Choosing Chosenness:
American Reform Judaism, the Liturgical Expression of Chosenness, and the Question of Modern Application

By

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Digest

In common parlance, the Jews are frequently referred to as the Chosen People. Some talk about Jews as being *or lagoyim*, a light unto the nations. This concept of chosenness is a topic with both historical and modern significance to the Jewish people. Over the course of history, chosenness has been characterized both as a burden and as an honor. Some interpret chosenness as a cause for perceived inferiority while others understand it to be an indication of superiority. Jewish responses to chosenness have ranged from pride to prejudice, from enthusiastic endorsement and acceptance to equally enthusiastic disdain and rejection. One thing is clear: chosenness is a complicated and complex topic that can also be controversial.

First, this thesis will establish the historical context for understanding chosenness at key moments in North American Reform Jewish history. These moments are identified based on the timing of the platforms and principles set forth by the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Second, this thesis will explore liturgical developments of the Reform Movement in America with three examples of chosenness: one text that the Reform Movement has always excised (*sh'lo asani goy*), one text that the Reform Movement has always maintained (*asher bachar banu*), and one text with which the Reform Movement continues to struggle (*Aleinu*).

Third, this thesis will detail the opinions on chosenness of modern rabbis who have served on the editorial committees of the Reform Movement's most recent prayer book (*Mishkan T'filah*) and High Holy Day machzor (*Mishkan Hanefesh*).

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Introduction

In common parlance, the Jews are frequently referred to as the Chosen People. Some talk about Jews as being *or lagoyim*, a light unto the nations. This concept of chosenness is a topic with both historical and modern significance to the Jewish people. Over the course of history, chosenness has been characterized both as a burden and as an honor. Some interpret chosenness as a cause for perceived inferiority while others understand it to be an indication of superiority. One thing is clear: chosenness is a complicated and complex topic that can also be controversial.

My interest in the subject as a concept and its liturgical expressions grew out of discussion and debate with colleagues who are uncomfortable with the words of prayers that express chosenness. Curious to know more, I began asking questions: Where does the idea of chosenness come from and how is it understood? Are there multiple definitions that might help us wrestle with the challenge of an uncomfortable idea? Does the concept of chosenness have to be understood as uncomfortable? How can we continue teaching the idea of chosenness in a society that stresses universalism?

These questions have led to a multidisciplinary approach to the subject. First, the concept of chosenness will be addressed historically. Looking at the origins of the idea as well as the historical context through different periods will frame the concept. Additionally, using the platforms of the Reform Movement will particularly frame the idea of chosenness in the American Reform Movement. Second, the concept of chosenness will be addressed according to liturgical expression. By tracing the prayer books published by the Reform Movement in America, one can glean further understanding about the tensions presented by ideas of chosenness in liturgy.

Third, the concept of chosenness will be addressed through the words of modern rabbis who have contributed to the most recently published prayer book of the American Reform Movement. These voices help present the relevance and authenticity of the subject at the same time as they identify and acknowledge its challenges. Finally, the question of teaching chosenness will be addressed through three examples of lesson plans.

Chapter One
Historical Context for Chosenness in American Reform Judaism

In order to examine the changing concept of chosenness in American Reform Judaism, it is necessary to consider the origin of the idea in order to establish a preliminary definition. Exodus 19:5 introduces the idea that Israel is סְגֻלָּה, treasured, מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים , from all other nations. This descriptor is one piece of a three-part process expressed in the Bible: first, Israel is chosen with no explanation. Looking to Deuteronomy 7:6-9, we get an explanation: God chose Israel כִּי מֵאַהֲבַת, because God loved them. Specifically, God loved Israel and did not choose Israel because they were numerous or deserving. The explanation here is about God more than about Israel. Additionally, the reason for choosing Israel was וּמִשָּׁמְרוֹ אֶת־הַשְּׁבֻעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לַאֲבֹתֵיכֶם, to keep the promise which had been made to [Israel's] fathers. Finally, the mission of Israel is clarified and explained in Isaiah 42:1-7 when we read that the people Israel will be עָם לְאוֹר גּוֹיִם, a light to the nations.[1] Although this three-part process is one thread in the Bible that helps us understand chosenness as a concept, it is not the only voice expressed.

In addition to these verses that identify the moments we turn to when explaining Israel's status as a chosen people, we can also look to moments when the verb *bahar* is used. In fact, *bahar* occurs 75 times in the Bible.[2] Generally, its usage is in reference to being set apart for service. For example, this is the case in Exodus 17:9 when Joshua chooses soldiers for battle against Amalek. Furthermore, when *bahar* is used, those who

[1] S. Leyla Gurkan, *The Jews as a Chosen People: Tradition and Transformation* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2009),10-12.
[2] Ibid

are "chosen" often are then called on to "choose" others. In these instances, chosenness is also a status that can be withdrawn.[3]

While the three elements of exclusivity, mission, and covenant are setting apart, service, and a contract of reciprocity[4], it is important to also consider that these elements alone do not suggest any superiority. In serving as God's "kingdom of priests", Israel is not selected because of any superior physical or moral character. In fact, one might suggest that Israel's "covenantal responsibilities were mainly the *result* of election, not a condition of it."[5]

Already, just by briefly examining the biblical mentions of chosenness, we see a complex definition that can be interpreted in multiple ways.

Moving to rabbinic literature, we are met by the Rabbis who affirmed and assumed chosenness but did so without explaining it.[6] Multiple reasons for a lack of explanation exist: maybe everyone already understood what it meant—it was part of the cultural repertoire of the time. Perhaps the Rabbis took for granted that their audience would need no clarification of terms. Alternatively, the lack of explanation might suggest that the concept of chosenness was too complicated for the Rabbis to get into. Explaining in detail a complex concept would detract from their other objectives. However, what is clear about the understanding of chosenness during the rabbinic period is that the Rabbis believed in the holiness of the people Israel.

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[3] Arnold Eisen, *The Chosen People in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 13-14.
[4] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 14
[5] Gurkan, *The Jews as a Chosen People*, 15
[6] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 17

In particular, this implicit recognition is prevalent in the tannaitic writings of the 2nd and 3rd centuries.[7] In the Amoraic writings of the 4th and 5th centuries, there is discussion and justification of the biblical concept of chosenness. At this time in history, the discussion and justification was likely a response to the institutionalization of Christianity.[8]

These differences between the two periods suggest that the Rabbis and people of these times faced different challenges in their lives. Thus, the implications of the concept of chosenness were also different. Furthermore, in their own time and context, the Rabbis responded to these challenges by adopting and adapting their understanding as was necessary. The idea of adapting and adopting to historical context will again become relevant as we examine the evolution of chosenness in the American Reform Jewish context.

Overall, the explanations for chosenness in rabbinic literature can be categorized into one of three classifications: God's love for Israel, Israel's merit, or the merits of the Patriarchs.[9] Furthermore, one might assert as Eisen did that "to the Bible, and the midrash, chosenness is a possibility into which one grows rather than a mantle which one can assume ready-made."[10]

As Jews entered modernity, chosenness took on additional meaning and metaphor. For Max Weber, the Jews were a "pariah community," separating themselves ritually from the other peoples of the world. In living out the *brit* and making these

[7] Gurkan, *The Jews as a Chosen People*, 33
[8] Ibid
[9] Gurkan, *The Jews as a Chosen People*, 35
[10] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 135

separations, Jews fulfilled the ritual and ethical duties that made them Jews.[11] Furthermore, Jews were guests in whatever land they were sojourning, a concept that differs from what we will see in America.

Generally, upon entering modernity, the approach to understanding chosenness shifted from holiness and separation to mission and from particularity to universality.[12] Additionally, chosenness was no longer assumed. Suddenly, the case for preserving the idea had to be made.

As people began to make the case for chosenness, the concept itself began to be a part of one's quest for Jewish identity. Since it was no longer assumed, it became a question. Many people related more strongly to the idea of choosing rather than being chosen.[13] Having an active role where one could opt-in to the relationship was important. With this change in mindset, chosenness became an emphasis on the Jews' universal mission to the world in Enlightened Europe. [14]

The story of American Judaism is complex and unique. Because of the distinct character of America as a nation and the history that accompanies such character, American Judaism both enriches and complicates the notion of chosenness when compared to the earlier definitions already established.

Despite its status as the "traditional vehicle for self-determination", chosenness in America became more specifically the "why and to what degree Jews should retain a separate identity in America."[15] Over time, the process of assimilation in America has been accused of diluting Jewish practices and identities. Assimilation has even been used

[11] Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (New York: The Free Press, 1952), 336-355.
[12] Gurkan, *The Jews as a Chosen People*, 47
[13] Gurkan, *The Jews as a Chosen People*, 48
[14] Ibid.
[15] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 5

as an epithet. However, it can also contribute new ideas to a community, and thus, some scholars such as Jonathan Sarna avoid using the term whenever possible.[16]

Instead of using assimilation and the distinctions between identities to understand chosenness, we might understand chosenness as the point "at which the three lines of relation which define Jews of necessity intersect." [17] In other words, we look at points of interaction instead of separation. These three lines of relation are binding to God, to fellow humans, and to each other as Jews. The value of such a definition allows for and even encourages a degree of assimilation which is unavoidable in America. Maintaining a definition of chosenness that also includes God is an absolute necessity given the history of the meaning of the concept. Finally, an inclusion of relationships with fellow humans in general is crucial in a society that values and even emphasizes inclusiveness. However, what might be most important in this definition is that chosenness is the point where these relations intersect out of necessity. These three relations cannot be isolated or completely separated from each other. The fact that they *do* intersect is also important when understanding chosenness in the American Reform Jewish context.

This context of chosenness in the American Reform Jewish context requires an understanding of the context of both the author and the audience: who is defining, writing about, talking about chosenness and who is taking it in and absorbing that definition. Furthermore, the dynamic that is at play when attempting to utilize internal ideas to address the Jewish community's needs at large is a key component of a fuller understanding of chosenness. Much like in other places and times in Jewish history, American Jews also faced constant worry about, and concern for, what outsiders think of

[16] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), xix.
[17] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 5

Jews. Thus, with changing times and contexts in America, the interpretation and understanding of many ideas changed and evolved. The same statement can be made about the concept of chosenness.

Chosenness in the Platforms of the American Reform Movement

In order to examine this evolution of the idea of chosenness, we will examine how it has been expressed from generation to generation, through articulation in the Reform Movement's platforms. Since the platforms were revised and revisited on a relatively frequent basis, we can conclude that this is reflective of a dynamic movement that is able to rapidly change and adapt to challenges it faced in a continuously changing environment. [18]

Philadelphia 1869 and Pittsburgh 1885

Authored by what we would call the "first generation" of German Reform Jews in America, these two writings are grouped together because of their close proximity to each other. In character, however there are a few distinctions between the two. The 1869 Philadelphia Principles were concerned with identifying what Reform Judaism is not. This approach to defining Reform Judaism was directly conceived from a need to distinguish Reform Judaism from Orthodoxy. Written by radical reformer David Einhorn, the representation of chosenness here is highlighted in three of the seven articles. First, in Article One it is written that

> The Messianic goal of Israel is not…the continued separation from other nations, but the union of all men as children of God.

[18] Michael A. Meyer and W. Gunther Plaut, *The Reform Judaism Reader* (New York: UAHC Press, 2001), 195.

One might suppose that this statement rejects chosenness in favor of a stronger universal notion. However, the emphasis on a union of all men as children of God as a *Messianic* goal exists to distinguish this Reform idea from the Orthodox Messianic idea focused on Jews.

In Article Two, the priestly task of Israel is described in a way that echoes some of the earlier ideas of chosenness found in the Bible:

> …their high priestly task to lead the nations in the true knowledge and worship of God.

Here, the idea of chosenness is expressed via the definition of a priestly mission that serves as an example for other nations when it comes to knowledge and worship. Again, this statement makes the platform's general understanding of chosenness difficult to extrapolate.

