 87.
[15] Ibid, 265-270.
[16] Ibid, 95.

immigration). In rebelling against their parents' generation, they looked with nostalgia to a distant model: the *shtetl*, or European Jewish village.

Indeed, one key element that set the havurot apart is that members tended not to be interested in fitting in—either into the past or into the present-- mainstream. They brought their full, questioning, Jewish-interested selves into the havurah experience. Ambivalence was an important dimension of the havurah experience: "ambivalence towards the authority of Jewish tradition, the religious character of interpersonal interaction and intimacy, and the creation of meaning through personal emotion and intellectual response to tradition."[17] Many people who joined havurot expressed difficulties around prayer. Many also characterized the havurot as a congenial place to learn how to pray. Yet most knew what they did not want more than what they did want. Many knew that their experience growing up in suburban synagogues of the 1950's and '60's did not reflect "authentic" Jewish expression.

Many havurah members criticized the decorum and 'well-run spectacle' common to suburban synagogues: "The cacophony, movement, and spirit of what they believed was real Jewish worship had been channeled and limited... worshippers had become consumers; rabbis and cantors, producers."[18] Intuitively, this consumer-like feel in American synagogues did not sit well with them. Indeed, minyan members in Prell's study also critiqued the bureaucratic aesthetic of American synagogues. Minyan members sought an experiential decorum and aesthetic. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, whose philosophical writings on ideal prayer we will take up in the next chapter, writes of this passive role of congregants in his famous essay, "The Spirit of Jewish Prayer":

> People expect the rabbi or cantor to conduct a service: an efficient, expert service. But efficiency and rapidity are no remedy against devotional sterility... What about the heart being in the right place? What about prayer? We have developed the habit of *praying by proxy*. Many congregants seem to have

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[17] Chava Weissler, *Making Judaism Meaningful: Ambivalence and Tradition in a Havurah Community*. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1989, 102.
[18] Prell, 140.

> adopted the principle of vicarious prayer. The rabbi or the cantor does the praying for the congregation.[19]

Whereas in more traditional contexts, congregants are free to *daven* or "pray in a swaying, engaged and free way," the modern synagogue had set up a situation in which the clergy did all the active praying, and everyone stayed together on the same word of the same prayer on the same page of the prayer book from beginning to end. This was the influence of classical Reform synagogue worship on Conservative, and Christian influence on both Reform and Conservative. The roots of Reform styles of prayer date back to late 18th Century Germany and what happened in the wake of European Emancipation. Yet the 1950's only continued the trend, which assumed that for Judaism to be acceptable and "palatable" to Christian sensibilities, it needed to adopt a more restrained and communally uniform style of prayer.

The havurah movement of the 1960's and '70's spurred a return to more authentically Jewish styles of prayer. At the same time, the movement encouraged informality and intimate worship in "family-like settings."[20] Participation became the value of the day, snuffing out congregational passivity and formality. In this way, the havurah movement both embraced tradition and innovated Jewish worship. People tended to pray in a circle, members shared words of Torah in discussion format rather than in formal sermons, and members struggled with more traditional liturgy, full Torah readings, and a higher degree of Hebrew. In their search for authenticity, havurah members sought to emulate Orthodox styles of independent davening while in community, and the democratic model of any competent Jew leading the group in prayer. Its major innovation was full egalitarianism. Any traditional model of davening, Torah reading, or Torah discussion included men and women as equally able to lead and participate in all rituals.

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[19] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Prayer," Susanna Heschel, Ed., *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996, 101.
[20] Sarna, 324.

The havurah became a "hot topic" among established Jewish professionals and leaders across the movements. Synagogue leaders came to see why and how the havurah movement filled a gap in Jewish life for the post-war generation. Yet attempts to integrate elements of the havurot into synagogue life happened with only mixed success. To be sure, many synagogues began to decrease the staged formality of their services, and encourage more participation. This happened slowly, and would not enter synagogues on a large scale until the 1990's. Yet many of the synagogues' attempts to create havurot within synagogues failed, mostly because of the level of buy-in, and because creating havurot involved more than using the word, "havurah" in marketing new synagogue programs. Bernard Reisman, writing in 1977 for a Reform publication, addresses what he sees as the reasons for the havurah's appeal among the post-war generation. He posits four main reasons that havurot arose: his first reason is the need for community, addressing loneliness. The intimate setting of the havurah fills this need. Secondly, havurot address the passivity experienced by many in synagogues, as havurot introduce autonomy and participation. Thirdly, the havurot address a search for authentic authority among the young generation of the '60's and '70's, and the havurah responds with ties to Jewish tradition. Lastly, responding to the generation's quest for meaning and ideology, the havurah offers transcendence.[21] This is a nice breakdown of what is unique among the havurot as compared to synagogues. He is writing at a time when the havurah movement is already on the decline, and he seeks to sustain them by joining forces between havurot and synagogues, thereby offering professional staff for havurot. Yet in suggesting this, Resiman misunderstands the whole point of the havurah, acting without institutional oversight and apart from the synagogues' hierarchical model. Still, Resiman's article is commendable in its attempt to recognize and incorporate lessons from the havurah movement for the evolution of synagogues.

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[21] Bernard Reisman, "Professional Leadership for the Havurah," *Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal*. New York: CCAR, 1977, vol. 24, no. 1, iss. No. 96, 55.

As contemporary Jewish prayer culture is the focus of this paper, we turn now to exploring the specific ways in which havurot explored traditional Jewish prayer in both ancient and innovative ways. We have already discussed some of the issues around ambivalence in regard to traditional Jewish liturgy among havurah members. There was generally tremendous interest among havurah members in uncovering authentic modes of Jewish prayer following more Orthodox models of *davening*. Yet as most havurah members did not grow up in Orthodox homes, one of the defining characteristics of the havurot was honest grappling and sharing around the difficulty of interiorizing Jewish liturgy, coupled with experimentation and reassessment. Havurah members largely understood prayer to be both ritual and text; and therefore, that one must study both prayer and praying. This idea that arose in the havurah movement will be a focus of our present study, as we parse out how prayer functioned and how it was learned in the havurah movement. This truth will also guide the remainder of this thesis, as we seek to weave together cultures and theories of prayer with the driving motivations behind the havurah movement in order to offer pathways by which to revitalize American synagogue prayer.

According to Lawrence Hoffman, there is "a process of self-definition in worship."[22] Part of the difficulty with traditional prayer for people who are not used to it, is the disjunction people sometimes feel between themselves and the text. In the words of Riv-Ellen Prell, "the ideal prayer experience for Minyan members, whatever differences there were among them, involved taking the prayer text into the self. Then the text was voiced as a product of the self that was also a product of Jewish tradition." This process is hard, and requires practice. In the Kelton minyan in Los Angeles, which is the major focus group of Prell's research on havurot, one day after services, everyone shared in a circle what their main difficulties were with Shabbat prayer. This discussion became the impetus for a

[22] Lawrence Hoffman, *The Art of Public Prayer*, 1987 in Prell, 166.

weekend retreat on the theme of traditional Jewish prayer. Here are some of the questions people were asked to think about before the main discussion on prayer during the retreat:

- Do we pray primarily for the benefit of ourselves, of others, or of God?
- What do we want to say when we pray? Do the words in the traditional *siddur* say what we want to say? Does the *siddur* reflect our own worldview? Should it?
- What is the best language for prayer? Why do we need language at all? Can song or dance be prayer?
- How personally should we address/speak about God in prayer? How shall we talk about God—in the second or third person? In the masculine or the feminine? In other ways?
- Are images like "king," "Father," "throne," etc., a help or a hindrance in entering prayer? Are there other images that might be more powerful (e.g., "lover," "companion," "energy," etc.)?
- What is the discipline needed to get into praying? Is there a difference between praying and davening? Between davening and meditating? Between prayer and group singing?
- What are the advantages/disadvantages of spontaneous prayer over against prayers prepared by others? Of prayers in the Siddur over against prayers written by our contemporaries?
- How do we feel about praising God? For what can we praise Him? How do we feel about petitioning God? What are valid requests? What is the role of love and fear/awe in praise and petition?
- How much of our prayer is an intellectual experience? An emotional experience? A bodily experience?
- If we have theological problems with certain prayers, is it hypocritical to say them anyway? What values can we find in prayer beyond the words? How far is it "legitimate" to go in reinterpreting theologically difficult prayers?[23]

These questions represent the kind of discussion about prayer most rabbis only dream about. They presuppose a serious investment in an ongoing experimentation with traditional prayer among Jews for whom traditional Jewish prayer is not first-nature. These questions highlight many tensions involved in modern people searching for an authentic form of prayer—authentic both to himself or herself and to the tradition with which the self is interfacing. Thus, this is an appropriate place to parse what we mean (and what havurah members meant) about a search for "authentic" communal prayer. What constitutes authenticity? It is interesting to highlight in such a discussion the role that nostalgia often plays in people's imagination of what is "authentic." According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "authentic" is defined as: "conforming to an original so as to reproduce essential features or made or done the same way as an original"; not false or imitation: real, actual; or true to one's own personality, spirit, or character."[24] Within the very definition of "authentic," we see a potential paradox as what is "true to one's own (individual) personality, spirit, or character" may be at odds with the "authenticity" of a religious tradition with a life of its own.

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[23] FIGURE 3: "Kelton Free Minyan Retreat," in Prell, 213.
[24] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/authentic

Furthermore, there is a great degree of subjectivity involved in differentiating between authentic and inauthentic religious expressions. Not only is religion itself constantly changing and evolving, rendering the "original" form of it irrelevant, but also no one would participate in a religious worship service he or she thought to be "fake." Authenticity is difficult to locate. We may say, however, if we remain wary of the generalization, that Jewish forms of prayer that more obviously imitate and incorporate non-Jewish elements or customs could be considered less "authentic," strictly-speaking than those that resist outside influences on uniquely-Jewish expressions of prayer. Furthermore, achieving a high level of authenticity in one's recreation of "authentic Jewish prayer" would not eliminate important tensions. Rather, in the words of Riv-Ellen Prell: "Jewish prayer was built on a tension between the private and the public, the individual and the communal, the spontaneous and the standardized. That tension is maintained rather than resolved in the worship service."[25] Thus, no one seeks out Jewish authenticity to simplify his or her prayer experience. Rather, havurah members sought out authenticity—and continue to-- because fulfillment in struggling with tradition is only worthwhile with an "authentic," "traditional" form of the religion.

The spirit of struggling with tradition and owning one's own Jewish exploration is too often absent from synagogues. As consumers, members expect to be cared for, pleased, occasionally uplifted, and sometimes challenged. Yet too many synagogue goers are content to let someone else tell them what to think about and when, and to let the prayers of the rabbi and cantor wash over them rather than dig deep in themselves to offer their own. Today's synagogue has changed dramatically from that of the 1950's and '60's. It has incorporated many of the trends set in motion by the havurah movement. These trends include increased lay participation in synagogues, enthusiastic singing and dancing through the aisles of some synagogues, and increasingly often, a full, silent *Amidah* (standing prayer), and increased use

[25] Prell, 182

of Hebrew. Few are aware of the impact of the havurah movement on synagogue life, and even fewer make a conscious effort to incorporate best practices and motivating forces of the havurah movement into synagogue life. In the next segment, we examine the evolution of the Reform movement's prayer book since the 1940's, to better understand the official trends and messages that the Reform movement hopes to inculcate in the synagogue, as demonstrated by the evolution of their prayer books. Through taking a closer look at how the prayer book has changed over time, we can better understand the distance yet to be traveled in bringing increased "authenticity" into Reform prayer life.

ii. Reform Prayer Book Evolution of the Last 70 Years

By examining the last three prayer books of the Reform movement, we can trace directions in which the prayer book has evolved since WWII. Like the layout and space of the synagogue itself, prayer book reform reflects changes in both the folk's and the elite's priorities for Reform prayer. Yet the prayer book is commissioned, published and distributed by "elite" leaders of the movement, even as it may incorporate and reflect changing folkways. Thus, it is a better representative of where the "elite" seeks to lead the culture of prayer than it does accurately reflect the *de facto* culture of the "folk."

Our study begins in 1940 with the publication of *The Union Prayer book for Jewish Worship* (Newly Revised Edition). This prayer book is itself a revised edition of *The Union Prayer book* first published in 1895.[26] Thus, it will serve as our launching point for the *siddur* (order) of Reform Jewish prayer at the time immediately preceding WWII and the rise of the suburban synagogue. *The Union Prayer book* of 1940 includes many reforms and truncations as compared to a traditional prayer book, or even the prayer book most widely-used today in the Reform movement. It includes five sub-sections: "Services for the Sabbath," "Services for the Three Festivals," "Services for Week Days," "Prayers for Private Devotion," and a

[26] *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook*, xii.

"Table of Bible Readings."[27] Under the first three of these headings come listings for evening and morning services (as well as an "afternoon service" on the Sabbath, and an "evening service at the House of Mourning" under "Services During the Week"). Of the evening services for the Sabbath there are no less than five complete services listed. As this is the only type of service with more than one version offered, it stands to reason that the typical congregant is more likely to be present on a Friday night for an evening service than on Saturday morning for a Shabbat morning service. These multiple offerings of Shabbat evening services indicate the value of Friday night services over Shabbat morning. Each of them is also highly truncated, especially in the department of psalms and prayers that precede "Barchu" in any given service. In the evening services, to start with, each begins with one psalm or prayer from *Kabbalat Shabbat* (the mystical service welcoming Shabbat according to the liturgy of the Lurianic Kabbalists of Sefat). In all cases, this single prayer (whether Psalm 92:1-7, 13-16; L'cha Dodi; Psalm 97:1-2, 10-12; Psalm 98:1-9; or Psalm 95:1-7) is followed by a reading by the "Reader" (service leader), which is followed by a responsive reading before Bar'chu. While classical liturgy mandates a full cycle of six psalms, L'cha Dodi, and two more psalms before the "*Chatzi Kaddish*" before Bar'chu, *The Union Prayer book* of this edition assumes that one traditional psalm or prayer from *Kabbalat Shabbat* is enough to warm-up the congregation for *Ma'ariv*, effectively skipping *Kabbalat Shabbat* entirely, save one of its prayers.

It is worth dwelling and reflecting on the near-elimination of *Kabbalat Shabbat* from *The Union Prayer Book*, and the subsequent restoration of the full cycle of psalms in the change from *Gates of Prayer* (with about 2-3 psalms of *Kabbalat Shabbat*) to *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* (2007), which includes all 8 psalms plus L'cha Dodi. Classical Reform Judaism emphasized the cerebral, the ethical, and the edifying side of ritual. In

[27] Ibid, Table of Contents, 1.

Classical Reform Judaism, of which *The Union Prayer Book* is product and instruction manual, the mystical *Kabbalat Shabbat* service would not be welcome. Mystical Judaism represents an antithesis in many ways to the sober-rational, Enlightenment culture that dominated Reform Judaism in its first hundred and fifty years. *Kabbalat Shabbat* originated in the hills of Sefat, Israel in the 16th Century. In the Lurianic kabbalistic worldview, which inspired *Kabbalat Shabbat*, Jews were thought to be able to influence God Himself through prayer, through participatory expressions of God-yearning, and through mitzvot. As *Kabbalat Shabbat* celebrates and comes out of an intensely spiritual and participatory prayer culture that imagines each Jew and the Jewish community in direct relationship with God, Classical Reform Judaism was not interested in including it. In Enlightenment thinking, God is an Absolute and an ideal so transcendent and far from individual human experience, that prayer itself became a theological stretch, an opportunity to reaffirm our universal values in celebration of the One God. What we see in the development of these three prayer books, then, is a gradual re-integration of and openness to *Kabbalat Shabbat* as a meaningful expression of Jewish spirituality. Whereas "spirituality" was hardly part of Classical Reform's liturgical vocabulary, it has become increasingly central to Reform worship since the era of the havurah. Thus, by *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* (note that the Hebrew word for prayer book, significantly, finally appears in the title) the entire psalm cycle of *Kabbalat Shabbat*, once excised, has found a meaningful place in the Reform prayer culture. Even if many congregations would not recite (or "daven") all of them in every service, the fact that all are present in the most current siddur reflects the reality that *Kabbalat Shabbat*, in all its spiritual power, has finally "made it" within contexts of Reform communal prayer. This reality reflects the three central trends of increased spirituality, participation, and traditional liturgical expression in the prayer cultures of Reform synagogues.

The legacy of Classical Reform is reflected in more basic layouts of the 1940 prayer book as well. It includes lines for "The Reader," (usually the rabbi or ritual performer) to recite to the congregation. There are numerous English prayers formatted with indentations and italics with the direction "Read responsively." These parts of the service solidify a structure of relationship between the congregation and the "Reader" or rabbi that reinforces the rabbi's power and centrality to Jewish worship. It also creates a particular kind of prayer culture, as the rabbi and congregation recite their assigned "lines" as actors would recite from a script. While this model is retained in sections of the 1975 prayer book, it is completely absent from *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur*. One of the unique innovations of the most recent siddur is that the left side of each page includes alternative readings and poems on the themes of the liturgy (on the right side of the page) but completely creative and original to the liturgy itself. These readings can be read silently to the congregant interested in incorporating the themes of the prayer into personal reflection, or can be read out loud or chanted in way the service leader instructs. Yet their presence in the siddur signifies and recognizes that prayer is very much a personal, spiritual endeavor, even as it brings the community together. The lack of instructions or assignments for "lines" to be recited by the "the Reader" and "the Congregation" marks a shift in Reform prayer culture, reflective of a basic recognition that services are not primarily a back and forth between the leader and the congregation, but that the realm of the leader and the realm of the congregation are one and the same. These alternative prayers in *Mishkan T'filah* are thus both participatory and spiritual as they offer avenues to engage congregants in personal and non-uniform ways.

Indeed, the different prayer books reflect an evolving theology and understanding of what we are together to do in Jewish worship services. They also reflect varying levels of interest in becoming educated in the traditional structure of Jewish services. Let us begin again with *The Union Prayer Book* of 1940. Within the flow of its various services, there is

little indication of different parts to the service. Each service is presented as a single whole, moving from one reading or Hebrew prayer to the next. There is no announcement as to which part of the service we currently find ourselves at any given point. Within the Torah service (which is assumed most commonly to take place in the evening service, contrary to the traditional custom) the liturgy hints at an underlying theological purpose and priority, which might explain the ease with which the Reform prayer book dispenses of traditional prayers: After the Torah is actually read and the appropriate blessings recited, the Reader proclaims, "...Joyfully we consecrate ourselves anew this day to the work our fathers began. Ours, too, shall be the constant aim and effort to bring ever nearer that blessed age, when this shall be the faith of all mankind," And the Congregation responds: *"One God over all; one brotherhood of all."*[28] Radical monotheism, one of the theological principles common among adherents of early Reform Judaism, saw Judaism as gifting monotheism to the world, and saw the goal of the ages as bringing all peoples everywhere under the banner of One God. This was how they imagined the Messianic future, a time when all peoples would proclaim the One God and join together in a universalized faith of pure monotheism.

The question then becomes, "how does one express that spirit of monotheism?" And to that question we have come to answer in our own generation, "through the various religious traditions of the world, in all their depth." Yet in 1940, when this prayer book was published, the relationship between modernity and religion was not yet clear. In fact, it still is not. At that time, Americanization and social acceptance by the greater society mattered more to Jews of this country than did loyalty to a strict adherence of Jewish, particularistic religious expression. At that time, imagining a universal brotherhood of men that transcended all difference was the ideal, just as American society posited that ideal in a civil context. The civil application of this idea would result in the establishment of the United Nations

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[28] Ibid, 96.

following the Second World War. Two decades later, the spirit of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement inspired not only the rise of the havurah movement, but changes within the established Jewish community as well. Also, as the next prayer book, *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayer Book* is not published until 1975, the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, as well as Israel's victory in 1967 have all taken place in the intervening years. Each of these events helps contribute to an increasing assertiveness of Jewish identity and distinctiveness within the synagogue prayer service itself.

Continuing in the order of the evening service, after *Bar'chu* (following the conclusion of *Kabbalat Shabbat*), whereas *The Union Prayer Book* includes only the first paragraph of the Sh'ma prayer, *Gates of Prayer* includes part of the third paragraph as well, beginning *L'ma'an tizkeru*. Following the Sh'ma, the Ge'ulah prayer is shortened as well in *The Union Prayer Book*, whereas it is presented in its entirety in *Gates of Prayer*. Likewise, many of the prayers of the Amidah are shorter than their traditional versions in the 1940 prayer book; In the 1975 version, some of that is restored, though its liturgy retains some uniquely Reform emendations. Perhaps the most immediately recognizable difference between *The Union Prayer Book* and *Gates of Prayer* is that the former opens left to right, acknowledging English as the main language of the book. *Gates of Prayer*, on the other hand, opens right to left (though it is also available in left to right versions) restoring the literary direction of Hebrew to the format of the book itself. *Mishkan T'filah* is only available in the right to left format.

The problem for Reform synagogues is that the culture of prayer has not found a balance between the aesthetic of participatory American folk-singing, and the aesthetic of traditional davening, even as it has included more and more of the traditional Hebrew liturgy. To recite all of the liturgy in song or readings together would be too daunting, rote, and would take too long, yet we worry that the trend of participation means that congregants

would not know what to do if they were encouraged to be "let loose" to daven at overlapping and varied times (as is common in Orthodox *shuls*). Spirituality can be found in both song and semi-autonomous davening, yet the trends of traditionalism and participation can be at odds. Being asked to go back and forth between these two styles does not work when the participatory songs lack the traditional integrity of liturgy. It becomes unclear whether we are in a shtibl or a camp "song-session," and distracts from the full spirituality of either experience. To gain grounding for an approach to Jewish prayer that prioritizes davening over "being on the same word of the same prayer," whether in song or speech, we turn to the philosophy and phenomenology of three major Jewish thinkers of the last century who imported "old-world" Judaism to America in various ways in their lives. From their descriptions and philosophical understandings of the core of Jewish prayer. By understanding their ideals, we can better imagine and construct a liberal Jewish prayer culture that gives room for independent davening by recalibrating the balance between tradition and participation, and re-contextualizing what participation can be as it relates to Jewish prayer.

CHAPTER II:

Theories of Prayer: Mining the Philosophies of Berkovits, Heschel and Soloveitchik

My aim in this chapter is to examine three important 20th Century Orthodox Jewish thinkers whose writing has inspired generations of Jews to reclaim the beauty of traditional approaches to Jewish prayer. I will compare and build on the recommendations and prerequisites for Jewish communal prayer found in the writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik ("the Rav"), Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits. By examining their philosophies of prayer, we will arrive at a quilted picture of what Jews must be allowed and encouraged to do when they pray; what they must know about praying in Jewish community, and eventually, how the prayer-leader might serve these aims. By delving into the depths of these thinkers' ideas and ideals for Jewish prayer, we might come to an understanding of the goals and opportunities synagogues need to prioritize in the functioning of their services.