Finally, Article Five addresses the issue very directly:

> The selection of Israel as a people of faith, as a bearer of the highest idea of mankind, is to be emphasized as strongly as it has been in the past, but only to the accompaniment of equal emphasis on Israel's universal mission and of the equal love of God for all His children.

This article is characteristic of Einhorn's understanding of chosenness because he interprets the concept to mean the mission of Israel. Specifically, the mission of Israel is to lead and teach humanity. Having such a mission is a rationale for maintaining the group's identity.

At this point in American Jewish history, the leaders of the Reform Movement were comfortable preserving the idea of chosenness without feeling the need to define or redefine the concept. However, the underlying tension presented here suggests a need to be cognizant of how an endorsement of the chosenness idea might reflect on the Jewish people in the larger context of American society. Therefore, the authors of this document

feel it necessary to emphasize the universality of Israel's mission and Israel's nature as both distinct and similar to other people in the world.

After only sixteen years, the leaders of the Reform Movement again met to outline the tenets of Reform Judaism. This time, they met in Pittsburgh, and this time, they were facing a growing Ethical Culture movement with a faith "beyond particularism"'[19] Additionally, this is the period of mass immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe. These Eastern European Jews held a distinct ethnic and proto-Zionist identity. Authored primarily by Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler, the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 includes eight articles. Within two of those articles, we see mention of chosenness, first in Article Five:

> Fifth. We recognize in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect the approaching of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community (kehila kedosha), and, therefore, expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.

Identified as a religious community and not a nation, Reform Jews express anti-Zionist ideals that again distance themselves here from a more traditional community that was very much seeking a return to Palestine and sacrificial worship. However, it is possible to read this article not as a rejection of chosenness but rather a refocusing of Israel's mission. Reading Article Five in this way is supported by what comes next in Article Six:

> Sixth…We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age is our ally in the fulfillment of our mission, and, therefore, we extend the hand of fellowship to all who cooperate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men.

The mention of mission here assumes and accepts an understanding of chosenness similar to that of Einhorn, Kohler's father-in-law. This mission is the motivation for and

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[19] Meyer and Plaut, *Reform Jewish Reader*, 197

expression of a commitment to working towards truth and righteousness in general. At this point in the American Reform Jewish context, there does not appear to be a need for a complete re-evaluation of the chosenness idea and concept. Here, it is clear that the understanding of chosenness is focused on fulfillment of mission.

Columbus 1937

By the time the Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism were adopted in Columbus, Ohio, in 1937, there had been major changes in the way the Reform Movement understood itself. Instead of a religion, the Jews were defined as a people. A first draft of this platform, primarily the words of HUC Professor of Theology Samuel S. Cohon, included primarily muted expression of chosenness and the idea of Israel choosing God. In fact, considerable debate transpired about using the language of "chosen" at all.

These changes were brought about in part because of the composition of this "Second Generation" of American Reform Jews. Now, the Reform Movement in America included mostly Eastern European immigrants and their children. This context is important because knowing the backgrounds and concerns of this generation is crucial to understanding the way its rabbis and leaders interpreted chosenness.

Another important piece of context for both the guiding principles in Columbus and the overall approach to chosenness is the existence of Jewish fraternal and professional associations as well as organizations and groups acting on behalf of or in relation to the Jewish community in Palestine.[20] Jews of this time were involved in associations and organizations alongside their fellow Jew. Some of this was by choice

[20] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 30

and some was by necessity. Eisen suggests that chosenness in this time would best be understood as the Jewish persistence in a separate identity.[21]

Part of this separate identity was driven by the influence of gentile opinion. In addition to forced separation from non-Jews in some facets of society, Jews faced attack based on their existence as the Chosen People. Since they were separated in certain social spheres and generally viewed as different, they were ostracized precisely because of their status as the Chosen People. As a result, chosenness began once again to take on the traditional role of a focus of gentile attack. Yet this separateness also permitted a resurgence of importance of chosenness as a part of Jewish self-definition and a source of self-respect for Jews.[22]

Essentially, there were three contextual challenges to the idea of chosenness as it had been understood by the previous generation. First, the second generation discarded ideas of exclusivity, both physically and in terms of values. Second, the idea of a Jewish "mission" to other people was a problem because it proposed a hierarchical interpretation in a society where all men were said to have been created equal. Third, moving into the second generation, many fewer people still felt bound by halacha in the same way. The focus on ethical obligations instead shifted the focus of many away from any idea of chosenness at all.[23]

For all of these reasons, the 1937 Columbus principles do not include the use of any overt "chosen" language. However, the document is not completely void of any reference at all to the idea. The first allusion to chosenness in the 1937 Columbus principles is in section A, Judaism and its Foundations:

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[21] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 36
[22] Eisen. *The Chosen People in America*, 33
[23] Ibid.

> 1. Nature of Judaism; Judaism is the historical religious experience of the Jewish people. Though growing out of Jewish life, its message is universal, aiming at the union and perfection of mankind under the sovereignty of God

The emphasis on a universal message with a focus on what mankind is capable of *under* the sovereignty of God takes out some of the language of partnership or relationship that is understood when referring to a chosen people with a mission. Additionally, identifying Judaism as the historical religious experience of the Jewish people is a change from previous statements about the nature of Judaism.

Still in section A, but a bit further in the document, Articles Four and Five also address different pieces of the chosenness idea:

> 4. Torah; Revelation is a continuing process, confined to no one group and to no one age. Yet the people of Israel, through its prophets and sages, achieved unique insight in the realm of religious truth.
>
> 5. Israel; Throughout the ages it has been Israel's mission to witness to the Divine in the face of every form of paganism and materialism. We regard it as our historic task to cooperate with all men in the establishment of the kingdom of God, of universal brotherhood, justice, truth and peace on earth. This is our Messianic goal.

Notable here is the absence of any chosenness language. However, the idea is encapsulated when referring to Israel's "unique insight" as well as "Israel's mission." This language echoes the former understanding of chosenness but avoids direct articulation of such an idea.

In actuality, the principles from 1937 reflected a significant change in the way chosenness was understood, viewed, and interpreted during the second generation. The trend moved towards apologetics because of the exclusivity or even racism that certain understandings of chosenness can promote. At the same time, a range of opinions was expressed on the subject. Undoubtedly, the timing of these opinions mattered a great deal as this second generation lived through World War II and the Holocaust as well as the founding of the state of Israel.

In 1939, debate ensued across the Movement because of the remarks of Rabbi Samuel Goldenson of Temple Emanu-El in New York.

"If we insist, as I believe we should, upon the moral basis and universal validity of democracy, we should at the same time emphasize less and less the particularisms in our Jewish heritage, those particularisms that separate us from others, and stress the universal concepts and outlooks more and more."[24]

While some agreed with Goldenson that focusing on universal concepts and outlooks would be the appropriate direction for Judaism to take, others disagreed. Jacob Rader Marcus, in 1945, argued that Jewish chosenness is necessary to the realization of American Democracy.[25] By connecting chosenness with democracy, Marcus made the two inseparable. Thus, if one were to continue pursuing democracy in America, one also must preserve the Jewish idea of chosenness. A parallel might be drawn between this thinking and the distinction between America as a melting pot and cultural pluralism in America. Does one maintain his culture and accept that of others or does one fuse her culture with those around her?

However, this juxtaposition then begs the question, "Once one was an American, why did one need to be a Jew, if the values of the two cultures were identical?"[26] The answer assumes that there is something unique and worthwhile about being a Jew. At the same time, one can be a better American by being a better Jew since the two identities are impossible to completely separate from each other. Felix Levy's interpretation of

[24] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America,* 43
[25] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America,* 28
[26] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America,* 41

chosenness was that it means to stand for the world as it should be.[27] Thus, we can take a stand as Americans but with the framing and foundation from a place of our Judaism.

In his address to the HUC community on the occasion of the start of the 1947 school year, Julian Morgenstern explicitly stated that, "We of the Reform wing conceive of Israel as a people, a chosen people, endowed from very birth with a genius for seeing God in every aspect of existence and of interpreting all of life, nature and history from the standpoint of the one, eternal God…chosen by God, therefore, to be His servant, the bearers of the highest knowledge of Him and of His way of life for mankind, unto all nations and peoples and throughout all time."[28]

This opinion is evidence of Morgenstern's place as a bridge between the generations. Most of Morgenstern's contemporaries made a different contribution to the understanding of chosenness in the American Reform Jewish context at this time. Samuel Cohon, Abba Hillel Silver, and Stephen Wise all adopted an interpretation of chosenness that Israel chose God.

Cohon identified a semantic problem being faced by the Jews of his time so he developed a semantic solution: Jews could be called a "God-choosing" people.[29] Approaching chosenness in such a way omits any mention of other nations and thus there is no assumed comparative or hierarchical notion when dealing with chosenness.

Silver similarly argued that Israel chose. However, he identifies this choosing to mean undertaking a burden. Additionally, a second piece of Israel's special role in the world could be found in the superiority of her ethical monotheism.[30] In making this

[27] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 54
[28] Julian Morgenstern, "Unity in American Judaism: How and When?" (Cincinnati, 1945), 14.
[29] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 64
[30] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 65-66

argument, Silver contextualized the particularity of Israel's choosing within the universalism of ethical monotheism.

Other individuals in the Second Generation understood chosenness to have a historical definition at the outset. Therefore, chosenness was a result of historical circumstances. Then, by playing an active role, Jews gave meaning and importance to the role, making it special. Through this engagement, this role became a special task in which God is involved only indirectly.[31]

Still others during this time period, such as Mordecai Kaplan, rejected chosenness completely. Kaplan rejects the idea of chosenness because in his theology, God is a Power not a Person and thus cannot do something anthropomorphic such as choosing. His goal was to use the term "vocation" in place of "election."

Overall, in the 1930s and early 1940s, chosenness "had never implied Jewish superiority, but only that man's life was significant."[32] Chosenness was understood as a guiding principle that could help one find meaning and direction in life. Once the late 1940s arrived, a decision had to be made because the rhetoric of mission and chosenness no longer held meaning for the wider Jewish community. In the aftermath of World War II, a shift of ideology was required.

The choice at this point in American Jewish history was between reinterpreting chosenness and discarding it. The rabbis and leaders of the Jewish communities could not demonstrate election. They faced the difficult task of explaining how a chosen people would suffer so significantly. Therefore, the idea of chosenness was reinterpreted.

[31] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 57
[32] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 58

Particularly in the 1950s, expressions of chosenness were accompanied by an emphasis on ethical cooperation.[33]

Ultimately, the Second Generation was faced with two reasons to rethink chosenness: First, the position of Jews in gentile society had changed. The second challenge was God. The rhetoric of "mission" no longer held meaning for a people that lived through the Holocaust and witnessed the founding of the state of Israel. These tensions and the strong desire for reinterpretation paved the way for the third generation.

San Francisco 1976

With a generation who had lived through the Holocaust and seen the creation of the state of Israel, there needed to be a purpose for chosenness. The Third Generation wanted—or even needed—chosenness to provide an added value to their lives. The focus of the San Francisco principles, authored primarily by Eugene Borowitz, intensely emphasized Jewish survival:

> In recent years we have become freshly conscious of the virtues of pluralism and the values of particularism. The Jewish people in its unique way of life validates its own worth while working toward the fulfillment of its messianic expectations

Essentially, the point here is that Jews do not need to exist for others to validate them because there is an intrinsic value to being Jewish. Here, survival is hinted as a result of both pluralism and particularism. A "unique way of life" suggests something different, and "fulfillment of its messianic expectations" is a reference to the idea of mission.

Further exploration of the uniqueness of Israel can be found elsewhere in the document:

[33] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 61-62

> The Jewish people and Judaism defy precise definition because both are in the process of becoming. Jews, by birth or conversion, constitute an uncommon union of faith and peoplehood…but the people of Israel is unique because of its involvement with God and its resulting perception of the human condition.