Now, a word of justification: I realize that all of these Jewish thinkers lean toward a modern-Orthodox or traditional persuasion in practice and outlook (although Heschel taught at both the Reform and Conservative Rabbinic seminaries). I have chosen these three thinkers because, as Reform Jews we have something to learn from their philosophy: Whereas Reform Jews have tended to be quick to adapt and give up "authentically Jewish" modes of religious expression, we need now to draw on the wisdom and grounding of more traditional thinkers to inform our movement's project of restoring a sense of the beauty of "authentic" Jewish prayer to our houses of worship, and the halls of our synagogues.

I recognize that "authentic" is a problematic word. There is no way to say definitively that organ-music and rabbis in robes are any less "authentic" than *daveners* who know how to open a *siddur* and for the most part can self-direct their prayer experience, for example. Yet

we need to be honest about education and the comfort-level of Jews in regard to prayer in many of our synagogues. As the Reform movement has followed the desires of its folk more than any other stream of Judaism, when the folk is largely uncomfortable with serious prayer, the leadership has acquiesced. For many Reform rabbis, the community-building side effects have overpowered the central act of prayer, namely, allowing people to enter into dialogue with God as Jews. Our congregants desperately want to know how to pray, to be cut loose from the reins of the rabbis and cantors who control every move of the service, and to have the experience of praying in order to meet God (rather than their rabbi) face to face.

Interestingly, all three of the thinkers I have chosen were themselves living bridges between Europe and America: all were immigrants from the "old" worlds of German and Eastern European Jewry. Also, at least two of them (Soloveitchik and Heschel) came from rabbinic dynasties and were, in a sense, "princes of Torah."[29] Their experience of American Judaism, and indeed, the ways they shaped and commented on it, was informed by the experience of transposing their ideas and background to the American milieu. It is interesting to realize that most of the great Jewish theologians of the last century, whose work was most influential in this country, were born abroad. In this way, I admit, I am continuing a trend in American Jewish life: to regard as most "authentic" those teachers and thinkers who come from Europe, and whose lives encounter the old and new worlds of the Jewish Diaspora. What all three thinkers carry with them is a desire to capture the essence of what worked in urban Germany or *shtetl* life in days of old. In their own way, each is involved in distilling the best of the old world prayer cultures from which they came in order to communicate the philosophical essence that supports their ideal phenomenology of prayer.

For Rav Soloveitchik, the faithful existentialist, prayer is a regular experience, at set times of day, at which the human being can enter the mysterious stream of his ontic existence

[29] This term attributable to Dr. Rachel Adler, Hebrew Union College Jewish philosophy seminar, spring, 2010.

in dialogue with God. The despair, doubt and purpose-lessness, which pervade the human experience, find respite in one's love and faith in God. As the Rav defines "love of God" as "love of Being," he argues that through praying to God one in effect restores one's faith in one's love for existence.[30] Whereas one might be frustrated with the depth of intimacy in many human relationships, in God one finds a completely trustworthy and intimate friend: "The *numen absens*... stem from the ontic-awareness of man. Hence, the formation of accidental friendships at a finite level does not give comfort to a lonely soul. The craving for love must be gratified at the plane of the God-man encounter."[31] There is no better remedy to the loneliness of life, than regular communal prayer. Yet paradoxically, the prayer experience itself must give room for one to be alone with God. Even in a prayer community where one has many friends, one needs to be alone enough during prayer so as to motivate one to seek out God and to pour out one's despair to God. Synagogues today do not allow congregants to be alone. When the rabbi interrupts too often, or too many of the prayers are sung in an extroverted fashion more conducive to meeting one another than interiority or divine-human dialogue, the potential for the power of prayer becomes diluted. Or worse, if one does not feel to be an "insider" in the primarily social community that gathers for services, one is sometimes made to feel socially alone even as one has limited outlet for expressing existential aloneness. Soloveitchik reminds us that even as prayer happens in a communal rhythm, its recitation and point of focus should not be on other people, but on the inner recesses of one's own soul, striving toward God. He writes: "The thou in prayer drives finitude to its very boundary. What is more, it lets finitude transcend itself and join infinity. In short, in prayer man establishes contact with God—the miracle of revelation repeats itself."[32] Loneliness and isolation dissolve in making contact with the Source of life itself, He who contracts God's Self from Infinity to enter relationship with human beings. Soloveitchik

[30] Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer*, 138.
[31] Ibid, 79-80.
[32] (Ibid, 95)

writes: "the crux of prayer manifests itself in a feeling of companionship with Him and mainly in experiencing Him face to face; in having my whole self talk not only towards Him but also *with* Him, confronting Him."[33] When synagogues try to do too many things and engage on multiple styles in the context of a single service, they tend to fail at all of them. Before we become lost in vague descriptions, and in order to home in on Soloveitchik's specific language, let us examine a longer excerpt from *The Lonely Man of Faith*, in detail:

> In the covenantal community man of faith finds deliverance from his isolation in the "now," for the latter contains both the "before" and the "after." Every covenantal time experience is both retrospective, reconstructing and reliving the bygone, as well as prospective, anticipating the "about to be." In retrospect, covenantal man re-experiences the rendezvous with God in which the covenant, as a promise, hope, and vision, originated. In prospect, he beholds the whole eschatological realization of this covenant, its promise, hope, and vision. Let us not forget that the covenantal community includes the "He" who addresses Himself to man not only from the "now" dimension but also from the supposedly already vanished past, from the ashes of a dead "before" facticity as well as from the as yet unborn future, for all boundaries establishing "before," "now," and "after" disappear when God the Eternal speaks. Within the covenantal community not only contemporary individuals but generations are engaged in a colloquy, and each single experience of time is three-dimensional, manifesting itself in memory, actuality, and anticipatory tension. This experiential triad, translated into moral categories, results in an awesome awareness of responsibility to a great past which handed down the divine imperative to the present generation in trust and confidence and to a mute future expecting this generation to discharge its covenantal duty conscientiously an honorably...
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> Thus, the individual member of the covenantal faith community feels rooted in the past and related to the future. The "before" and the "after" are interwoven in his time experience. He is not a hitchhiker suddenly invited to get into a swiftly traveling vehicle which emerged from nowhere and from which he will be dropped into the abyss of timelessness while the vehicle will rush on into parts unknown, continually taking on new passengers and dropping the old ones. Covenantal man begins to find redemption from insecurity and to feel at home in the continuum of time and responsibility which is experienced by him in its endless totality. *Meolam v'ad olam,* from everlasting even to everlasting. He is no longer an evanescent being. He is rooted in everlasting time, in eternity itself. And so covenantal man confronts not only a transient contemporary "thou" but countless "thou" generations which advance toward him from all sides and engage him in the great colloquy in which God Himself participates with love and joy.
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> This act of revelation does not avail itself of universal speech, objective logical symbols, or metaphors. The message communicated from Adam to Eve certainly consists of words. However, words do not always have to be identified with sound. It is rather a soundless revelation accomplished in muteness and in the stillness of the covenantal community when God responds to the prayerful outcry of lonely man and agrees to meet him as brother and friend, while man, in turn, assumes the great burden which is the price he pays for his encounter with God.[34]

From Soloveitchik's description of what an individual member of the sacred Jewish community ought to discover and realize during the prayer experience, three themes emerge. The first is that the act of prayer must be able to transport one into a consciousness of eternity and timelessness. One must, in the process of prayer, rise above the narrow moment of one's

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[33] Ibid, 99)

[34] Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, 68-71.

day from which one enters prayer and to which one returns when it is over. One must be able to enter a level of consciousness that transcends time. This includes connecting to the many generations before and after one, which have shared and will yet share in the Jewish covenantal community. Next, one is reminded of one's responsibility during prayer: responsibility to the "generations," to God, and to oneself as a member of this covenantal community. Relationship is key to the imagination of covenant. The generations that have come before one help one to feel "rooted," giving life context and direction, and diminishing the feeling of randomness that so often accompanies life. Because one is connected to multiple generations, all part of the same covenant with God, God will notice each of us in our personal lives more readily. But this comes with a measure of commitment to the responsibilities of the covenant. In other words, prayer does not happen in a vacuum, but reaffirms the covenantal motive of responsibility behind all of our actions. Finally, there must be room for silence. Stillness and "soundless revelation" are as integral to prayer as speech. Even as the words of the liturgy guide and propel our "outcry" to God, the highest form of prayer may not require words at all. The prayer context, then, needs to accommodate our need for stillness and soundlessness. These three aspects of prayer: timelessness, covenantal consciousness, and quiet stillness emerge as central themes in Soloveitchik's phenomenology of prayer.

In *The Lonely Man of Faith*, Soloveitchik makes a distinction between two archetypal categories of person: Adam I and Adam II. He relates each of the two stories of human creation to ways of being in the world. While Adam I, created male and female simultaneously, is a social and achieving person who rarely questions the bigger questions of existence itself, Adam II was created first alone, and God breathed God's very soul into his nostrils. Adam II is aware of his own loneliness, inclined to the questions of life and seeking answers that fall outside the realm of science, and man-made constructs of social behavior

and success. Adam II is not satisfied with success as social norms define it, but is constantly searching further into the recesses of existence itself, seeking relationship with Being beyond all forms. Synagogues today are better at serving the needs of Adam I than Adam II. They set up contexts for socializing, meeting one another in services, on committees, and during programs. They set up goals for membership, capital campaigns, and Hebrew school enrollment for the purpose of the *B'nei Mitzvah* event. Even in services, synagogue cultures encourage people to meet one another, to sway together, and to clap their hands in time. Yet in satisfying the needs of Adam II, the spiritual seeker, the broken-hearted calling to God, synagogue cultures often fall short. Creating a prayer culture that honors Soloveitchik's priorities of transcending time, encouraging covenantal responsibility and relationship with God, and allowing for extended periods of silence and stillness would help meet the needs of Adam II within our synagogue walls.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, of all three of the thinkers in this chapter, knew modern American synagogues best. He spoke in many of them himself. Having taught in both the Reform and Conservative rabbinical seminaries, he had a uniquely rich understanding of American synagogue prayer culture. As such, Heschel's writings uniquely include both philosophical ideals for prayers, and critiques of modern synagogue prayer. In an essay entitled, "The Spirit of Jewish Prayer," Heschel offers a "state of the union" address on the state of Jewish prayer in the present day synagogue. Although he wrote four decades ago, much of his critique still rings true. While he does not mention specific movements of Judaism in the essay, his critique begins with the pomp and precision of services. Decorum stifles the possibility of "adventure of the soul." Nothing unpredictable ever happens in services, and thus spontaneous emotional responses are out of place. The construction of synagogue buildings happens at an alarming rate, yet the worship inside is decaying. Heschel asks rhetorically whether leaders of American Jewry are members of "a burial society" and

synagogues "the graveyard where prayer is buried?"[35] He states what we have already demonstrated in the last chapter, that prayer and synagogue attendance have become a service of the community rather than a service of God. He complains about the distance between prayer books and congregants, and the air of tranquility and complacency, which prevails in synagogues. While the rabbi is expected to conduct an expert and efficient service, he decries, neither is a "remedy against devotional sterility."[36] He thinks that we are embarrassed to take prayer seriously because of our sophistication. What our services lack is grace. He defines grace as: "when the throbbing of a person's heart is audible in his voice; when the longings of the soul animate his face."[37] He laments that there is altogether too much focus on synagogue attendance rather than on inspiring the hearts. He takes issue with the common message from synagogue leaders that prayer is the "identification of the worshipper with the people of Israel."[38] He says: "'An act of identification with the people' is, phenomenologically speaking, the definition of a political act. But is a political phenomenon the same as worship?"[39] He is taking issue with the absence of God from discourse around prayer. He reminds us that each individual must awaken his own heart. Individual prayer came first. Communal prayer grew out of it.[40] Thus, individuals need to approach prayer with urgency.