Further exploration of the tension between universalism and particularism, a tension often associated with the idea of chosenness, is also expounded upon elsewhere in the document:

> Until the recent past our obligations to the Jewish people and to all humanity seemed congruent. At times now these two imperatives appear to conflict. We know of no simple way to resolve such tensions. We must, however, confront them without abandoning either of our commitments. A universal concern for humanity unaccompanied by a devotion to our particular people is self-destructive; a passion for our people without involvement in humankind contradicts what the prophets have meant to us. Judaism calls us simultaneously to universal and particular obligations.

Again, the emphasis is on survival. However, there is also an emphasis on "unique existence" and not simply a universal mission. In fact, the platform very much moves away from a sense of mission. Instead, language of "election" is used.

A combination of experiences that included success and survival contribute to the context of this generation. These successes and this survival drive a need for distinctiveness in American society. They also drive the progressivism that is highly identified with the Third Generation.[34] Furthermore, the context for this generation and this platform is the period following the1967 and 1973 wars in Israel.

These shifts in experiences lead to the reinterpretation of chosenness that was so keenly needed by the end of the Second Generation. Now, members of the Third Generation were feeling an intense conflict between the universalistic and egalitarian components of their liberal persuasion and the particularistic and elitist aspects of Jewish identity.[35] This generation was torn because their universalistic ideals didn't match the

[34] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 72
[35] Leonard J. Fein, *Observations on Jewish Identity*, Address prepared for delivery at Biennial Convention of American Jewish Congress (New York: Grossinger's, 1966), 3.

understanding of chosenness that they had inherited from their parents. In reaction to this tension, the "third generation" reintroduced the idea of ambiguity in understanding chosenness. By reintroducing the uncertainty, this generation avoided the need for justification or explanation. Their definition identified chosenness as a doctrine beyond human comprehension. Essentially, the "third generation" returned to the traditional context of "chosen" beliefs but they embraced this concept only as a mystery beyond their comprehension. The driving force behind this shift might have been the gut feelings of identification with Israel during two wars and the need for Jewish survival.

A unique component of the Third Generation's discussion of chosenness is that it included Jewish intellectuals. Previously, the conversation took place only amongst theologians. Now, the field was growing as the concept of chosenness attracted a broader range of participants. Philip Roth, in 1963, remarked that the "Jewish culture transmitted to him by his parents was at best fragmentary, he had 'received whole' a *psychology* which could be expressed in three words: Jews are better."[36] Leslie Fiedler, an intellectual of the time, wrote, "The Jews are a chosen people because they have no choice. We are chosen: the choice is outside us."[37] In 1966, Arthur Hertzberg stated, "The essence of Judaism is the affirmation that the Jews are the chosen people: all else is commentary."[38]

However, even with the noted addition of Jewish intellectuals to the discussion, congregants were still primarily absent from it. Thus, it is important to remember that we don't know what the congregants of the third generation thought or how they felt about chosenness because there is not much survey data and there are only a few published

[36] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 135
[37] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 136
[38] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 137

sermons. Yet, there is an argument that can be made from the silence. If rabbis were not preaching about it, then either their congregants did not want to hear it, were unable to hear or comprehend it, or did not know enough to care at all about it.

Overall, the third generation was not bound by covenant in the same way. They did not observe ritual practices that would separate themselves from non-Jews. Therefore, they had no problem resorting to a traditional definition of chosenness because it was not a major factor in their lives. The question Jews were asking throughout this third generation was not "Are the Jews chosen" but "In what sense are they chosen?"[39] This new question is more focused on the practicality and implications of being chosen. Instead of a theory, Jews were asking what it looks like in practice. Furthermore, in this application, there is no longer an apologetic tone to chosenness.[40]

1999 Pittsburgh

Written by Central Conference of American Rabbis president Richard Levy, the 1999 principles emphasized holiness. By this time, what could be labeled as the Fourth Generation was striving for religious meaning, moral purpose, and a sense of community. Thus, the 1999 Pittsburgh Principles are organized on the pillars of God, Torah, and Israel. Various aspects of chosenness as understood previously are expressed in the sections on God and Torah:

> We affirm that the Jewish people is bound to God by an eternal brit, covenant, as reflected in our varied understandings of Creation, Revelation, and Redemption.
>
> We cherish the truths revealed in Torah, God's ongoing revelation to our people and the record of our people's ongoing relationship with God.
>
> We affirm the mitzvah of tzedakah…these acts bring us closer to the fulfilling the prophetic call to translate the words of Torah into the works of our hands.

[39] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 151
[40] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 166

Each of these statements builds on at least one of the previously established definitions of chosenness. The idea of the relationship between God and Israel being that of *brit*, or covenant, into which both parties must enter, is one piece of chosenness. The nature of the relationship as ongoing reflects the continued preservation of chosenness. And the reference to fulfilling a prophetic call, one that challenges Israel to be a light unto the nations, is another aspect of chosenness. However, in the Israel section of this platform is another direct mention of the chosenness concept:

> We are Israel, a people aspiring to holiness, singled out through our ancient covenant and our unique history among the nations to be witnesses to God's presence. We are linked by that covenant and that history to all Jews in every age and place.
>
> We embrace religious and cultural pluralism as an expression of the vitality of Jewish communal life in Israel and the Diaspora.

While holiness is the articulated aspiration here, the idea presented is that of chosenness. Being "singled out" with a "unique history among the nations" is very much a definition of chosenness. However, the author chose not to use the term. The absence of the word "chosen" suggests another shift in understanding. At a time where many in American society are focused on universalism and, to a degree, anti-institutionalism, using a controversial word such as "chosen" might have been problematic here. However, its core concepts are preserved. Eisen would explain, "to abandon the claim to chosenness would be to discard the raison d'être that had sustained Jewish identity and Jewish faith through the ages."[41] Perhaps our authors here knew that as well. Instead of chosenness, the concept here is redefined as Jewish distinctiveness. As a result, one can say that a particular Jewish identity still matters and has validity.

[41] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 3

Conclusion

Throughout four or five generations of American Reform Jews, the idea of chosenness has been challenged and adapted. Since Reform Judaism had "gone the farthest in rejecting the assumptions and obligations on which that belief [of chosenness] had always rested," naturally, it also had a complicated time accepting the traditional definition and belief of chosenness.[42] However, what exactly is that traditional definition and belief?

Looking back to Tanakh and glancing across rabbinic literature and modern scholarship, we find many definitions and aspects of chosenness: mission, election, unique, special, choosing God, particular but not exclusive, plausible mystery we cannot understand, covenant, ever-changing, ongoing. At this point, one might conclude that the English language fails to fully capture this idea first expressed as *am segula*. While it is true that language can only have the history of ideas it experiences, the English version of chosenness is necessarily Christian, and the grammar of the Hebrew changes the form in English,[43] we are nonetheless forced to use what we have in order to explore a key tenet of Jewish identity throughout the ages.

One way in which trends of understanding chosenness can be explored is through the platforms of the Reform Movement. These articulations of core principles and values establish the foundation for expression in various ways. One of those vehicles of expression is liturgy. Therefore, the next step in examining chosenness can be accomplished by looking at three specific examples of its expression liturgically.

[42] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 52
[43] Eisen, *The Chosen People in America*, 174

Chapter Two

Reform Liturgical Development and Chosenness

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the context for expressions of chosenness in Reform Jewish liturgy in America. When identifying the places in Jewish liturgy where chosenness is expressed, we might make a long list. Depending on which definition of chosenness we apply, many prayers and blessings can be interpreted as containing some element of Jewish chosenness or particularism. For example, if we understand the giving of Torah to be an expression of chosenness, any liturgy that mentions revelation or is included in the Torah service might be considered an expression of chosenness. Additionally, if we understand an element of chosenness to be the calendar of Jewish time, any liturgy that marks particular places in this calendar could be considered an example of chosenness.

In order to focus the area of study for the purposes of this thesis, I have identified three specific liturgical examples of expressions of chosenness. The first, within the prayer rubric of *Birkhot Hashachar*, is an example of a prayer that Reform Jews have always excised. This example is one of the morning blessings, *Baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, sh'lo asani goy*, "Blessed are you Adonai, ruler of the universe, who did not make me a gentile." The second example, within *Seder Kriat HaTorah*, the Service for the Reading of Torah, is a liturgical example of chosenness that the Reform Movement has always included. This example is the blessing before the reading of the Torah, *asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim*, "who has chosen us from among all peoples." The third example, from the concluding section of our service, is a

prayer that the Reform Movement continues to wrestle with and adapt. This example is the *Aleinu*.

For each of these examples, I will trace the wording in both Hebrew and English that was published in each of the American Reform Movement's most influential siddurim through the 20th century. Since Leo Merzbacher's *Seder T'filah* (1855), David Einhorn's *Olat Tamid* (1856), and Isaac M. Wise's *Minhag America* (1859) are considered to have been prototypes of the first *Union Prayer Book,* I will begin there. Then, I will trace these three liturgical examples through the first *Union Prayer Book* (published in 1894/5), the Newly Revised *Union Prayer Book* (1945), and *Gates of Prayer* (1975). The most recent Reform prayer book, *Mishkan T'filah* (2005), will be addressed in Chapter Three.

By looking at these three liturgical examples, we engage with the evolution and development of Reform Jewish liturgy in America. We also learn how different generations interpreted the ides of chosenness and can describe how our liturgical expressions of chosenness intersect with our historical understanding of the concept at various times in history. This approach is intended primarily to be a description of what exists and which definitions of chosenness are expressed, while also making inferences about the historical context facing decision-makers at the time of each siddur's publishing.

In order to examine specific examples of chosenness in Reform liturgy, a general liturgical context needs to be set forth. According to Jakob Petuchowski, who was a reknowned scholar and professor of liturgy and theology at the Hebrew Union College, there are several characteristics that distinguish Reform liturgy from traditional liturgy.

Reform liturgy tends to be an abbreviation of the traditional service. Removing the repetitions of prayers such as the Amidah and eliminating *piyyutim* shorten Reform services.[44] Additionally, a discomfort with angelology as being superstitious and posing intermediaries between God and humans led to the omission of all such references in early American Reform liturgy.[45] Another theological conviction rejected in early American Reform liturgy was that calling for the ”ingathering of exiles: and a ”return to Zion.”[46] With the reintroduction of such prayers in *Mishkan T’filah*, these ideas continue to be interpreted as non-literal. In other words, despite wording calling for the ”ingathering of exiles” and a ”return to Zion”, these ideas are interpreted metaphorically or in support of the State of Israel and not as a call to end the Diaspora.

Other characteristics of Reform liturgy include omission of prayers for the restoration of the sacrificial cult, a substitution of ”messianic age” and ”redemption” for notions of the personal messiah, and a substitution of spiritual immortality for physical resurrection.[47] Included in Reform liturgy is vernacular translation of prayers, provision of variety and liturgical choices, and the addition of new prayers that address contemporary concerns.[48]

Most relevant for this thesis is Petuchowski’s observation that Reform liturgical choices tend to tone down particularism. However, in the almost half-century since the publication of Petuchowski’s booklet in 1968, slightly different trends have been present. These more recent trends are especially evident in *Mishkan T’filah*.

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[44] Jakob Petuchowski *Guide to the Prayerbook* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1968), 58-59.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

In many ways, *Mishkan T'filah* violates Petuchowski's assertions. The language of the "ingathering of the exiles" and a "return to Zion" as well as the reference to resurrection of the dead in the *g'vurot* benediction of the Amidah have been reintroduced. This phenomenon might be an expression of Jews finding new meaning in old rituals or discovering them for the first time.[49] Furthermore, Reform liturgy began to include new innovations and changes such as meditation, more Hebrew, and a simultaneous move both toward and away from traditional practices.[50] Some voices suggest that each platform or set of principles that came after the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform created space for an increased openness to "the restoration of particularistic practices that mark the uniqueness of the Jewish people."[51] These particularistic practices are reflected in our liturgy but might not only be a reflection of theological ideation. We might also interpret these shifts as an acknowledgement that Judaism is more than "a confession of faith."[52] Thus, it is important to remember as we evaluate liturgical changes that there are multiple reasons that might explain the changes.