Theologically, Heschel maintains that just as one cannot pray merely to an idea, it is also insufficient to pray only to the "good within us." The former is too abstract and the latter is egocentric. Heschel paints a specific portrayal of God as a Being with pathos, whose sympathy we can affect, and who resonates both emotionally and spiritually with humans in prayer. He condemns American rabbis who do not believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and

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[35] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Prayer," *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, 101.
[36] Ibid, 101.
[37] Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, 51.
[38] Ibid, 55.
[39] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Prayer," *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, 104.
[40] Ibid, 105.

Jacob. He writes: "...if Torah is nothing but national literature of the Jewish people, if the mystery of revelation is discarded as superstition, then prayer is hardly more than a soliloquy."[41] He seeks to challenge the culture of complacency that too easily sets-in in American synagogues around prayer. Unless one believes in a Being who is involved in human life, he sees no point: "One cannot pray unless he has faith in his own ability to accost the infinite, merciful, eternal God."

Heschel sets up the commandment to "Know Before Whom You Stand" as a three-part paradigm for prayer. Know: "No one is able to think of [God] unless he has learned how to pray to Him."[42]Before whom: God is not an "it," or an idea, and therefore not a "what." You stand: Reading or studying a prayer is not the same as praying... the decision to enter and face the presence of God differentiates prayer from study or any other activity.[43]

In standing before God in prayer, there is one paradox one especially needs to balance: on the one hand is the power of raw emotion in the moment, the *kavannah* (intentional direction) of one's prayer, and on the other is the fixed text of the prayer book (*keva*), which the Jew is obligated to intone. Heschel seems to prioritize the spontaneous mode of prayer that is a cry of the heart in the depths of despair. Yet he also advocates prayer at fixed times with fixed texts that ought to affect the one who *davens* them. As Heschel writes: "What, as a rule, makes it possible for us to pray is our ability to affiliate our own minds with the pattern of fixed texts, to unlock our hearts to the words, and to surrender to their meanings."[44] He argues for individuals in prayer to strike a balance between the emotions one brings to the printed text of the prayer, and the liturgy itself as it affects one's emotional supplication in turn. Maintaining the sense of the raw emotion and presence in one's confrontation with God is the challenge of *kavannah*. Experiencing the text of the

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[41] Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, 58.
[42] Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Prayer," *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, 108.
[43] Ibid, 109.
[44] Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, 32.

liturgy as connected to one's internal experience or direct communication with God can be the challenge of *keva*. In many modern-day congregations, basic literacy often prevents the individual from relating intimately to the prayer book at all.

Indeed, for Heschel, both *keva* and *kavannah* are difficult. The former is additionally hard because there is no way the mind can absorb all that the words convey; the latter is made complicated by the fact that there is no way the words themselves can keep up with self-expression.[45] Yet even as the words of the liturgy are supposed to affect the *davener's* thoughts, there is a way in which the liturgy is, "a higher form of silence."[46] The words on the page are a finite exercise for the mind, that function to keep the praying person engaged, active and concentrated. Yet what one feels and how one directs one's heart to God in the process of intoning the prayers is where the action of prayer most profoundly lies. One's lips move according to the words on the page; yet one's heart pours out to God like a soundtrack connected to the scene only by virtue of concurrent actions, in sync. To be sure, each action informs the other. Engaged in both the *keva* and the *kavannah* of prayer, one must seek both to understand empathetically from the page, and express one's innermost thoughts and feelings from one's heart. *Kavvanah* gives the *davener* permission, in a sense, to use the words as a launching pad into a state of consciousness that transcends the mundane and allows one to enter a higher state of being. Soloveitchik writes: "The *kavannah* concerning tefillah must express itself not in a mere duty-awareness, but in an all-embracing and an all-penetrating transcendental experience."[47] If this transcendent experience is one goal of *tefillah*, the liturgy becomes a vehicle for active silence. This is what Heschel means, I think, when he writes, "our liturgy is a higher form of silence."

Soloveitchik cites Maimonides (the "Rambam") in discussing the importance of *kavannah* in Jewish prayer.

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[45] Ibid, 37.
[46] Ibid, 44.
[47] Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer*, 21.

> The intention (*kavannah*) required for prayer is not like the *kavannah* required for other *mitzvot*. In other commandments the intention is not the most important element. It is a secondary element, even if it is required for fulfillment of the *mitzvah*. Rather it is the act, the concrete action, that is primary, and *kavannah* simply accompanies the action. With prayer, however, *kavannah* is the essence and substance: prayer without intention is nothing.[48]

While there is debate about the necessity of *kavannah* in the performance of other *mitzvot*, in regard to prayer, *kavannah* is the central aspect. This underscores what will become an important question in this thesis: how does the communal environment support *kavannah* among its worshippers? We will turn to that question in the next chapter.

Now that we have examined Heschel's critique of American synagogue prayer, and explored one of the central paradoxes inherent in prayer as he sees it (that between *keva* and *kavannah*), let us now turn to the heart of Heschel's philosophy of prayer. Prayer is not a substitute for sacrifice, according to Heschel. Prayer is sacrifice.[49] Since the self took the place of the thing, though the spirit is the same, the problem, as he sees it, is not how to revitalize prayer, so much as how to revitalize ourselves.[50] He suggests that we "revitalize ourselves" by bringing ourselves closer to God. "*Empathy* rather than expression is the way of piety."[51] A relationship of empathy with God flows in two directions. One can affect the divine pathos, just as God's love and mercy for us overwhelms us. As a Jewish thinker inclined toward the mystical, Heschel sets up an ideal for the God-human relationship in prayer as one of inspiring mutual empathy. The "God of pathos," which underlies Heschel's thought is exactly what Eliezer Berkovits most heavily criticizes in his own writings on Heschel.

Berkovits commends Heschel's originality in expanding familiar thoughts about God into a theology of pathos. Yet Berkovits finds that Heschel derives his theology of pathos from a selective reading of God's biblical emotions. According to Berkovits, Heschel is overly anthropopathic in his descriptions of God, and inconsistent in not allowing the

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[48] Maimonides, *Hilchot Tefillah 4:1*, Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer*, 147
[49] Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, 71.
[50] Ibid, 77.
[51] Ibid, 135.

wrathful side of the biblical God equal foray into his theology. To Heschel, God is affected by man and involved in the human situation.[52] Yet Heschel forgets that God is not always sympathetic in His relations to Biblical Israel. Berkovits similarly critiques Heschel's notion of prophetic religion, which Heschel defines as a religion of sympathy: "It is the pathos of God that is communicated to the prophet in the encounter with the divine presence."[53] Yet Berkovits questions whether "pathos" is all that is communicated. Berkovits paraphrases Heschel's words in saying that "the fundamental challenge to Jewish theology through the ages has been how to reconcile the awareness of God's transcendence with His overwhelming livingness and concern, which are one in the Jewish concept of God."[54] Yet Berkovits reads Heschel as ignoring the transcendent side of this challenge completely. Berkovits is unsatisfied with the ease with which Heschel declares this tension between God's transcendence an imminence a "mystery and a paradox," without addressing it systematically.

Furthermore, since Heschel is so quick to assign emotions to God, Berkovits questions why he does not also assign God a physical body. This, too, is an inconsistency. Berkovits is wary of any literal interpretation of God's anthropomorphism, including those that assign emotion to God. This is what a theology of pathos requires. This is Berkovits' fundamental problem with Heschel's descriptions of prophetic pathos. Berkovits concludes that only if we accept God as "all-personal," "all-subject," "devoid of anything impersonal," can Heschel's theology be understood. In his final analysis, the theology of pathos would be better derived from Christianity than from Judaism. God is not all personal and all imminent.

Yet Berkovits only cites one work by Heschel in his endnotes: *The Prophets*. One might question whether Berkovits has read or considered other writings by Heschel, which expand on his theology. In *God In Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*, for example,

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[52] Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism*, 193.
[53] Ibid, 193.
[54] Ibid, 203.

Heschel elaborates on what he means by "mystery." In Chapter 5, "The Sense of Mystery," he takes great pains to demonstrate just how little the human mind can truly and completely understand of God. Heschel depicts God as so "far off" from human experience, that however much we seek him, we will not find him out. Yet as Berkovits notes, in *The Prophets*, it seems that the prophet knows the will, emotions, and priorities of God. In places in *Man's Quest for God*, it seems we can access divine compassion simply through prayer. Is there a disconnect between our ability to attract and inspire God's sympathy and our inability to really know God? Perhaps, but this to me is well warranted. When we engage with God in prayer, we indeed cause a shift in the divine consciousness; we indeed enter a "godly" state of mind. To be fair, the emotionality of the direct experience with God is different than solving the paradox between God's transcendence and imminence. We can access some dimension, some ear among many ears of God's attention without making God Himself as small as our own innermost problems and fears. What could anyone else say except affirm that this is a paradox and a mystery?

Still, I understand Berkovits' hesitation about accepting the all-personal God, which dominates Heschel's theology. God is not only imminent, and prayer as we know it is a hybrid of individual and communal concerns. Why emphasize one more than the other? Indeed, one of Berkovits' most central concerns in his own writing lies in how it is we cultivate an intimate relationship with He who transcends Creation. In comparing the "God of philosophy" (Infinite and Absolute) with the "God of Judaism" (both transcendent and imminent), Berkovits writes: "According to Judaism there are the paradoxical concepts of *rahok* and *karov* ("far" and "near"). The One who is omniscient and omnipotent in such a manner that He can even bend down and lend an ear to the supplication of a poor fool is greater [than Kant's God]."[55] Indeed, in the traditional Jewish understanding, God has a

[55] Berkovits, *Studies in Torah Judaism: Prayer*, 77.

vested interest in relationship with His people Israel. Just as Jews draw upon their collective covenant in calling upon God, so does God seek out the prayers of Israel. It is only out of God's superlative greatness that God is so powerful as to be able to "lower God's Self" to heed the supplication of a single, praying Jew.