Another key factor in the production of Reform Movement prayer books is the proximity of publication to the prior articulation of a platform or set of principles for the movement. Only with the case of *Gates of Prayer* in 1975 did the articulation of principles follow the prayer book's publication.[53] Therefore, we might understand each prayer book as reflective of the change in beliefs that were articulated in the platform or set of principles. For that reason, the historical and social context presented in Chapter

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[49] Dana Evan Kaplan, ed. *Platforms and Prayer Books: Theological and Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 1.
[50] Kaplan, "The Reform Theological Enterprise at Work: Debating Theory and Practice in the American Religious 'Marketplace'",*Platforms and Prayer Books,* 12.
[51] Peter Knobel. "The Challenge of a Single Prayer Book for the Reform Movement", *Platforms and Prayer Books*, 159.
[52] Knobel, "The Challenge of a Single Prayer Book," *Platforms and Prayer Books,* 159
[53] Kaplan, "The Reform Theological Enterprise," *Platforms and Prayer Books,* 8

One of this thesis is significant when trying to understand the reasons for the liturgical changes presented in this chapter.

For example, in the mid 1990s, "The Liturgy Project" was created to explore what in the worship system of Reform congregations was working and what was not working. Ultimately, the goal of this project was to examine the role of the siddur itself in experiences of successful worship.[54] As a result of this process, it was decided that a new prayer book should be created in order to preserve the unity of the Movement. Since the current Movement prayer book of the time, *Gates of Prayer*, was defined by variety and many options, the ultimate recommendation when creating *Mishkan T'filah* evolved to maintain a multivocality within one service without themes. As a result, there were no longer ten different Shabbat evening services and six different Shabbat morning options with themes that were not inclusive enough or identifiable to most congregants.[55] Instead, *Mishkan T'filah* presented options within the context of one service that could prioritize the meaning and reflect inclusion and accessibility.[56]

As we explore the differences in Reform Movement prayer books, it is crucial to remember that those making the liturgical decisions can be considered the elite at the top of the movement.[57] Each prayer book can be used flexibly and creatively when it comes down to individual rabbis, congregations, or people. However, the prayer books would not be accepted by the wider Movement if they did not appeal to what the people in the pews were thinking and feeling. Therefore, "the editors have to take care to balance the

[54] Knobel, "The Challenge of a Single Prayer Book," *Platforms and Prayer Books*, 155
[55] Knobel, "The Challenge of a Single Prayer Book," *Platforms and Prayer Books*, 160
[56] Knobel, "The Challenge of a Single Prayer Book," *Platforms and Prayer Books*, 161
[57] Kaplan, "The Reform Theological Enterprise," *Platforms and Prayer Books*, 8

ideological demands of the liberal fringe of the movement with the expectations of the typical suburban member."[58]

At the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) Biennial in Orlando in 1999, then President of the UAHC[59] Eric Yoffie stated,

> Our movement came into being as a liturgical revolution. Reform Judaism did not begin with ethics, social justice, or personal autonomy; it was a reaction to the chaos and mechanical mumbling of the then-dominant forms of Jewish prayer. Worship reform was the very heart of early Reform Judaism.[60]

As we consider the development of certain prayers within the American Reform Jewish liturgy, we consider that "Jewish liturgy has always been and should continue to be an ever-evolving process,"[61] and that this process can provide insight about the change and development of the concept of chosenness within Reform Judaism in America. Furthermore, "If a system of prayer is living, then it will grow and change to meet the needs of the times and the people who look to it for solace, hope, and inspiration."[62]

Liturgy Excised from Reform Prayer Books

The morning blessings, *birkhot hashachar*, can be traced back to the Talmud, where we find the instruction to recite these blessings upon awakening each day.[63] However, even there, debate and discussion are presented surrounding questions of who should recite the blessings and when. The blessing of interest here, *sh'lo asani goy*, "who did not make me a Gentile,"was grouped with two other statements of identity: *sh'lo*

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[58] Kaplan, "The Reform Theological Enterprise," *Platforms and Prayer Books*, 9
[59] In 2003 the UAHC became the Union of Reform Judaism (URJ).
[60] Kaplan, "The Reform Theological Enterprise," *Platforms and Prayer Books*, 13
[61] Judith Z. Abrams, "The Continuity of Change in Jewish Liturgy", *Platforms and Prayer Books*, 119
[62] Abrams, "The Continuity of Change," *Platforms and Prayer Books*, 119-120
[63] Yoel H.Kahn, "On Gentiles, Slaves, and Women: Historical Survey," in *My People's Prayer Book: Volume 5*, Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed. (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 17.

asani ishah, "who did not make me a woman," and *sh'lo asani eved*, "who did not make me a slave." The version of this last benediction that first appears in Tosefta Berakhot 6:18 is "who did not make me a boor/ignoramus." This version is also the first one in the Talmud, where it is emended to "who did not make me a slave." Yoel Kahn suggests that these were not prayers at all but rather slogans that "affirmed the identity of the people who said them."[64]

The three blessings here also parallel the Greek version of such a statement about identity, as recorded by Diogenes. There, the affirmation is "born a person and not a beast; man and not woman; Greek and not barbarian."[65] If we were to accept this parallel, the blessings might feel more acceptable. Additionally, interpreting *goy* in its biblical Hebrew context as non-derogatory and simply as a nation attached to a territory would further support this approach.[66] Furthermore, one might also understand these three blessings collectively as an appreciation for the duty of obeying commandments. Elliot Dorff points out that the organization of these three blessings is in decreasing order of mitzvot that apply: non-Jews are obligated for the seven Noahide laws, slaves are obligated for the three hundred sixty-five negative commandments, and women are exempt from time-bound mitzvot. [67]

However, this negative framing of identity made many uncomfortable. In particular, the Church sought to censor such wording. The text reads *sh'lo asani goy* in all of the first manuscripts. The printed version in the Babylonian Talmud, *sh'asani Yisrael*, reflects the Christian censorship. Geniza prayer books that reflect the rite of

[64] Kahn, "Historical Survey", *My People's Prayer Book Volume Five*, 18
[65] Kahn, "Historical Survey", *My People's Prayer Book Volume Five*, 19
[66] Hoffman, ed., *My People's Prayer Book Volume Five*, 127
[67] Elliot Dorff, in Hoffman, ed., *My People's Prayer Book Volume Five*, 131

Eretz Yisrael read *sh'asani Yisrael v'lo goy*, including both the positive and negative framing of the blessing. In addition to censorship by the Church, there is also evidence of occasions of self-censorship. This led to versions of the prayer that either included the positive phrasing or used a different term for *goy*. The alternatives included other biblical peoples such as the Arameans or Kuthites.[68]

Another point about premodern prayerbook development in relation to this blessing is the variable of vernacular translations. In cases where translations were not included in the printed prayerbook, this blessing was not deemed to be incredibly problematic. However, once the common practice was to publish translations, many challenges were presented.[69] In response, some edited just the vernacular. Others edited the Hebrew as well. However, the question was posed:

> If the distinctions between Jew and gentile were no longer meaningful, what rationale existed for separate Jewish identity? The answer seemed to be a reaffirmation of the election and special mission of Israel.[70]

Therefore, a creative response was required. The reason this blessing is controversial and problematic is because of the definition of chosenness that it reflects. Framing one's identity by negating someone else's does not only suggest an idea of chosenness. It suggests and aura of superiority and promotes a negative opinion towards the other. Saying a blessing thanking God for not making me a non-Jew is a disparagement of non-Jews. Removing the negative formulation and retaining the statement of identity preserves the separateness and uniqueness of being Jewish without evoking or condoning negative feelings towards others. A positive statement of identity

[68] Kahn, "Historical Survey", *My People's Prayer Book Volume Five,* 21
[69] Kahn, "Historical Survey", *My People's Prayer Book Volume Five,* 24
[70] Kahn, "Historical Survey", *My People's Prayer Book Volume Five,* 25

acknowledges that there is something special about being Jewish; it responds to the question with a creative interpretation that also preserved the notion of chosenness.

Tracing the blessing through the prayer books of the Reform Movement

In Leo Merzbacher's *Seder Tfilah*, the morning blessings are entirely omitted. The morning service begins with psalm texts and proceeds directly to the *Barchu*. The blessings are also omitted in David Einhorn's *Olat Tamid*. His service goes from *Elohai N'shama* into *Ribon Kol Haolamim* and *Atah Hu* ,all in the vernacular, but omits the short blessings. We might understand this in light of Petuchowski's suggestion that one characteristic of Reform liturgy is to shorten the service. These blessings could be seen to form a repetitive cluster.. In Isaac Mayer Wise's *Minhag America*, we find the positive formulation in Hebrew, *sh'asani Yisrael*, and "who hast deigned me to be an Israelite" in the English translation.

Although all three of these prayer books were used to inform the creation of the *Union Prayer Book*, the first version of *UPB*, published in 1894 and 1895 did not include the morning blessings. This omission persists in the subsequent revisions (1918, 1940). Instead, UPB retains in translation only *Elohai N'shama* and *Atah Hu* (following Einhorn),

With the publication of *Gates of Prayer* in 1975 we find a shift. Here, the morning blessings are included. The Hebrew formulation of the blessing is *sh'asani Yisrael* and the English translation is "who has made me a Jew." The prayer book also includes the positive formulation of "who did not make me a slave" as "who has made

me to be free" but it does not include any version of the third of these three identity blessings, dealing with gender.

What we can say about all of these Reform Movement versions of the morning blessings is that they did not include the negative formulation of *sh'lo asani goy*. This is a liturgical example of chosenness that has never been included in American Reform Jewish liturgy. Instead of an idea of chosenness that promotes superiority or degredation of others, our liturgy reflects an idea of chosenness defined by uniqueness and positive affirmation of what it means to be a Jew.

Liturgy Included in Reform Prayer Books

The recitation of the Torah blessing before the reading of Torah clearly expresses an idea of chosenness. The Hebrew root *bet, chet, resh*, means to choose, and this language is used in all the prayerbooks of the Reform Movement traced here.

Proof of a blessing recited before the public reading of Torah can be traced to the Mekhilta, however the wording of such a blessing was not fixed at that time.[71] We know this because of the presence of multiple versions of such a blessing. One Eretz Yisrael version read *asher bachar batorah hazot, v'kidshah v'ratsah v'oseha*, "who chose this Torah, sanctified it, and took pleasure in those who do it."[72] Another version once in use was *la'asok bidivrei Torah*, "who commanded us to occupy ourselves with the words of Torah." This language comes from the Babylonian Talmud (Berakhot 11b). This blessing we now use elsewhere in the liturgy. The wording of the Torah blessing familiar to us today, *asher bachar banu*, can also be found in the Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 11b.

[71] Lawrence A. Hoffman, Ed. *My People's Prayer Book Volume Four: Seder Kriat HaTorah* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing:2000), 106.
[72] Hoffman, Ed. *My People's Prayer Book Volume Four*, 105

The ongoing and uninterrupted presence of this blessing requires a consideration of the chosenness idea that it conveys. Evidently, despite the blessing's clear expression of chosenness, those making liturgical choices for the Reform Movement never considered it offensive or exclusive in a way that would merit a discontinuation of use.

One understanding of *asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim* is that of election, akin to what is mentioned in Deuteronomy 7:6. However, it is an election that also carries a sense of obligation according to Amos 3:2—"You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth -that is why I will call you to account for all your iniquities."[73] Thus, it is not an articulation of superiority and it does not suggest an exclusivity that would make many uncomfortable. Rather, it is a challenge to "disseminate the ethical teachings of the one God before the entire world."[74]

A second interpretation is rooted in the English translation of the Hebrew. The language of this blessing, *asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim*, could mean either "from all the nations" or "from all other nations," two translations that carry different connotations. "From all the nations" could be understood to suggest that God looked at all the nations and chose us while rejecting that God chose us *above* all other nations.[75] Additionally, the next clause of the blessing *v'natan lanu et torato* could be translated as "and gave" or "by giving," again changing the connotation: either the giving of Torah was the process of choosing or it was the result of God having chosen.[76] Translation is an act of interpretation, and there exist multiple options when translating this example of liturgy.

[73] Marc Brettler in Hoffman, Ed. *My People's Prayer Book Volume Four*, 105
[74] David Ellenson in Hoffman, Ed. *My People's Prayer Book Volume Four*, 108
[75] Joel Hoffman Hoffman, Ed. *My People's Prayer Book Volume Four*, 105
[76] Ibid.

Approaching the text in this way offers opportunities to understand chosenness in a positive and nonexclusive way.

Despite the continued inclusion of *asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim* in Reform Jewish liturgy, another liberal denomination of Judaism has regularly replaced this expression of chosenness with other Hebrew and English. Mordecai Kaplan, founder of the Reconstructionist Movement of Judaism, rejected any concept of chosenness whatsoever. Even an interpretation of mission did not assuage his concern about the topic, and as a result, Kaplan created his own version of the Torah blessing. His language, *asher kervanu l'avodato*, "who has brought us nigh to Thy service" refocused Torah as a way by which Jews could draw nearer to God.

Interestingly, the current Reconstructionist prayerbook *Kol Haneshama* retains Kaplan's English rendering of the blessing but includes the traditional Hebrew of *asher bachar banu* as an option. Even for the traditional Hebrew, there is an alternative translation that uses "singled us out" instead of "chosen us."

Tracing the blessing through the prayerbooks of the Reform Movement

In all of the prayerbooks of the Reform Movement in America, beginning with Leo Merzbacher's *Seder Tfilah*, David Einhorn's *Olat Tamid*, and Isaac M. Wise's *Minhag America*, the Hebrew text of the Torah blessing has remained the same: *asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim, v'natan lanu et torato*. However, there have been some changes in and adaptations in the English translation.

Merzbacher's *Seder Tfilah* translates, "who hast chosen us from all nations, and hast given us thy law." This is virtually identical to Einhorn's *Olat Tamid* ("who hast

chosen us from among the nations, and given us Thy law") and Wise's *Minhag America* ("who hath chosen us from among all nations, and hath given us His law").

A subtle yet significant change was made in the publication of the first *Union Prayer Book*, where the translation of *asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim* reads "who hast called Israel from amongst the nations and given him Thy law." The absence of the word "all" changes its connotation a bit. Even more significant is the substitution of "called" for "chosen." This reflects the great emphasis of the time on the mission of Israel. When the *Union Prayer Book* was revised in 1940/5, the English text changed again, "who hast called us from among all peoples and hast given us Thy law." Here, the "all" is again included.

The publication of *Gates of Prayer* in 1975 brought back the word "chosen," "who has chosen us from all peoples by giving us His Torah." Additionally, instead of choosing then leading to giving the Torah, this translation suggests that the act of choosing was *by* giving Torah. In other words, what sets the Jewish people apart is their receipt of Torah.

Since *asher bachar banu* has continued to be present in American Reform Movement prayerbooks, we might understand its expression of chosenness to be a positive affirmation of identity and uniqueness rather than a morally questionable statement of superiority. However, it is interesting to note slight changes in English translations of the blessing that have been present over time. These changes shed light on the mindset of those making liturgical decisions at that time. They also present a varied and fuller definition and description of chosenness.

An example of liturgy with which the Reform Movement continues to struggle

Aleinu originated as the beginning of the *malchuyot* section of the Rosh Hashanah *musaf* service. [77] In the *musaf* context, this poetic composition introduced the biblical verses about God's sovereignty.[78] By the turn of the fourteenth century in the wake of the Crusades, it became a concluding prayer for all services.[79] The evidence of this can be found in late medieval manuscripts.

It is hard to say exactly what triggered this shift in usage, but Stefan Reif offers two suggestions in his book, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History*. First, he points to censorship. Second, he suggests that an increased need for formal conclusions to prayer services led to the growth in popularity of the *Aleinu*.

In his book, *Entering Jewish Prayer,* Reuven Hammer identifies two separate parts of *Aleinu*. The first declares the Jewish concept of God. It affirms the existence of God while simultaneously denouncing idolatry. As a text based on the creation story, this first part of *Aleinu* is not considered a prayer because it doesn't address God in the second person. Overall, both Hammer and Jakob Petuchowski, in his book *Prayerbook Reform in Europe*, agree that this first section of the *Aleinu* reinforces a sense of the Jewish particular. The second part of *Aleinu* contrasts this sense of the particular with a universal acceptance of God's rule in the messianic future.[80] There is discussion of a time

[77] Jakob Petuchowski, *Prayerbook Reform In Europe* (World Union of Progressive Judaism, 1968), 298
[78] Ruth Langer, "Theologies of Self and Other in American Jewish Liturgies." Accessed here: http://hucliturgy.blogspot.com/
[79] Stefan Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History.* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 208-209.
[80] Langer, "Theologies of Self and Other in American Jewish Liturgies," 15

when there will be unity of humanity under one God. Here, God is addressed in the second person. Instead of an affirmation of faith, this section is a petition.[81]

Hammer articulates that *Aleinu* is not thanking God for creating us different in an absolute sense. He suggests that *Aleinu* does not claim superiority. It emphasizes the advantage that Jews choose for themselves by recognizing and worshiping the "true God" while others remain on a path toward idolatry.

The question relevant for this thesis is what kind of sense of Jewish particularism does *Aleinu* present. My assertion is that the ambiguity of what concept of chosenness is presented leads to an ongoing discussion and continued adaptations that do not eliminate any version of *Aleinu* from our current Reform liturgy. However, that has not always been the case.

Tracing the blessing through the prayerbooks of the Reform Movement

At Temple Emanu-El in New York City, Merzbacher's *Seder T'filah* was used starting in 1855. Labeling the *Aleinu* as "Adoration" started here, and it is a nomenclature that remains in some congregations to this day. In this *siddur*, the שלא עשנו phrases are replaced with words that traditionally come from the second (and more universal) paragraph of the *Aleinu*:

"שהוא נוטה שמים יוסד ארץ. ומושב יקרו בשמים ממעל. ושכינת עזו בגבהי מרומים. הוא אלהינו אין עוד"

The vernacular version of this, in English, translates literally the Hebrew words that had been substituted for the original. Isaac Mayer Wise's *Minhag America* has the same language as Merzbacher in both Hebrew and English.

[81] Reuven Hammer, *Entering Jewish Prayer* (New York: Schocken Books, Inc., 1994), 208

In David Einhorn's *Olat Tamid*, we find only a vernacular version of the beginning of the prayer, "It is meet for us to praise the Lord of the universe, to glorify the Creator of the world, who hath delivered us from the gloom of error and sent us the pure light of his truth. We bow before him…" Here the language is similar to that of David Philipson's alternative to the second part of *Aleinu*, "May the time not be distant…" and does not mention any comparison to other peoples. However, in its mention of deliverance, there is still a piece of particularism.

In the original 1892 version of the *Union Prayer Book*, *Aleinu* is referred to as the "Adoration" and most of the text is again found only in English:

> It is our duty to render praise and thanksgiving unto the Creator of heaven and earth, who delivered us from the darkness of false belief and sent us to the light of His truth. He is our God, there is none besides. We bow the head and bend the knee before the Ruler of the universe, and bless His holy name!

Here we again see an abbreviated resemblance to the original text in some of the ideas. Interestingly, there is still a sense of "us" and particularism, but it is without the mention of "them."

After only three years, the CCAR revised the *Union Prayer Book* in order to get greater buy-in from the Einhorn faction of the Movement. The 1895 version also referred to *Aleinu* as the "Adoration." The text again is almost entirely in English. Here, we see the language that becomes familiar to a later generation through various musical settings:

> Let us adore the ever-living God, and render praise unto Him who spread out the heavens and established the earth, whose glory is revealed in the heavens above and whose greatness is manifest throughout the world: He is our God, and there is none else.

When the *Union Prayer Book* was revised in 1918 and 1940, no changes to *Aleinu* were made. However, when *Gates of Prayer* was published in 1975, it provided the

service leader (and congregant) with multiple options. When it came to concluding prayers (which begin with *Aleinu*), there were four options.

Service I re-institutes the original שלא עשנו texts. The translation, however, does not include all of the words. "We must praise the Lord of all, the Maker of heaven and earth, who has set us apart from the other families of earth, giving us a destiny unique among the nations." Here, some of the Hebrew has been combined (e.g. "who has not made us like the nations of the land" and "who has not put us with the families of the earth" becomes "who has set us apart from the other families of earth").

Service II provides the substituted Hebrew from the traditional second part with a literal English translation:

"שהוא נוטה שמים יוסד ארץ. ומושב יקרו בשמים ממעל. ושכינת עזו בגבהי מרומים. הוא אלהינו אין עוד"

In place of the second part, Service II then has the "May the time not be distant" reading. Service III has the same Hebrew as Service II for the first part of *Aleinu,* but offers a different, more interpretive, translation:

> Let us revere the God of life, and sing the praise of Nature's Lord, who spread out the heavens and established the earth, whose glory is proclaimed by the starry skies, and whose wonders are revealed in the human heart. He is our God; there is none else. With love and awe we acclaim the Eternal God, the Holy One, blessed be He.

All the English provided in Service III for *Aleinu* (including for the second part) is more interpretive and less literal.

Service IV of *Gates of Prayer* uses the Hebrew version found in the 1929 German Reform *siddur* from Frankfurt (the so-called "*Einheitsgebetbuch,*" or German "Union Prayer Book"), which derives from Abraham Geiger's 1854 prayer book. The text differs in the last two words:

"שבחר-בנו ליחד את שמו וקרבני להמליך מלכותו"

However, the English does not resemble the Hebrew words at all:

> We praise Him who gave us life. In our rejoicing He is God. He is God in our grief. In anguish and deliverance alike, we praise; in darkness and light we affirm our faith. Therefore we bow our heads in reverence, before the Eternal God of life, the Holy one, blessed be He.

The four options found in *Gates of Prayer* provide diverse approaches to a challenging text. They represent many of the other approaches taken over time. Perhaps one of the most interesting moves is to reinstate the original Hebrew text as an option.

The continued appearance of multiple options and adaptations to *Aleinu* in Reform Jewish liturgy suggests that it presents a concept of chosenness that makes some uncomfortable. Yet if it were unanimously deemed to be truly appalling, we would expect the prayer to be excised from the liturgy completely and replaced with something completely new, as is the case with *sh'lo asani goy*. Therefore, there is something about *Aleinu* that continues to both resonate with people and challenge them.

Conclusion

By looking at these three examples, we can make inferences about the way Reform Jews making liturgical decisions approached chosenness, accepted aspects of chosenness, and wrestled with what it means to be chosen. The next chapter of this thesis will focus on the most current Reform Movement prayer book as it reflects its contemporary context.

Chapter Three

Chosenness Today

Tracing the idea of chosenness through the history of the American Reform Movement has produced several definitions: mission, unique destiny, responsibility, choice. At the same time, this overview exposed a continued discomfort with notions of superiority or disparagement of others. Examining the liturgy of the Reform Movement prayer books provided an opportunity to see a concrete application of the conceptual ideas and theories.

The most recent *siddur* of the Reform Movement in America is *Mishkan T'filah*, published in 2007. Currently, production is under way for a new High Holy Day *machzor*, set to be published in 2015. In an attempt to understand the contemporary conversation as well as the decision-making process surrounding the creation of these two prayer books, I interviewed a group of rabbis who have been involved in their creation. By interviewing the rabbis who have been part of the process, I gleaned a better sense of the various perspectives represented around the table. Additionally, I gained insight into the decision-making process and the conversations that were had while making these decisions.

These seven rabbis represent a variety of backgrounds. Some of them serve or have served congregations while others served as leaders in other Jewish communities. Additionally, the ordination years of the rabbis span almost three decades, from 1969 to 1998. [82]

[82] The transcriptions of all seven interviews can be found in Appendix A.