We have already established that prayer in physical community is highly regarded in Judaism. One more proof for that is as follows: "One can pray because God is near, but God is nearer to the community than to the individual. When ten people pray, the Divine Presence is within them, for, 'God stands in the congregation of God.'"[56] Yet the physical community is a stand-in for the covenantal community that supports it, and with which a Jew always prays, whether in physical community with other Jews, or alone. Although physical community is preferred, the imagined community of the Jewish people as a whole is primary. In Berkovits' words, obligatory prayer is community prayer: "[Obligatory prayer] is not the prayer of one Jew in one situation; it is the prayer for all Jews at all times. Therefore, even when prayed by an individual in solitude, it remains in its essence communal prayer."[57] On similar lines, both Berkovits and Heschel agree that praying alone can be dangerous. Heschel says this outright: "It is not safe to pray alone."[58] Berkovits draws his reasoning from *The Kuzari* (by Judah Halevi), who writes: "the self-centeredness of [individual] prayer may amount to outright selfishness and may lead to unethical praying."[59] Berkovits continues with his own interpretation on the dangers of praying alone:

> "Those rare personalities who in prayer alone fly to the Alone are so much in love with their personal salvation that they may become easily forgetful of the lot of humanity that is less gifted in seeking the way to God. In communal prayer, the hearts of those less able to pray as one may be awakened and carried along on the waves of communal inspiration."[60]

Berkovits is illuminating the point that in the context of a community, one has the ability not only to affect and be affected by God, but also to affect and be affected by the spiritual

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[56] Ps. 82:1, Ibid 53.
[57] Ibid, 51.
[58] Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, 45.
[59] Berkovits, *Studies in Torah Judaism: Prayer*, 54
[60] Ibid, 55.

devotion of others. When one is feeling less inspired than usual, one can be lifted up in one's prayer by those who are "more able to pray." When one is feeling especially inspired in one's prayer, one may have that same affect on others. It also acknowledges, I think, that there will always be those in the community for whom prayer is inherently difficult all the time. For those who lack a talent for prayer, it is crucial for them to be "socialized" among others more gifted at prayer. Communal prayer can facilitate one's ability to affect the quality of prayer for others. The community gives one strength, as well, to approach God with the *chutzpa* (spiritual audacity) that Jewish liturgy demands. As Soloveitchik writes on the meaning of the *Sh'ma* and *Amidah* prayers, "In Shema one assents to and accepts authority. In the Amidah one gives himself to God Who, in His infinite grace, meets him on almost equal terms within a community created by the worship."[61] To pray to a God who meets one on almost equal footing, one needs the support of a covenantal community. As Berkovits writes: "...one can only pray in the historic context of one's life with God."[62] At the same time, the historic context of Israel's relationship with God over many generations forms the foundation for one's own life. Thus, we invoke the covenant between God and Israel each and every time we pray. According to Berkovits' teachers, prayer is possible only because God desires to be imposed upon by man.[63] God desires Jews to impose upon Him because of the special connection they have to God through Israel's enduring covenantal relationship.

Transcending one's own personal pre-occupations, it turns out, is a thematic priority in Berkovits' thought beyond his advocacy of communal over individual prayer. It is also relevant for him in parsing out the necessity for both obligatory prayer (at set times) and spontaneous prayer. The problem with occasional or spontaneous prayer for Berkovits is that one is seeking out God only in a time of trouble.[64] He articulates the issue this way: "In

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[61] Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer*, 99.
[62] Berkovits, *Studies in Torah Judaism: Prayer*, 52.
[63] Ibid, 75.
[64] Ibid, 44.

obligatory prayer one begins with preoccupation with God. Under the pressure of a momentary crisis, even in prayer man is often self-centered and preoccupied with himself."[65] He sees prayer time as an opportunity for man to transcend narrowly focused pre-occupations and transcend selfishness. The advantage to set prayer at fixed times of day is that one does not begin with one's own petty needs. One begins with God's need of us. Part of Berkovits' problem with Heschel's theology is that the very personal God of Heschel's thought could condone one to remain wrapped up in one's own emotion and personal needs. Berkovits thinks our culture is focused on the self plenty as it is. Prayer is not just one more opportunity to languish in one's own self-pity, grandiosity and demands on God. It is rather, the daily chance to transcend the narrowness of one's own life, casting one's lot with that of the community of Israel.

Connected to the theme of *kavannah* being even more important in prayer than the obligatory performance of recitation, is the theme of the inseparability of prayer from life itself. All three thinkers, Berkovits, Heschel and Soloveitchik emphasize the unity of prayer, *mitzvot* and life itself. Eliezer Berkovits writes: "Any deed performed in the name of God is not essentially different from prayer. In the *mitzvah* one may confront God no less than in prayer."[66] He continues: "In life and prayer the task is the same: to set the Eternal One always before oneself."[67] Thus, one of the primary goals of prayer is cultivating one's human relationship with God in order to remind oneself that God is always before oneself. One can bring this high level of God-encountering consciousness into any act. Prayer as direct communication with God becomes practice for all other moments in life, into which one might infuse that same level of awareness. On prayer as an investment in the human-God relationship for all of life, Soloveitchik writes: "Prayer is not merely an additional stage in the worship of the heart, but, as we have stressed, the mirror that reflects the soul of the

[65] Ibid, 44.
[66] Berkovits, *Studies in Torah Judaism: Prayer*, 14.
[67] Ibid, 16.

worshipper who is totally and perpetually committed to God."[68] That commitment to God is pure during prayer, but not-yet demonstrated through deeds. Yet there are many realms of life that become moments that mirror one's real commitment to God and covenant. We must never think that prayer time is disconnected from the mundane decisions and deeds of life. Praying invests our relationship with God with trust and credibility. As Heschel writes: "...We do not breathe in order to live, but live because we breathe. So we pray rightly not in order to be heard, but we are heard because we pray."[69] For Soloveitchik, the Hebrew word for "worship," (*avodah*), which can also mean "service" (as opposed to the word that narrowly means "prayer," *tefillah*) ought to be applied to all aspects of human life:

> The domains of life are intermingled... Worship begins with physiological functions like nutrition and copulation, with the intimate feelings of the individual, with love of parents, and then moves through all of man's public manifestations, his conduct in every nook and cranny of reality, culminating in connections with friends and companions, in business dealings, in professional work that serves society, in the manufacture of economic-industrial products, in social and national initiatives, in political sovereignty. In short, the human being serves God from the fundamentals of his vital, instinctual existence to the realms of cultural creativity.[70]

Opportunities for "serving God," as we do in prayer, are not limited to it. Awareness of God and awareness of one's actions in service of God is what binds prayer to every-day life: "Prayer in Judaism is not an activity apart from life, but a specific form of the Jewish way of life. In Judaism, living means facing God..."[71] The question is, simply, how much relevance exists in our imagination between the connection to God we feel during or associate with prayer, and the way in which we live outside of praying? To what extent do we infuse our every-day lives with the realizations and commitments we feel during prayer? In order for prayer to be relevant, there should actually be little distinction between how we live and how we pray. While the activity changes in and out of prayer, the intention to serve God ought not to.

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[68] Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer*, 165.
[69] Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, 99
[70] Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer*, 164-5.
[71] Berkovits, *Studies in Torah Judaism: Prayer*, 14.

In this way, prayer is about committing ourselves to the "ethico-moral authority" of God, as well as experiencing awareness of God's presence. Since the "covenantal community" is primarily a community of action, the direct, mystical experience of the prophet is only significant insofar as it results in a moral message being transmitted in a democratic way to the people of Israel.[72] Thus, it is imperative that the prayer communities of synagogues translate into moral communities of action. The prayer culture, then, ought to connect with the culture of social and ethical action inspired by the sacred drama and commitments of our people. Since, as Soloveitchik writes in the same chapter alluded to above, that prayer commitments are inseparable from halakhic commitments, the community's local halakhic norms might be recited or included during prayer as a reminder of the community's particular set of commitments. The Ten Commandments, and other specific ethical commandments (all ten can be construed as ethical commandments) might be read aloud as well. Synagogues ought to provide a setting for members of the covenant community not only to form personal friendships, but also to join together to take ethical social action in the larger community as well. Ethical action would include many ritual commitments as well, such as observance of Shabbat as an ethical mandate to rest and to participate in sacred time.

In addressing the various topics of this chapter so far—the inherent value of prayer, prayer as an opportunity to struggle with existence itself, prayer as drawing on the covenant and the increased holiness of communal prayer, the tension between *keva* (fixed prayer) and *kavannah* (intention and outpouring of the heart), the inseparability of prayer from *mitzvot* and every-day life, and prayer as reminding us of our ethical and communal commitments, these thinkers take for granted a mode of prayer and a culture of prayer that they do not all feel the need to address directly. With the exception of Heschel, who deals extensively with

[72] Idea found in Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, 59-60.

the sociology of modern American synagogues that affects the way in which people stand before God in prayer, these thinkers are not primarily concerned with the details of how prayer functions sociologically. They assume a traditional mode of *davening*, a fluency of congregants with Hebrew and with the mechanics of the prayer book, and an Orthodox style of free agency in prayer within the context of community. Yet in order for Jews to pray in the ideal ways these thinkers describe, communities must meet certain conditions. When Soloveitchik writes, for example: "Prayer is the expression of the soul that yearns for God via the medium of the word, through which the human being gives expression to the storminess of his soul and spirit,"[73] we imagine a Jew with freedom to *daven* at least somewhat independently within an Orthodox setting. In a synagogue whose main priority is making people feel good and happy, and whose melodies are mostly borrowed and uplifting tunes, or in a synagogue where everyone recites every prayer together en mass, it may be difficult for the individual to "give expression to the storminess of his soul and spirit." Thus, in the next chapter, we turn to communal conditions for ideal prayer, and existing impediments to ideal Jewish prayer common in modern synagogues.

[73] Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer*, 146.

CHAPTER III:

A New Praxis for Reform Synagogue Prayer: Suggestions for Transforming the Culture

In the first chapter of this thesis, I chronicled the recent history of Reform synagogue prayer through a social and liturgical framework. In that chapter, I included the history of the Havurah movement that broke away from standard synagogue culture as a result of many of the same problems that persist today in synagogue prayer. In the second chapter, I highlighted the philosophy of three prominent 20th Century Jewish thinkers who have written extensively on the theology and phenomenology of "what happens when we pray" according to their view of Jewish tradition. What do we need to allow for? What kind of community understanding and education does this phenomenology presuppose, and how does covenantal imagination come to bear in prayer? In the current chapter, I aim to build on both narratives, historical and theoretical, as I present the contemporary situation of prayer in many Reform synagogues, and synthesize recommendations for improvements. What lessons might congregations learn from the 1970's havurah movement—as well as from the contemporary "independent minyan" movement of today? How might we integrate the perspectives of Soloveitchik, Heschel and Berkovits into the Reform synagogue context? Finally, how does prayer relate to action, as the Reform movement continues to bear the prophetic voice as a central motivating voice? In short, how can historical practice and philosophical theory best converge to create a new praxis for contemporary synagogue prayer?

First we need to identify the present-day trends, in the areas of practice and theory. In my opinion, Jewish continuity in general and guilt in particular continue to motivate synagogue attendance too much. While I respect Jewish continuity as a goal, which many Jews feel themselves personally responsible in ensuring, it is not, in itself, sufficient for inspiring people to pray. As services often constitute the main social event of regular

synagogue life, they might yet become the spiritual cornerstone for everything we do in Jewish community as well. That means, first and foremost, prayer needs to matter for its own sake. If it is merely a means to a social end there is no reason to pray rather than dine or socialize in community. People need to know why and how to pray and prioritize their own inner life, in order for prayer to matter, and in order for prayer to become the spiritual cornerstone of the Jewish sacred community. Though preferably not during the service itself, rabbis need to educate people on how to *daven*. For truly meaningful prayer, people need to become aware of the covenantal obligations of which prayer reminds them. Emerging from the ideal prayer experience, congregants would feel motivated and obligated to engage in the work of engaging the mitzvot and improving their lives and circles of community-- to heal themselves and the world. All of this is not to say that what many Reform rabbis are already doing—to make prayer accessible and to teach people about each prayer before they pray-- is not helpful. In under-educated groups of Jews, giving directions and compromising liturgy for the sake of participation is still better than succumbing to non-participation. The point, however, is for the community to become educated in and exposed to the power of Jewish prayer, and invested in their own growth as *daveners*. Finally, the goal is not participation in the short-term (i.e. in the current service as it is happening), but in long-term participation, which requires showing people the power of prayer to awaken the soul and strengthen one's heart and resolve to act for the sake of God in the world.