At the same time, it must be noted that this is a select group of leaders in the early part of the twenty-first century. Just as Eisen noted a difference between the "elite thinkers" and the general population of Jews, we can assume that similar differences exist in the contemporary Reform movement as well. Further research may be warranted to address the disparity by surveying or studying a broader population of American Reform Jews. Likely, the understandings of chosenness uncovered by such a study would be different from the ideas uncovered here. Nonetheless, interviewing even seven rabbis produced a wide range in definitions and understandings of chosenness.

Rabbi Elyse Frishman, ordained from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York in 1981, has served as Senior Rabbi of The Barnert Temple in Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, since 1995. For her, the essence of chosenness is commitment to Torah:

> The Jewish people were chosen for a particular path. There are many paths up the mountain; the Jewish path is based on Torah.

Frishman also emphasized the importance of Judaism and the sense of chosenness as being special but not "better than." Her continued attention to avoiding any misconception of elitism or exclusivity was clear:

> One can think of chosenness as being exclusive but it's not. It's a statement of "this is how we live" and you are welcome to join this path; you are not prevented from joining this, you are welcome to, but this is how we do it.

Rabbi Hara Person, Publisher of CCAR Press, was ordained from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York in 1998. Her definition of chosenness is rooted in the idea of the choosing people:

> There is an active, participatory piece… I'm not so comfortable with presenting [the idea] as "better than," but chosen as in having chosen—

> then there's sort of a reciprocal covenantal relationship which we're constantly choosing and God's constantly choosing.

Chosenness in terms of the mission of Israel is the definition, rooted in Prophetic Judaism, that Rabbi Peter Knobel uses:

> We had a special responsibility to be an exemplar; a light unto the nations, to bring a message to the world; [it] didn't mean we were better; [it] just meant we had a special mission.

Knobel, ordained from HUC-JIR in Cincinnati in 1969, served as senior rabbi of Beth Emet, a nine hundred household congregation in Evanston, Illinois, before retiring. His connection to chosenness through Prophetic Judaism also emphasized equality and concern for the weakest members society. Rabbi Knobel also suggested a slightly different definition for chosenness if interpreted historically. He identified chosenness as featuring prominently for Jews in times of persecution.

Rabbi Edwin Goldberg, senior rabbi of Temple Sholom in Chicago, was ordained from HUC-JIR in Cincinnati 1989 and views chosenness as related to a general religious idea of feeling special and the human desire to feel such a purpose. He further described an element of being a choosing people as well as the sense of mission:

> If we realize that we have a wonderful heritage, we should feel responsible to live up to that.

Rabbi Shelly Marder and Rabbi Janet Marder, a husband and wife team, were interviewed together. Shelly was ordained from HUC-JIR in New York in 1978 and is in his sixteenth year as Rabbi and Director of the Department of Jewish Life at the Jewish Home in San Francisco. Janet was ordained from HUC-JIR in New York in 1979 and is in her sixteenth year as senior rabbi of Congregation Beth Am of Los Altos Hills,

California. Both Shelly and Janet defined chosenness in terms of Jews being living exemplars who embody Torah:

> Chosenness as the idea that the Jewish people have a purpose in the world to embody the highest of Torah; living exemplars of the mitzvot.

Rabbi/Dr. Richard Sarason, ordained at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati in 1974 and serving on the faculty at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, expressed a variety of definitions that include a biblical concept of chosenness, an idea of mission, and a more contemporary sense of chosenness as focused on the collective existence of Jews. Furthermore, he emphasized a need to retranslate the concept of chosenness:

> I don't see us as the chosen people but I do see us as a people that has a) as much right to be distinctive as any other people and b) a people with a distinctive religious, historical, and cultural identity.

The common thread among the definitions offered by these seven rabbis is the broad reach of the concept. No single definition of chosenness was presented, and each person, influenced by their beliefs, experiences, and circumstances, connects differently to chosenness. All of the definitions offered reflect some version of the concept as it has been defined historically, and, collectively, these definitions suggest a multiplicity of understandings and applications.

Another element shared by all of these interviews was the concern about misinterpretations of chosenness. Each rabbi acknowledged the danger of, and his or her distaste for, definitions or expressions of chosenness that reflect a "better than" understanding. Each rabbi interviewed was intentional about identifying this challenge and, in some cases, a sense of commitment to avoid and reframe the challenge so that chosenness does not have to continue to be misunderstood.

After defining chosenness, the rabbis were asked to comment on chosenness in relation to our liturgy. Rabbi Goldberg focused on his interpretation of liturgy as poetry with profound symbolic meaning. He pointed to many examples of particularism but indicated that, in the new *machzor*, he has been "happy to leave in a lot of particular things as long as we have on the other page more humanistic or theology of action, human adequacy, however you want to put it….it's not about a [single] theology; it's about different theological choices." In other words, the particularism or expressions of chosenness are not problematic as long as we encourage members of our congregations to consider multiple viewpoints and we give them an opportunity to avoid the particularism if that is what resonates with them.

Rabbi Elyse Frishman also spoke to the highly particularistic nature of our liturgy. However, she also carefully and explicitly distinguished between particularism and exclusivity. From her point of view, particularism is acceptable but exclusivity is not. Frishman, like Goldberg, also pointed to the alternative readings as a tool to help combat potential difficulties with particularism. "It's important for us to affirm our Jewishness, but the value of the pieces on the left hand page and of commentary [is] that [they] gave us an opportunity to explore a little bit [some] different ideas."

Rabbi/Dr. Sarason's comments echo these ideas of both Rabbi Goldberg and Rabbi Frishman in that he, too, reads liturgical language figuratively. He goes one step further to assert that the reason behind his approach is that, by its very nature, "all God-talk is figurative." The challenge when it comes to liturgy, Sarason maintains, is that "We're not used to thinking metaphorically unless the language is clearly marked out as poetry and metaphor, and that's why the translation needs to be a little more poetical

too—to force people away from literal thinking." Furthermore, he is adamant in his view that the particularism of a Jewish service is important because "you are welcoming people to a *Jewish* service; it's not 'to whom it may concern.'"

Specifically in reference to the liturgy of *Mishkan T'filah*, Rabbi Peter Knobel described the need for a balancing act to "make sure that we didn't give up on the old Reform notion [that said Judaism was exclusively a religion] but that we were very much into Peoplehood, we were into Zionism," yet those concerns were not necessarily addressed in "the specific language of chosenness." Acknowledging the particularistic nature of much of Jewish liturgy, Knobel noted that the goal of *Mishkan T'filah* was to "produce a *siddur* that was as faithful to the *matbeah tfilah* as we could [get], with alternative materials which would speak to a wide variety of Jews." Furthermore, Knobel asserted, "As people actually pray a prayer book, they don't really pay that much attention to the words." Thus, providing multiple theologies on one page allows the people who are praying to explore different options and, perhaps, to pay more attention to the words.

Although the original ideal plan for *Mishkan T'filah* was "to take the 'traditional siddur' and go through every single prayer and ask what could be included and what could be excluded within the context of the Reform Movement," Knobel admitted that this ultimately was too big of a project.

By examining in *Mishkan T'filah* the three liturgical examples of chosenness traced through other Reform prayer books in Chapter Two alongside the comments of the rabbis interviewed, we can get a better understanding of the nature of the current conversation about chosenness in American Reform Judaism.

Birkhot Hashachar

Similar to the 1975 prayer book *Gates of Prayer*, the 2007 *Mishkan T'filah*, includes *sh'asani Yisrael* in Hebrew and "who has made me a Jew" in English as the third to last blessing in the *nisim b'chol yom* section of *birkhot hashachar*. This blessing, thanking God for making me a Jew, follows the blessing that thanks God for making me *btzelem Elohim*, in the image of God, and the blessing *sh'asani ben/bat chorin*, who has made me free. These three blessings, as a unit, precede the final two blessings, *ozer Yisrael bigvurah*, who girds Israel with strength, and *oteir Yisrael b'tifarah*, who crowns Israel with splendor.

Additionally, the left side of the page where these blessings are printed is an interpretive reading that repeats the trope "I am a Jew because…" Thus, we see a reintroduction of the chosenness idea but in a positive affirmation of identity instead of a negative and comparative one.

Mishkan T'filah editor Rabbi Elyse Frishman explained the reorganization of these blessings. The traditional order follows the progression of what one does upon waking up. However, since very few people in the Reform Movement are reciting these blessings in the home upon waking in the morning,

> We took the last page of what we call the 'identity blessings' and we wanted the first one to be early on because we wanted it to be very clear from the beginning that this is a Jewish prayer. But we took the rest of the identity blessings and put them on the last page so that we ended with that strength of "this is who we are." And of course it goes right into *la'asok b'divrei Torah*. So that was a very careful and thoughtful framing.[83]

[83] Dr. Sarason notes that in the Sefardic rite (and the Hasidic rite that follows it), the identity blessings are at the end, after all the blessings about getting up in the morning. In the Ashkenazic rite, the identity blessings follow immediately upon the first one. Mishkan T'filah kept the Sefardic order but it moves the blessings for girding ones loins and putting on one's head covering to the end, to conclude the series with references to Israel's strength and glory.

As a result, we can further understand the importance of asserting our unique or particular identity as Jews. As Sarason stated, "I think *sh'asani Yisrael* is something important to say. *Sh'lo asani goy*, that's offensive. But affirming that it's part of our identity—[that's] like Mel Brooks, 'It's good to be the Jew.'"

As a movement we continue to reject the language that suggests superiority over other peoples but we affirm the uniqueness of being Jewish.

Torah Blessing

Although the Torah blessings are a liturgical expression of chosenness that the Reform Movement has always maintained, we do find something new and different in *Mishkan T'filah*. On the right side of the page, which typically includes the more traditional language of a prayer, we find *asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim* along with the translation "who has chosen us from among the peoples and given us the Torah." The translation differs from *Gates of Prayer* by using "and given us" instead of "by giving us" Torah. However, the more significant observation is the alternative blessings found on the left side of the page.

On the left side of the page, typically the place for alternative prayers that reflect multiple different theologies, there are two alternatives to the traditional Torah blessing. Both are entirely in English. The first option reads:

> Holy One of Blessing,
> Your presence fills creation.
> You have enlightened this path with the wisdom of Torah,
> Giving it to the Jewish people
> As their particular way.
> Blessed are You, Merciful One,
> Who gives this Torah to the Jewish people.

The second alternative:

> Holy One of Blessing,
> Your Presence fills creation.
> This Torah is a teaching of truth,
> Whole and balanced,
> And from it comes eternal life
> For the people who embrace it.
> Blessed are You, Merciful One,
> Who gives this Torah to the Jewish people.

The inclusion of these alternatives points to a different challenge that faces Reform Judaism. Instead of a concern over the language of the liturgy, there is a concern over who is participating in services. Confirmed by Frishman, these blessings provide options for non-Jews who might be participating in the Torah service. As more and more interfaith families comprise our congregations, more and more non-Jewish parents seek to celebrate bar and bat mitzvah with their children. These alternative blessings provide an authentic opportunity for that experience: a non-Jew does not need to recite words expressing that he or she has been chosen; instead, this alternative blessing helps eliminate a sense of exclusivity and elitism that comes with the traditional text. At the same time, there is not a perceived need to eliminate the sense of chosenness articulated by one who is invited to recite the traditional Torah blessing. As Rabbi Hara Person described it, "It's about 'we've made a choice and you've made a choice and we're sort of in this together.' *Bachar banu* feels more about the covenantal relationship which doesn't feel 'better than;' it just feels unique." Rabbi Peter Knobel expressed similar sentiments: "The liturgical text of *asher bachar banu* doesn't bother me in any particular way and I don't think that when people use [these words] they think very much about them."

Rabbi Frishman explained a sense of boundaries:

> [When] non-Jewish family members come up on the *bimah*, they recite this blessing. I explain that I wouldn't have them say the Hebrew even in translation because it says "I"; who has chosen "me"; and "I" am not yet Jewish so it's like communion, you wouldn't do that. On the other hand, when we take the Torah out of the ark and I hand it to a parent who is then going to pass it to the child, I don't hand it to the non-Jewish parent; I hand it to the Jewish parent. Now I do talk about how in this blended family there are different traditions and their family has chosen a particular path for their child but still I think that if the parent didn't convert, I think that's a boundary…It's not a question of they're my family, it's a question of covenant related to the Torah and being part of the Jewish people. The bar mitzvah isn't about the bar mitzvah family; it's about the Jewish people. So there are lots of things that I wrestle with….that's our identity.

In the eyes of the rabbis interviewed, there is a difference between the expression of chosenness found in the Torah blessings and the expression of chosenness found elsewhere in the liturgy. Perhaps many Reform rabbis making liturgical decisions over the years shared this view, because the traditional text of the Torah blessing has always been included. At the same time, this liturgical example has become a question about boundaries of participation in our synagogues. *Asher bachar banu* is not an expression of chosenness that expresses superiority, and it is usually an individual or a small group who is asked to recite it. In accepting the responsibility to recite this blessing, the individual or small group also *chooses* to be part of the Chosen People. For all these reasons, the Torah blessing has been a liturgical expression of chosenness that the Reform Movement has always maintained.

Aleinu

When it comes to *Aleinu*, *Mishkan T'filah* provides several options. These options exist both for the first and second parts of *Aleinu*. Interestingly, the first option provided is the Hebrew substitution reflected in so many previous *siddurim*: the text from the

second, more universal paragraph inserted into the place of the שלא עשנו phrases. The second option provided is the original text, with the consolidated and incomplete English translation also found with the original text in *Gates of Prayer*. The third option is equivalent in its Hebrew text to Service IV in *Gates of Prayer* (שבחר-בנו ליחד את וקרבנו שמו להמליך מלכותו). However, the English rendition is different. It more closely (though not exactly) reflects the words of the Hebrew:

> Let us now praise the Sovereign of the universe, and proclaim the greatness of the Creator whose unity we are charged to declare: whose realm it is our purpose to uphold. Therefore we bow in awe and thanksgiving before the One who is Sovereign over all, the Holy and Blessed One.

The fourth option in *Mishkan T'filah* for this first section of *Aleinu* is the "Let us adore" text from *UPB.*

After the page turn, there are also options for the rest of *Aleinu*. These include the traditional text, an abbreviated text, and the English reading by David Phillipson that has found such a permanent place in our Reform liturgy, "May the time not be distant…"

A good summary of the reason for so many options comes from Rabbi Elyse Frishman: "Congregations were all over the place with this prayer." The inclusion of so many options reflects this phenomenon. Yet the universal version of *Aleinu* is prioritized at the top of the page. Frishman explained, "We decided that we would put the universal one first to really make a statement…it wasn't secondary to be universal." Rabbi Peter Knobel corroborated this approach. "No matter which one you choose to use, universalism is an important principle within the Jewish people—or at least Reform Judaism." At the same time, Knobel noted, "a large number of congregations were using

the more traditional version of *Aleinu*." Thus, the traditional version is also prioritized on the first page of options.

Rabbi Janet Marder described that the "goal is to cultivate Jewish distinctiveness without disparaging other people or [to promote a] sense of hostility or elitism; [Rather], a sense of distinctive purpose in the world." Therefore, multiple versions are provided in order to promote this sense.

In creating the *machzor, Mishkan Hanefesh,* the rabbis who are part of that editorial team also commented on *Aleinu*. In terms of Rosh Hashanah, the origin of *Aleinu,* Rabbi Goldberg described that the division of the shofar service into three parts scattered through the service allows "even a *chevruta*-style conversation about the *Aleinu* fairly early on in the service. It's a different dynamic that I hope people will take advantage of." Multiple versions exist in the *machzor* as well.

In the most recent draft of the Rosh Hashanah morning service for *Mishkan Hanefesh* (June 2014), the traditional version of *Aleinu* is prioritized on the right side of the page with a non-literal English translation:

> who has made us unique within the human family with a destiny all of our own.[84]

The left side of the page contains two alternatives. The first is the same as the prioritized universalistic option on the top of the right page in *Mishkan T'filah*. However, the second option on the left hand side of the *Mishkan Hanefesh* page is completely new:

> *Shehu asanu k'shomrei ha'adama,*
> *V'hu samanu kishlichei haTora;*
> *Shehu sam chayeinu itam,*
> *V'goraleinu im kol haolam.*

The English translation of this completely universalistic version reads:

[84] DRAFT of *Mishkan Hanefesh,* Rosh Hashanah morning, page 96 of the PDF.

> Who trusts us to be guardians of the Earth and messengers of Torah; who gives us a shared destiny with all human beings and binds our lives to theirs.

Ultimately, *Aleinu* is the source of a lot of discussion and disagreement. While some have no trouble translating the *sh'lo asanu* phrases through a particular but not exclusivist lens, others prefer to change the language in favor of a more universal approach. A lack of unity in opinion suggests neither a complete acceptance nor a complete rejection. As a result, we find multiple options in both *Mishkan T'filah* and *Mishkan Hanefesh*.

In addition to questions about defining chosenness and liturgical expressions of chosenness, the interviews of these rabbis also focused on what they felt to be the ongoing relevance of chosenness to Jewish identity and if—and how—we should approach the subject moving forward.

Rabbi Frishman offered that she speaks regularly and publically about how she rejects elitism and exclusivity:

> I try to get the message out there as much as I can so that our congregation becomes known as a place that is going to deepen your Jewish identity but not to the exclusivity of other people.

Additionally, Rabbi Frishman repeatedly expressed her strong feelings that Judaism is particular and should be particular:

> I honestly don't understand the concept of universal identity. In every other way we define ourselves…All of us need to figure out who we are, but we are something…I believe that Judaism is more than a religion; I'm Kaplanian in that sense. It is a total way of being. And of course it's particular. But again, I don't think that's elitist… *Hachnasat orchim* means that you look into someone's eyes and you see them for who they are. You don't pretend that you are all the same. But when you see

> someone for who they are and you want to engage with them, you figure out how to do that.

Rabbi Knobel emphasized the mission of the Jews and their responsibility to bring ethical monotheism to the world. He also acknowledged the tendency we as Jews—and the world in the larger sense—have to hold Israel to a different standard than anyone else. This tendency and this approach to Israel was, in Knobel's eyes, another aspect of chosenness. However, he also challenged the notion of calling it chosenness:

> I think that the whole question of chosenness is largely irrelevant to people and doesn't add anything to the discussion at the moment of what our role is as Jews….it seems that there are much more important things to talk about than to talk about chosenness.

At the same time, in reference to the teaching of the concept, Knobel expressed a different view:

> If we want to [draw] people in to something meaningful, then you have to have something that makes you distinct from everybody else and therefore chosenness, if rightly framed, can be that.

Rabbi Sarason's comments suggested something similar in that the concept might be more important than the term:

> I am a believer in Jewish particularism …The outright language of chosenness is not exactly something I would use…but…I believe very strongly in the importance of Jewish collective existence not just as a matter of family…Like Rabbi Shelley Zimmerman said in his inaugural address back in 1996, once upon a time the rabbinic task was to Americanize the Jews; now the task is to Judaize the Americans.

Rabbi Janet Marder expressed that, as Jews, it is important to maintain a sense of purpose in the world and chosenness might be the venue through which we find that.

Rabbi Hara Person continued to focus on being a choosing people:

> We choose to live in a certain way; we choose to act in a certain way; we choose to make choices this way and not that way; we choose to be intentional about how we do certain things—ethical about the way we do certain things…[I] try to find something that's comfortable and feels inclusive because it's this weird fine line I feel we walk as Reform rabbis. We're Jews. We're not apologetic about it and that's who we are and that's what our institutions are, and then on the other hand, we want to be welcoming without excluding people who are there for all the right reasons even if they're not Jews.

In order to achieve this sense of unapologetic assertion of identity without excluding people, Person points to compassion as the key component of our existence.

Despite varied definitions of chosenness and broad ideas of where chosenness fits into Jewish identity in the twenty-first century, the rabbis interviewed all believe that teaching some idea of chosenness is important to the future of the Jewish people.

Rabbi Goldberg believes that "as long as it's taught in the context of 'this is what people do,'" we need to teach chosenness because it is a way in which we can help people "grow in faith development and awareness…to build something stronger." The challenge, he notes, is that "grown-ups are very sloppy thinkers."

Rabbi Person believes in a similar challenge:

> On a superficial level, people think they know what it means…Either people feel very proud of it [or] on the other hand, people reject it, so it's challenging; it's a very complicated issue and it's easy to just love it or reject it without really understanding it.

The result of studying it, she feels, is that it becomes easier "to understand and find interpretive ways to live with it comfortably." Person has taught the subject in a

sermon about choosing versus chosenness and she also has introduced it in the context of bar/bat mitzvah.

Rabbi Knobel ties the teaching of chosenness back to his definition of mission:

> I personally do [think we should continue to teach some sort of idea of chosenness]. I would like to argue that in some sense we are distinct and unique and that we have an important mission to perform and that without going through the whole theological question of what does it mean to be chosen, I would say that the concept at least as a metaphor is a worthwhile concept to hold on to.

Rabbi Marder emphasizes the importance of teaching about chosenness by considering the consequences of not teaching it:

> If we don't teach about it or if we take it out of the liturgy, it will continually be misunderstood. How does one maintain a sense of self-love and pride in Jewish identity without making comparisons to non-Jews; we must cultivate particular understanding, a particular sense of family loyalty and family identity and shared purpose without casting aspersions on the identity of others. Nothing should be taught that disparages another religion or the absence of religion and there is a way to teach Judaism without doing that.

Rabbi Sarason recognizes the importance of teaching the concept of chosenness in a retranslated way that is rooted in who we are as Jews:

> I think we have to [teach it] in terms of having a better sense of who we are; we have to know where we came from; I think it's a concept that can be taught historically-descriptively for sure.

Rabbi Frishman chooses to introduce an intentional discussion surrounding the words of *asher bachar banu* at the moment of becoming bar/bat mitzvah. In so doing, she uses a metaphor about a mountain with multiple paths:

> The image I use comes from Rabbi James Rosenberg, now retired, [who] used to be in Barrington, RI. And he had this idea that you come to a mountain and you want to climb the mountain in order to reach something higher. So I like that image and I expanded it a little bit to suggest that there is more than one path at the bottom of the mountain. And depending upon what the path is, you need different skills and abilities and experience. So for example, if you are climbing Everest, you go the north face or you go [to] the side [and] you have to be prepared for different kinds of terrain and you need different kinds of equipment. So, [in] the same way, religious paths require different preparation. The Jewish path is very particular, you get to the bottom and there is a pack of people—because we travel in packs—and I'm your tour guide. I say, "Hey, I'm Rabbi Frishman, what's your name?" and you say "My name is Leah" and I say "Oh, is that also your Jewish name?" and you go "Well, yeah it is, but I also have a middle name and it's Miriam" and I go "Cool, do you know who you're named after" and we learn a little bit about your ancestry and then I say "So Leah, do you know a little bit about Jewish history, Jewish culture, Hebrew, ethics?" and you say "Yes, no, or whatever" and at a certain point I say, "Okay, you know enough to start climbing." And we have tons of food because we always have tons of food. So the moment you start to climb is your bar or bat mitzvah. And that's what I say to families: when you drop out basically it's like you learned how to ski but you never went down the mountain—what fun is that? So as we climb, some of us want to go higher than others, some of us get to a certain lookout point and we are satisfied—that's good enough for us. Sometimes, other groups come up and join us—they're moving a little faster. Sometimes, someone says, you know what, this isn't my path I want to go down but I still want to climb the mountain I just want to try a different path—that's conversion. They can't go across the mountain; they have to go down, learn new skills, and start all over again. Ultimately, all those paths merge at the top, and that's the ultimate universal place. So the idea is that we need our particular route to get us to actually really be together. And when we pretend that religion doesn't matter, we end up being in a place of nothing.