Indeed, lack of education about how to pray is not the only barrier to a meaningful and spiritually enriching prayer culture. Let us take a moment to compile a few other such barriers. One is the culture of the "*Bnei Mitzvah* factory." This is the term for synagogues whose Shabbat morning services revolve around the *B'nei Mitzvah* and their families, allowing the individual family essentially to usurp the service. This widespread phenomenon tends to distract from the primary experience of Shabbat prayer. Another problematic trend is

the tension between non-participatory cantorial singing and congregants' desire for full participation. This problem applies to many rabbis as well as cantors, who sometimes abuse service time by upstaging congregants and making prayer-time "showy" by inserting themselves too much into the community's time with God. Connected to this problem is the trend of "campy," albeit participatory, "feel-good" singing, which may relate to liturgical themes, yet ultimately serves to distract from the liturgy itself. An advantage in the short-term but a disaster for the long-term, such an approach covers up congregants' knowledge gaps vis-à-vis the prayer book—especially if the congregation never advances from the songs into liturgically-driven prayer. It can also trivialize Jewish prayer for those who are less intimidated by the prayer book and its order. It can also limit the scope of the liturgy's possible interpretations, inserting uni-vocal English interpretations as a substitute for multi-vocal prayers. Finally, congregants are not always aware how the cycle of prayers relates to their obligations to act in the world when the service is over. These are the main practical problems with contemporary synagogue prayer as I see them, and the main issues I seek to address in the pages that follow.

In the realm of phenomenology, there is a pervasive discomfort among congregants-and rabbis! - with silence and stillness. Tensions with the ideal phenomenologist arise when, unlike Soloveitchik, Heschel and Berkovits, most Reform Jews do not know or understand why their prayers matter. They either cannot name or do not share the specific set of assumptions or commandments that God expects of Jews. They often are not privy to an adequate level of education in the mechanics of prayer, and the artistry of the liturgy. Additionally, discomfort with Hebrew may alienate them from the liturgy altogether.

i. Education

I do not believe that Reform Jews should be embarrassed or ashamed by lack of education. Judging people for their level of knowledge when they enter a synagogue is far from productive. On the contrary, Reform Jews should be comforted that the problems that plague the Orthodox, while not as frequently related to gaps in education, are no less daunting. Mumbling through the liturgy and excluding women from the prayer culture are, in a sense, opposite problems and no less troubling. "Speed davening" is motivated by a desire to finish the service. It does not allow time for people in prayer so much as to register what their mouths are saying, let alone recite the prayers with intentionality. Excluding the women from the center of the "action," as most Orthodox services still do, is a by-product of a male-dominated culture that obligates only the men to encounter God in prayer. It sets up a first and second-class system, which then organizes all of Jewish life. Dependant on gender alone, this hierarchy is unfair, alienating, and much harder to correct. While Reform synagogues have a lot of work to do in educating congregants, education, at least, can be straightforward.

That is not to say that changing the *kitschiness* of Reform prayer does not also require deep cultural shifts.[74] Education is the primary solution, yet the education that is required must proceed on multiple levels. Beyond educating Reform Jews about the liturgy itself—and for comprehension of Hebrew—theological conversations about God and our relationship to God as the people Israel are necessary as well. Jewish prayer can only come alive when its adherents feel they have a stake in the Jewish people's particular covenant and lineage, which, in turn, informs one's personal relationship with God. How does one teach that connection-- that ancestors and covenant are gateways to our personal relationship with God? Sessions on people-hood and family would be necessary. What does it mean to be part of an extended Jewish family? The 'King of Kings' gave Torah to our ancestors, which makes all

[74] *Kitsch* in a worship context often relates to the singing of compositions that are meant to evoke a single emotional response, rather than allowing people to respond to the iturgy in a variety of ways and with a range of emotional responses.

Jews princes and princesses of Torah. Thus, teaching relationship with God as connected to family and familial relationships could be the basis of a groundbreaking curriculum in covenant-based prayer.

As described by Franz Rosenzweig, the early 20th Century German Jewish philosopher, Jewish tradition is "informed by a unique dialectic whereby one is by virtue of the very same ritual act both the child of his or her ancestors and one's grandchildren's ancestor."[75] Being aware of one's own place in the link of tradition allows one to enter the timeless dimension of generational continuity. As Soloveitchik described, this feeling of the stream of timelessness one enters in Jewish prayer is essential. I, like Rosenzweig, also warn of the dangers of an 'atheistic theology'—the tendency (shared with many Christians in the modern world) "to remove God in all but name from one's religious consciousness, projecting onto the exalted altar formerly occupied by the Almighty the community's values, self-image, and even interests."[76] Thus, God and covenant need to be the central topics of education classes on prayer. Prayer comes directly out of the sense of personal responsibility one has to the world as a Jew, derived from one's covenantal relationship with God.

Finally, classes in Hebrew are of utmost importance as well. In describing the importance of Hebrew, Rosenzweig explains: "The language of the eternal people drives it back to its own life which is beyond external life, [and] which courses through the veins of its living body and is, therefore, eternal."[77]As Rosenzweig would argue as well, tradition is dynamic rather than static.

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[75] Paul Mendes-Flohr, "The Retrieval of Innocence and Tradition: Jewish Spiritual Renewal in an Age of Liberal Individualism," in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer, 294.

[76] "Atheistische Theologie," in *Franz Rosenzweig: Der Mensch und sein Werk, Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, *Zweistromland*, ed. Reinhold und Annemarie Mayer (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1984), 687-98 in Paul Mendes-Flohr, "The Retrieval of Innocence and Tradition: Jewish Spiritual Renewal in an Age of Liberal Individualism," in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer, 295.

[77] *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 292f. in Ibid, 298.

> Tradition is not simply LIVED, but is an object of UNDERSTANDING. It is something to be learned. The Jewish tradition is not the culture of the past, but rather that which the modern Jews PERCEIVE as the culture of their past. Tradition, therefore, changes as perceptions of the past change.[78]

Synagogue members should have conversations about how and what they conceive as "authentic tradition." Rabbis ought to hold face-to-face meetings and house-meetings about the forms that "traditional prayer" takes, according to their congregants. Yet such conversations are two-way. In addition to listening to congregants' perceptions, clergy also need to teach the meaning of tradition as they understand it, and relate the cultural implications that their interpretation ought to have on the synagogue culture. In collaboration with the vision of the rabbi, the majority picture that emerges from these conversations should affect the forms of the synagogue's prayer culture.

Part of teaching how to pray is exposing key, interested congregants to communities of prayer that work. Finding a local traditional-egalitarian minyan, for instance, where members of that minyan educate one another and take turns leading davening could inspire the synagogue's members to imitate elements of it in their home synagogue. One can only really teach how to *daven* through enculturation, i.e. providing people with experiences on which to build in the future. In order to rejuvenate an existing prayer culture, there needs to be a core of people who share the rabbi's vision, and that engages in active dialogue with him or her, challenging one another. Setting up experiences of model communities of prayer is the most direct tool to showing (rather than describing) what is possible in a progressive prayer culture.

While the havurah movement, as we have seen, is a product of the 1970's, the independent minyan movement is its equivalent today. This movement attracts young Jews, has high standards of liturgical completeness (usually with a full Torah reading), and tends to encourage shared leadership among all educated members (regardless of degree or

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[78] Charles S. Liebman, "The Reappropriation of Jewish Tradition in the Modern Era," in Ibid, 473.

ordination) with the requisite desire and skill to lead ritual. Am I suggesting that synagogue prayer cultures become more like independent minyanim and/or havurot? Absolutely yes: I am suggesting exactly that. Although synagogue prayer will likely continue to be rabbi-dominated as long as the Jewish literacy of most liberal congregants is low, synagogues can incorporate much from what they learn from smaller minyanim of educated Jews. Discussing the experience after such an outing is at least as important as the experience itself. What do people want to learn more about? What was difficult? What was surprising? These kinds of questions after experiencing a local havurah or independent minyan can help people home in on what they would want to replicate and identify what knowledge gaps are in greatest need of being filled.

ii. Individual Prayer

Also, even as our focus is on communal prayer, congregants need to be taught and encouraged to pray with the *siddur* on their own as well. Deep experiences with individual Jewish prayer contribute to the vibrancy of the synagogue prayer culture when congregants come together. Prayer needs to be approached as a spiritual discipline. This means practicing outside of services. As Berkovits and others have pointed out, even as the Jewish ideal is communal prayer, the liturgy is always communal. One imagines the covenantal community of which one is part, even when one is physically alone. Individual prayer requires tremendous discipline, and it requires a community in which one can process the experience and support one another. The ideal for weekday daily prayer is also in a minyan. Unfortunately, weekday minyanim have become rare in Reform (and Conservative) communities. But congregations could experiment with weekday prayer once per week, or on Mondays and Thursdays, when the Torah is traditionally read. Workshops might be held about differences between the weekday and Shabbat liturgy, and in how to *daven* daily in an

efficient amount of time. Which prayers are most important to include, and which might one skip? Meditation, I have found, is another wonderful alternative or supplement to daily prayer. If one has a set amount of time for a morning spiritual practice, one can meditate on a piece of the liturgy that speaks to one on a given morning, or use the weekly Torah portion as inspiration for contemplative meditation. Experiencing Jewish prayer on a daily basis, individually, helps one internalize the set prayer of the *siddur*. It engenders familiarity, confidence and a personal relationship with Jewish practice. When a daily *davener* joins a Shabbat minyan, he or she then brings that level of familiarity, confidence and internalization of the liturgy into the minyan. These qualities are contagious.

For sure, there are dangers to individual prayer, especially when one becomes overly swept up in one's own personal emotions, troubles and interests. In the words of Heschel:

> I do not wish to minimize the fact that we all suffer from an egocentric predicament. Our soul tends to confine itself to its own ideas, interests, and emotions. But why should we raise the egocentric affliction to the status of a virtue? It is precisely the function of prayer to shift the center of living from self-consciousness to self-surrender.[79]

This message about being wary of egocentricism in prayer is as relevant for clergy as for lay people. Many clergy have their egos thoroughly invested in the performance of all ritual. Sharing these duties with competent congregants reminds them that they are not inherently holier or closer to God than any other Jew. This quotation from Heschel also reminds us as to why communal prayer is preferable to solitary prayer. Even though the liturgy is always communal, with others praying around one, it becomes that much more difficult to think that one's own troubles and emotions are the most important, all-encompassing ordeals. Surrounded by other Jews, one more easily remembers that troubles, loneliness and yearnings are universal aspects of the human experience. When, in the course of *davening*, people say *Kaddish Yatom* because they are in a period of mourning or observing a *Yahrzeit*, or *Mi Shebeirach* for a loved one who is ill, we are reminded of this directly. One has the feeling

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[79] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Prayer" in *Review of Religion*, 1945, 156 in Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Prayer," *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, 105-106.

that one's own prayers join with those of others and might more emphatically reach the ear of God, bound to the prayers of others. Still, individual prayer as an alternative when one is not in community builds one skills and gives one practice in more effectively praying and adding to environments of communal prayer. Practice and familiarity with Hebrew liturgy can prevent the liturgy from remaining an obstacle to *kavannah* (intentionality). For those who do not have as much practice in daily prayer, the *keva* of the prayer book can dominate the prayer experience to such an extent that, opposite to Heschel's point above, the prayer book distracts them from incorporating one's emotional and spiritual presence into the recitation of prayers. These are some of the reasons why encouraging a culture of individual prayer is worthwhile.

iii. Sharing Leadership

The clergy's main role vis-à-vis the prayer culture is to ensure a standard of quality. Not just anyone in the congregation should be allowed to lead *davening* or *leyn* Torah. That said, the actual leading of prayers does not require rabbinic ordination either. It requires knowledge, competence, passion, and emotional-spiritual sensitivity and vulnerability. The rabbi's main role anywhere is that of teacher. In the realm of prayer, then, the rabbi is in charge of quality control and teaching how to lead. Sharing the *bimah* with lay leaders who have been trained to lead prayer detracts from the clergy-show that often frames synagogue prayer. Many congregations have introduced alternative minyanim in addition to their main service Saturday mornings. These minyanim are an excellent forum for congregants to learn, lead and engage in growing Jewish skills. Rabbis can have this same role of quality controller and teacher in alternative minyanim. The rabbi can also scout for talent in the congregation. Someone who shows up regularly, has a strong and clear voice, or who comes to the Saturday morning service regularly when he or she is not related to the *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* child is an

excellent candidate for the next step in prayer leadership. If rabbis see their primary role as that of empowering agent for others' Jewish journeys, they will see that involving congregants in the running of services actually serves this mission. For clergy who enjoy being at the center of attention, sharing prayer leadership with skilled congregants can be hard-- even threatening. While I have some compassion for these feelings, I tend to believe that these reactions will melt when clergy see how engaging lay leadership in prayer can be for everyone present.

Convening adult education classes based in the expressed needs of congregants, rabbis can also encourage congregants to organize their own study sessions, using the rabbi as a resource and for quality control. Borrowing the model learned from the Havurah movement, we see that when congregants learn from educated peers, it send a message that the learning is truly coming from a lay desire to learn and teach, and that the learners, too, could teach and lead in the future. The rabbi can be consulted in the planning of such sessions, if it is helpful. When a given sub-community within the synagogue, such as an alternative minyan organizes its own study sessions, bonds of community within it are re-formed and strengthened as well.

iv. Singing the Liturgy and Re-Directing "Staginess"

Responding to the culture of showiness among Reform clergy takes more than sharing the spotlight during services. It also involves using the liturgy itself as the main text for singing during prayer, and it requires one very simple shift: that the prayer leaders face the ark instead of the congregation. Rabbi Elie Kaunfer, co-founder of the independent minyan "Kehilat Hadar" in New York City, writes this about the importance of the direction in which the *shlichei tzibur* faces while leading prayer:

> Self-consciousness and an inability to let go are perhaps the biggest challenges to prayer in the modern age. The other layout popular in independent minyanim, and the one that I advocate, is that used in many traditional Orthodox synagogues: all rows face forward, with the prayer leader stationed in the center, also facing forward. This sends a few important messages. First, everyone is facing the *aron*

> *kodesh* (the holy ark) rather than facing a leader who is davening toward (at?) the congregation. The unity of purpose is clearly reinforced by the direction of the community. Second, the charismatic role of the prayer leader is diminished—half of the congregation sits in front of the leader, while the other half sits behind her. While at first blush this may seem impersonal, it actually allows both the congregation and the leader to avoid self-consciousness, putting the focus on sound rather than sight. A third advantage is that the prayer leader experiences a different relationship to the congregation by being in their midst. She can better gauge to what extent a melody is "working" and can feel supported by the more active daveners in the congregation. She is simply closer to the entire congregation than in a standard synagogue layout, and she draws strength from that closeness.[80]

The quality of relationship between the *shaliach tzibur* (prayer leader) and the congregation during prayer is important because the leader needs the community to respond and to allow a particular melody and prayer to be accepted and soar. The community needs the leader as an anchor, to set a rhythm to the individual prayer that happens in the context of the community, and to unify, stop and start the congregational singing of a prayer. When the prayer leader faces the same direction as the congregation, the message is clear: leader and community are engaged together in the same project: prayer to God. The risk of the leader thinking that leading prayer is akin to a concert is diminished because everyone is appealing to (and physically aligning themselves toward) Jerusalem and God. Although God is present in every direction, something about not facing the congregation diminishes the extent to which any party might grow confused about the extent to which the service is about the prayer leader rather than about the prayer leader facilitating the congregation's prayers to God. It also prevents congregants from mistakenly addressing their prayers to the *shaliach tzibur* instead of God. Finally, it allows people to be a bit less self-conscious. Just as the prayer leader can let go a little from the mental barriers of being liked or connecting to the faces of each person who is praying, making sure everyone is "alright," so too congregants do not have to worry so much about what the prayer leader is thinking or the social cues being signaled back and forth. Congregants can "let go" into the prayer itself, and align their prayers toward the "face" of God instead of the community or prayer leader.

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[80] Rabbi Elie Kaunfer, *Empowered Judaism: What Independent Minyanim Can Teach Us About Building Vibrant Jewish Communities*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010, 114.

Next, congregational singing becomes more prayerful when the text of all the prayer-songs the community recites in unison is based solely on the text of the *siddur*. For similar reasons as orientation toward the ark, the prayer leader thus does not have to interrupt the progression of prayer to explain where the words are coming from, or who wrote the song. Singing non-liturgical songs or songs loosely based on the liturgy can yank people out of the prayer experience and into a social experience of a very different kind. When the text remains the blueprint of prayers in the hands of each person, even singing in unison remains part of the individual's personal experience of standing before God. (Especially if new melodies are continually introduced and learned). As I have stated elsewhere, if the liturgy is so inaccessible to various members of the community so as to necessitate non-liturgical singing during services, "dumbing-down" services alienates regulars for whom the *siddur* is the accepted map they expect to use throughout the service. Even if a particular song or chant focuses on a single line of the liturgy, and is repeated over and over again in unison, staying with one of the many set texts of our people rather than an interpretive song based on it keeps the congregation "on the same page," and focused on the progression of Jewish prayers.

Davening is a highly active and engaging experience, whether one is in community or not. The purpose of prayer is not to "feel good." The purpose of prayer is to offer sacrifices of the heart to God, to perform the fixed liturgy we have inherited, and to thereby invest in our relationship with God as Jews. It transforms us because within the set prayer cycle, the structure itself provides a measure of safety to let go. The feeling that often builds during prayer-- of standing "face to face" with the One entity that hears and understands the existential state of human life requires order. Although the learning curve necessary to arrive at a place of competency with the liturgy is steep, the corresponding reward is also great. In fact, the investment of time and learning that allows one access to God through the *siddur* raises the stakes of the human-God encounter every time one enters its stream as a learned

Jew. If we take away or diminish that standard for the sake of short-time "inclusivity," we have rendered the service un-inclusive to Jews who have made the investment of time and learning in their own growth and practice of prayer. While creative songs connected to Jewish ideas and prayers are wonderful in and of themselves, I believe they are more appropriately sung in contexts of social meeting or children's singing than during prayer, a time reserved for encountering God through liturgy, stillness, silence and outpouring of the heart.

v. Including Silence, Stillness, and Spontaneous Expression

Part of the issue with prayer in many Reform synagogues is a cultural discomfort with silence and stillness. When people are silent for more than a couple of minutes, the rabbi sometimes begins to feel that he or she is letting the congregation down. We are somehow neglecting our community, not "doing enough," or encouraging their minds to wander. Similarly, because of emphasis on decorum-- something Heschel so criticized, as we saw in chapter 2—the Reform Movement does not make room for spontaneous outpourings of the heart. If congregants were to be genuinely moved, and cry or wail during prayer, we might have a security guard politely escort them out of the building. As Heschel's sociological critique would demand, as well as Soloveitchik's insistence on the power of stillness and silence, part of the cultural shift in Reform prayer needs to be a shift from outward decorum to internal soul-searching in relationship to God. How is such a shift made possible, and how are these twin goals of silence and stillness on the one hand and spontaneous expression on the other hand achieved?

Currently, many Reform synagogues observe a period of time for "silent prayer" following the *Amidah* prayer, after everyone has been seated. This period should be incorporated into the end of the standing prayer itself. If an additional period of silence is desired once everyone is seated, this should be in addition to the ample time provided to

congregants for their private prayer during the *Amidah* itself. Also, I think it is important that we emphasize that (except for the disabled or elderly) the *Amidah* is the "standing prayer" before it is the "silent prayer." If one wants to shout out during the end of the *Amidah* or if one feels moved to sob or vocally express something to God, this ought to be permissible during this time. Besides the *Amidah*, where silence is already by and large a given, silence and stillness can be incorporated throughout the service. In between prayers, or even in the midst of recitation of particular prayers, one need not move too quickly through each line of liturgy. One solution to this problem is changing the frequency of congregational English or Hebrew readings in unison. When the *shaliach tzibur* begins a prayer, but allows each congregant to *daven* it with agency at their own pace, the individual congregant can choose to insert silence after certain lines of liturgy that are particularly relevant to that person. Allowing people to choose the speed and section of the prayer for themselves has the effect of naturally providing for silence when silence is the better prayer. It also eliminates the deadening effect of rote recitation of prayers in unison.

Repeating certain phrases of the liturgy through chant or singing can add mental stillness to the performance of prayer. Rather than sending a message of needing to move through the liturgy, it sends a message about the value of dwelling on a phrase or thought, and seeing new meanings in it, while bringing a range of emotional experience to the repeated phrase. The same can be said for the already-widespread practice of reciting the *Sh'ma* over the course of six breaths for each of the six words of the prayer. Varying the pace of the prayer's recitation can increase intentional awareness and remind congregants that speed and mumbling through the prayers is less important than allowing the ears (and the heart) to fully hear the words the lips are pronouncing. As prayer leader, I might also experiment with an alternative to reciting the *Chatzi kaddish*. This prayer acts as a section marker between parts of the service. Rather than reciting it, I might encourage everyone to sit

in stillness as a way of integrating the prayers we just recited and letting their effect take hold on parts of the body before moving on to the next part of the service. In the rare times when a clergy person or *shaliach tzibur* does offer an instructive piece of inspiration before a prayer, allowing congregants to sit in silence with that thought before plunging into recitation of the next prayer could be welcome as well. The prayer leader acknowledges tht silence is difficult at times so people know that it is intentional and a discomfort worth struggling with. Wyet whenever possible, giving people opportunities to confront their own discomfort with stillness and silence is more often valuable than our instincts have us know. In order for people to get in touch with the state of their hearts, which they can then expose, to God during the prayer, people need to sit or stand in silence and stillness. Providing opportunities for that throughout the service allows people to deepen their inner-directed focus so they might be more prepared to confront God.[81]

vi. Prayer as Prelude to Action

At its best, prayer reminds us of our higher purpose and our role and responsibility to the sacred community and many concentric Jewish and human communities of which we are a part. In other words, prayer never exists in a vacuum. As we saw at the end of the last chapter, each of the philosophers we examined professes the connection between the art of prayer and life. Prayer and holy enactment in the world are mutually supportive because the values recounted in prayer are meant to inform our deeds in life. The weekday *Amidah*, the central portion of any Jewish prayer service Sunday morning through Friday afternoon, can serve as a format for teaching connections between prayer and embodied prayer (deeds) during the work-week. Let us delineate how we might read the benedictions of the *Amidah* to serve as templates—and wake-up calls-- for communal action.

[81] Mishna B'rachot 5:1: "One should not rise to pray [the *Sh'moneh Esrei*] other than with an attitude of reverence. The early pious ones would tarry for one hour and pray, in order that they might direct their hearts to their Father in Heaven."

1) *Avot* (Ancestors): The *Amidah* begins by invoking the merit of the patriarchs and matriarchs in the eyes of God, and the covenantal relationship between them and God. As descendents of these men and women, we inherit the intimacy of their requited love for God. God in God's infinite heights (*El Elyon*) bestows loving-kindness and goodness (*gomayl chasadim tovim*) (we infer: towards His people Israel). Because God was Abraham's defender, so too will God continue to defend us. Because ancestry and lineage are so important in Jewish tradition, we remember also the elderly in our own community, our grandfathers and grandmothers. "Living" this prayer might mean visiting and caring for the elderly in our community.
2) *G'vurot* (Might): The second prayer of the *Amidah* praises God's infinite power. Just as Jews pray for rain throughout half of the year, so too, with this prayer we are not only thanking or acknowledging God for the mighty acts he is able to perform, from reviving the dead to freeing the captive, but we are emboldening God to continue to perform these mighty deeds. In modern parlance, that means we are also emboldening ourselves to be God's hands in the world, so to speak, and to live in a way that honors the spark of God in each of us. As we say, "Who is like You, Source of mighty acts," we remember that we have the power to act as well. *M'chaiyeh hamaytim*, reviving the dead, is the first power ascribed to God in this prayer. We might instruct one another about how to lift up a grief-struck family by gathering for a *shiva minyan* or delivering food as an example of "enacting our prayers."
3) *K'dusha* (Holiness): It is no coincidence that in the contemporary Reform *siddur*, *Mishkan T'filah*, the alternative reading on the left-hand side of the page across from the *K'dusha* includes a slew of prophetic readings on justice. The first words that the congregation utters in the prayer are from the prophet Isaiah, the quintessential advocate for social equality in the Bible. The movement in this prayer is reaching up

as we attempt to bring the holiness of the heavens down to the earth. Pursuing justice is our way, as humans, to bring the holiness of God into our world.

4) *Bina* (Understanding): In praising God for gracing us with knowledge and understanding, this prayer emphasizes the connection between study and action. It reminds me of the story of Rabbi Akiva who debates with Rabbi Tarfon about which is greater, the study of Torah or performance of *mitzvot*. The Sages come to the conclusion that "study of Torah is greater because it leads to performance of good deeds."[82] In this way, the corollary action of this prayer is study: both of Torah and research on specific issues and needs in the community.

5) *T'shuva* (Repentance): This benediction begins with the following line: "Return us to Your Torah and draw us to *avodatecha* (Your service)." *Avodah* in relation to prayer is usually translated as "service of the heart," or "worship." Yet its meaning regarding service would be relevant outside of prayer as well. How can I be of service to those in need around me?

6) *Slicha* (Forgiveness): I think of this prayer as connected to the one immediately prior. "Now that I have acknowledged my shortcomings and inadequacies and I have begun a path of *t'shuva* (repentance), forgive me, God. Forgive me for every time I passed a homeless man on the street and put nothing into his collection cup. Forgive me for doing too little, for being too comfortable with the discrepancies between rich and poor that plague our society." As Maimonides defines it, "*t'shuva* is only complete when one finds oneself in the same situation as when one sinned, and one does not repeat the sin."[83] Thus, this prayer is itself a call to action to more fully address the problems plaguing the society in which one lives.

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[82] BT Kiddushin 40b in Heschel, *Heavenly Torah: As Refracted through the Generations*. New York: Continuum, 2008, 205.
[83] Maimonides, *Hilchot Teshuva*, Chapter 2: Law 1.

7) *G'ulah* (Redemption): This prayer begins by asking God, as always, in the collective, to take note of "our affliction" and to make "our struggles" Yours. Another way we might read this prayer is that we remember to make other peoples' struggles our own in some way, to remember that suffering anywhere morally obligates us to act--for members of the people Israel, and for all humans. By ending with the *hatimah* (signature), "Blessed are You, YHVH, who redeems Israel," we pray for that day when all Jews will have enough, and will live in freedom to openly practice Judaism.
8) *R'fuah* (Healing): The corollary to praying for healing is the Jewish value and *mitzvah* of *bikkur cholim* (visiting the sick). This can include bringing food, and helping and providing for the sick person's family and caretakers.
9) *Birkat Hashanim* (Blessing of the Years): This is a prayer for abundance. Even as we pray for personal and communal abundance, we think of those who lack basic necessities. It is our obligation to share an abundant harvest with those who have not.
10) *Cheirut* (Freedom): This is one of my favorite prayers of the *Amidah*. It is a prayer for "our oppressed," and by extension the oppressed of the world over. What can we do to add our own voices to the "voice of liberty" wherever it arises throughout the "four corners of the earth"? This is a call for political activism, both locally and globally.
11) *Mishpat* (Justice): This is the prayer for justice. Just as we ask for God to help guide the "rulers of all lands" to govern justly, so too should we cultivate relationships with those in political office to help guide their just hand in government. The prayer also includes a hope that God alone will be a loving and compassionate ruler. We might interpret this by asserting that values and ideals of just government are more important than the well being of any individual ruler, as all people are flawed.

12) *Al HaRisha* (Regarding Wickedness): This prayer's corollary is fighting against tyrants who threaten life and basic freedoms. These could include political or intellectual tyrants, who disseminate false truths or misguided views and ideals.

13) *Al HaTzadikim* (Regarding the Righteous): What makes a person righteous is subjective. Yet we might support (with our dollars, voices and power) those righteous people in our community who are sincerely working towards social equality and change to account for all people and their needs.

14) *V'lirushalayim* (And for Jerusalem): This is a prayer for peace and the flourishing of Torah from Jerusalem. In this time when, politically, Jerusalem is the center of so much debate in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, what are we doing to work towards peace and the flourishing of Torah that supports peace?

15) *Yishua* (Salvation): Across from this prayer in *Mishkan T'filah* is printed a famous quote from *Pirkei Avot* (Chapters of our Ancestors): "Everything is foreseen, yet freedom of choice is given. The world is judged by grace, yet all is according to the amount of action."[84] This quotation makes the connection between prayer and action explicit: "the most important thing is what we do." The middle of the actual prayer reads, "May the strength of Your people flourish through Your deliverance for we continually hope for Your deliverance." This reads as a call for God to strengthen the will of the people to make truth and justice "from the heavens" a reality on Earth. We care most about God strengthening God's people however God may achieve it. It is up to us to make the word a better place. When we reach the *Aleinu* prayer after the *Amidah*, I think again about how in that prayer, too, it is "on us" (the literal translation of "*aleinu*") to make the world a better place for all "families of the world."

[84] Pirkei Avot 3:19 in *Mishkan T'filah*, 91.

The next three prayers, about hearing our prayer, accepting our prayer, and offering thanksgiving (*Shomeiya T'filah*, *Avodah*, and *Hoda'ah*, respectively), all correspond to the sincerity, acceptance/service and gratitude that are integral in being of service to others. The final blessing, *Shalom* (Peace) constitutes the final formal benediction of the *Amidah*, or Standing Prayer. Our thoughts at that point turn to the communities in which Jews and all people live. What can we do to make peace in our homes, in our extended families, congregation, local community, country, in Israel, and in all human communities throughout the world? Finally, we have time to offer our own prayers. As prayer is a mirror of life, usually our own *T'filat HaLev* (Prayer of the Heart) relates to how we will act: both what we have done and how we will act similarly or differently in the future. We might specifically reflect on our contribution to the greater community during this time. As we see, all of the prayers of the *Amidah* directly correspond to action, both in our smaller and larger circles of human interaction. Providing a sheet for the relationships between prayer and action could be a simple and edifying way to make these points explicit to congregants. We are reminded of those with whom we do not regularly interact as well, yet who nevertheless dwell among us: those who are oppressed, those who lack abundance, those who are sick, and those who have been led astray ideologically or intellectually. And we commit to caring and acting for the benefit of all these people in all such narrow corners.

Within a synagogue community, it is imperative that the spiritual culture of prayer finds an outlet in organized action. Social action is a form of prayer and can take many forms. I want to suggest that social action in synagogues should be a three-pronged approach:

1) Community service and volunteering in the local community, which should start with the synagogue community itself. People need to know who is in mourning, who is sick, and who needs extra support and care.

2) Issues-based interest groups that advocate, raise funds and/or awareness, and volunteer for a particular cause of particular interest to members of the group. They comprise mini-communities within the synagogue; yet also collaborate in community-wide efforts as below.
3) Broad-based community organizing where the local synagogue partners with other faith-based organizations that build power in enacting their evolving agenda by leveraging their democratic capital to convene actions that hold public officials accountable to the will of the people. The organizing cycle includes one-on-one meetings, house-meetings, research actions, public actions, and constant reflection and evaluation.

When a local Jewish community participates in a broad-based coalition for community-wide change, it ought to act both out of self-interest and because our tradition commands us to live our values. The prophetic tradition of protecting the widow and orphan and providing for the needy demand us to stand up to injustice and social inequality in all its forms. Whereas traditionally, community organizing encourages people to act out of their own self-interest, Jewish communities stand with those in need even if their needs do not reflect the Jewish community's needs. Such is the burden and responsibility of living our values as Jews.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have examined six areas in which synagogue leaders might make improvements for the sake of their prayer cultures. We showed how education, practicing prayer individually, creating opportunities for shared leadership between clergy and congregants, addressing "showiness" by re-orienting the *shlichei tzibur* and re-emphasizing the centrality of liturgy in synagogue singing, making room for stillness, silence and

spontaneous expression during services, and offering connections and opportunities for social action can each serve to enliven and enhance the communal prayer experience in synagogues. These suggestions derive from an integration of the best of recent American Jewish history—from prayer book reform in the Reform movement to the havurah movement in the wider American Jewish culture—and the best of three Jewish thinkers' theory. When taken together, these six suggestions result in a congregation that "owns" their prayer culture. A transformed culture is not the result of decisions made by clergy for clergy, but is the result of a partnership between clergy and congregants founded on the fundamental agreement that prayer is only "worth it" to the extent that it stirs people's souls, provides them with uninterrupted "face-time" with God, and strengthens people's hearts to be of service in the world.

Following these six suggestions, a congregation could transform its prayer culture to become even more traditional, participatory, and spiritual. As these are the trends, which the elite of the Reform movement are already advocating, the changes I have proposed are in line with the current orientation of the movement. The problem arises when increasing any one of these three (say, making the format of services or strict use of liturgy more "traditional") interferes with the established norm of participation. The changes I have proposed do not need to occur all at once, but over time, so that congregants can establish a "new normal" for participation, for instance, that centers on performance of the complete liturgy. "Spirituality" results from a Jewish prayer culture that moves people; usually, participation is a measure and a result of spiritually effective prayer. People only want to participate in something they think is functioning well. Thus, people need to want a more traditional service in order to be moved by it. In congregations that are resistant to change or learning traditional *davening*, the songs may need to be a bit less traditional in order to inspire full-spirited participation. The balance here is in responding to the desires of congregants on the one hand, while continuing

to challenge and educate congregants to increase their own levels of familiarity and therefore comfort with traditional approaches to prayer, on the other. Since "authentic" and even "traditional" are entirely subjective adjectives that tell more about one's perception than a set of facts, the prayer culture needs to reflect what people feel best exemplifies the meaning of these words. Finally, the history and culture of the particular Reform congregation needs to factor into the process through which change is achieved. While timing and strategies for change may vary depending on such factors, the need for clergy to challenge congregants to learn and to grow as engaged and independently-competent Jews in prayer applies to Jews wherever they gather.

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