Each rabbi's complete confidence that we should be teaching the concept of chosenness in some way leads to the question of how. How do we teach chosenness? At what age? Using which definitions? How do we avoid misconceptions and misunderstandings?

Chapter Four
Teaching Chosenness

One way to display knowledge of a topic is to teach it. Teaching is also an opportunity to turn theory into practice. Therefore, Chapter Four of this thesis will be comprised of three lesson plans that can be used in order to teach chosenness. These lesson plans are designed to be age- and developmental stage-appropriate for three different audiences of people.

The first lesson is designed as an adult education piece. Using the liturgical expression of chosenness found in the text of *birkhot hashachar*, the idea for this lesson is grounded in the assumption that an adult learner is ready to explore both the notions of being chosen and of choosing to be a Jew.

The second lesson is designed as a family education program to be conducted at a sixth-grade family education session or retreat at the moment when students receive their bar or bat mitzvah Torah portion. Using the liturgical expression of chosenness found in the text of the Torah blessing, the idea for this lesson is grounded in the assumption that sixth-grade students and their families are at a pivotal moment in their lives as they consider what Judaism means to them and what it means to choose.

The third lesson is designed for teenagers. Using the liturgical expression of chosenness found in the text of *Aleinu,* the idea for this lesson is grounded in the assumption that teenagers are at a point where they seek to understand the tradition they are a part of and they want the agency to express themselves in their lives.

Lesson One: Adult Education

Enduring Understandings:

- Chosenness is both a prize and a price for a Jew
- There are multiple ways that we might understand the concept of chosenness

Core Concept:

Within the diversity of Israel is the unity of Israel.

Essential Questions:

- In what ways are we God's chosen people and in what ways are we God's choosing people?
- What can we add to the conversation about liturgy and chosenness?

Evidence of Understanding:

- Participants will write a commentary on the blessing *sh'asani Yisrael*
- Participants will be able to describe what it means to be a Jew

Lesson Timeline:

00:00-00:10 Set Induction
00:10-00:13 Framing
00:13-00:25 Chevruta text study
00:25-00:35 Full group discussion
00:35-00:50 Writing time
00:50-01:00 Sharing

Materials:

Chevruta study handouts
Writing implements
Pictures of diverse representation of Jews
Paper
Some form of white board or easel

Detailed Lesson Breakdown:

00:00-00:08 Set Induction

-Ask participants to make a list of "Jewish names"
→After list is made, ask participants, "What makes these names Jewish?"
-Ask participants if they remember how they might have known by sight or by name if someone was Jewish
-Point out that some of these assumptions no longer hold true
-Present participants with images of Jews from all over, using different races, ages, genders, ethnicities, dress, etc of all Jews

→not everyone is a white Ashkenazic Jew
→Jews come in all shapes and sizes

00:08-00:11 Framing

-Every Jew is a Jew by choice; we live in a free society where there are no sanctions or penalties for being a Jew or not being a Jew and there is no requirement to register yourself as a Jew
-Given this cultural context, a Jew in North America is someone who is choosing to be a Jew
-At the same time, our liturgy also suggests that it is not entirely up to us—God shaped, formed, made, created, chose, us
-Therefore, this tension creates the opportunity for a dialectic

00:11-00:25 Chevruta text study
-Introduce idea of *birkhot hashachar* and contextualize within the siddur:
→routine of waking
→thanking God for various abilities both physically and spiritually
→hone in on *sh'asani Yisrael*
-Distribute handout with commentary from My People's Prayer Book Volume 5 (excerpts from pages 125-142)
-Direct participants to break up into chevrutot and study one or two of the commentaries by responding to the following questions:
- What is the commentator saying?
- Why does the commentator feel the need to comment on this piece of the blessing?
- What is the central idea presented here?
- How do you relate (or not) to the comments made by this commentator?

00:25-00:35 Full group discussion
-Recap the chevrutot sessions by asking the following questions:
- What did you notice?
- What did you learn?
- What resonated with you?

00:35-00:50 Writing time
-Now it is our chance to add our voices to the ongoing tradition
-Suggest that participants can frame this as a letter to God about what it means to be part of Yisrael

00:50-01:00 Sharing
-Ask for volunteers to share what they wrote
-Add a sentence or two of concluding thoughts that summarize the learnings and experiences of the session

Lesson Two: Family Program

Enduring Understandings:

- Chosenness is both a prize and a price for a Jew
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah represents a choice point in the life of an individual and a family

Core Concept:

Distinctiveness is a positive attribute/trait.

Essential Questions:

What does it mean to choose?
What does it mean to choose within parameters?
How is choosing related to becoming a bar/bat mitzvah?

Evidence of Understanding:

- Participants will illustrate what it means to become a bar/bat mitzvah
- Families will select which piece of the Torah portion their bar/bat mitzvah will chant or read

Program Timeline:

00:00-00:10 Set Induction
00:10-00:17 Mountain Metaphor
00:17-00:30 Illustrating bar/bat mitzvah
00:30-00:45 The Torah Blessing
00:45-01:00 Choosing Within Parameters
01:00-01:15 Torah Portion Distribution

Materials:

Markers/crayons/colored pencils
Paper
Pens/pencils
Torah portion books
Whiteboard or large post-it note for program leader to make lists
Handout with Torah blessings

Detailed Program Breakdown:

00:00-00:10 Set Induction

-Synectics
-Have participants come up with a list of single words that finish this sentence "Choosing is…."
-Pick one thing from that list (eg. hard) and then make another list of other things that are that thing (eg. hard)
-Instruct each family to come up with one sentence summary:
"Choosing is like (something from second list) because…"
-Take a few moments to share with the group

00:10-00:20 Mountain Metaphor

-Ask students:

-What does it mean to become a bar or bat mitzvah?

-Why did your parents decide that raising you to become a bar/bat mitzvah was important? (have the opportunity here for the kids to ask their parents if they don't know the answer)

-Present to the group the metaphor of the mountain (from EF interview):

"You come to a mountain and you want to climb the mountain in order to reach something higher. There is more than one path at the bottom of the mountain. And depending upon what the path is, you need different skills and abilities and experience."

- Ask: what kinds of skills and abilities and experiences might you need to climb a mountain?

"Now let's think of these paths as different religious paths, all climbing towards something higher—something bigger than ourselves—a spiritual experience or maybe God. The Jewish path is very particular; you need a certain set of skills and knowledge in order to begin the climb."

- Ask: What specifically Jewish skills or knowledge might you need to begin the climb?

"The moment you begin the climb, that is when you become a bar or bar mitzvah. Some of us will climb higher than others and some of us will get to a nice lookout point and feel satisfied that we have climbed enough. We might encounter other people who are climbing and they might climb faster or slower than us. And remember, we have chosen a particular path—a Jewish path. There are other paths up the mountain and they all lead to the same universal place."

00:20-00:30 Illustrating bar/bat mitzvah

-Instruct students and parents to separately illustrate what becoming a bar/bat mitzvah (or their child becoming a bar/bat mitzvah) means to them

-Make sure that families have time to share with each other

00:30-00:45 The Torah Blessing

-Text study of Torah blessing (have students and/or parents read it in Hebrew and then read the translation)

→Ask participants: what is the difference between choosing and being chosen?

-Also have participants look at Kaplan's version

→What are the differences between these two versions?

→Why do you think the Reform Movement has kept the original version?

-Make the point that when one becomes bar/bat mitzvah that is the first time that they recite this blessing in the community. It is the first time you confirm a status of being different or distinctive.

→Why is it a special moment to assert your distinctiveness?

→What changes when you become a bar/bat mitzvah?

00:45-01:00 Choosing

-Ask parents to share with their children a time where the family decision was rooted in a choice made by the child

-Ask children to share with their parents a time where they made a choice and had to deal with consequences/result
-Ask families to discuss:

- What responsibilities accompanied your choices?
- What does it mean to choose to live as a Jew (as you become bar/bat mitzvah)?

01:00-01:15 Torah Portion Distribution
-Distribute Torah portions to families and make the connection that there is an element of choosing within parameters that happens here: the date and week decide the parasha but each family can choose something within the parasha that is meaningful or interesting and that can be what is chanted by the bar/bat mitzvah
→Give families a few minutes to begin reading through and discussing together (but they don't have to come to conclusions right at this moment)

Lesson Three: Teen Program

Enduring Understandings:

- Chosenness is both a prize and a price for a Jew
- There are multiple ways that we might understand the concept of chosenness

Core Concept:

We have a stake in the conversation about the meaning and version of the prayers that we offer during t'filah, and in addressing them play an active role in continuing the tradition of shaping our Judaism.

Essential Questions:

How do we understand the concept of chosenness?
How does contextualization influence our prayer decisions?
What can we contribute to the living tradition of Jewish prayer and ritual?

Evidence of Understanding:

- Students will be able to compare and contrast multiple interpretations of chosenness
- Students will be able to identify distinctions between versions of Aleinu
- Students will be able to describe their personal connection to the concept of chosenness as expressed in Aleinu

Program Timeline:

00:00-00:08 Set Induction
00:08-00:15 Particularism vs. Universalism Discussion
00:15-00:20 Introduction to Aleinu
00:20-00:30 Chevruta study of 4 versions
00:30-00:40 Recap of Chevruta
00:40-00:45 Revisit post-it notes to make a list
00:45-01:00 Write spoken word poem/version of Aleinu
01:00-01:10 Sharing
01:10-01:15 Wrap-Up

Materials:

Giant Post-It Notes
Regular sized post-it notes (for each participant)
Packet of Mishkan Tfilah copies of pages 586-587
Paper
Pencils
Computer with Projector Set up

Detailed Program Breakdown:

0:00-0:08 Set Induction

-Fluid start as participants enter the room and take a writing implement and small stack of regular size post-it notes

-Instructions posted on the door read, "Walk around the room and respond to each of the eight prompts by writing your response on a small post-it note and sticking it up on the big ones hanging around the room."
-The following prompts, each on one giant post-it note, are spread out around the room:

- What does it mean to be chosen?
- What does it mean to be unique?
- What does it mean to choose?
- What do you think of when you hear the word "universalism"?
- What do you think of when you hear the word "particularism"?
- What does it mean to be Jewish?
- How would you describe your Judaism?
- Why do we pray?
- Word association: God

00:08-00:15 Particularism vs. Universalism Discussion
-Program leader facilitates a discussion about the values and tensions between universalism and particularism using the following questions:

- What makes you different from everybody else?
- In what ways are you like everybody else?
- How are both pieces (both being alike and being different) important?
- What aspects of Judaism/being Jewish are particular or unique to being Jewish?
- What aspects of Judaism/being Jewish are universally applicable to the world?

-Program leader transitions the conversation to apply it to liturgy:

- What are some prayers in Jewish liturgy that reflect universalism?
- What are some prayers in Jewish liturgy that reflect particularism?

00:15-00:20 Introduction to Aleinu
-Program leader introduces Aleinu by providing the following information:

- Where did Aleinu come from and when
- Tracing the changes through Reform liturgy
- Translation

-Program leader draws participants' attention to *Mishkan T'filah* handout that provides all four versions of the beginning piece of Aleinu (pages 586-587) and points out that we as Reform Jews make choices and we need to be conscious of what choices we make.
-Program leader further asserts that part of making choices is knowing what we are looking at and feeling the tension that is on the page in front of us

00:20-00:30 Chevruta study of 4 versions
-Program leader instructs participants to find a chevruta partner and focus on one of the four versions of Aleinu (if time allows, they can examine more than one)
-On the handout, the following questions are listed to help direct the chevruta conversation:

- What is the main idea of this version of Aleinu?
- How is this prayer particularistic? Universal?

- Why might you consider using this version if you were leading services?
- Why might you choose not to use this version if you were leading services?

00:30-00:40 Recap of Chevruta
-Program leader reconvenes the group to discuss as a larger group the following questions in reference to the chevruta:
- What differences did you notice?
- Why do you think there are multiple versions?
- Which did you relate to most? Why?
- How did the different versions affect the way you feel about chosenness?

00:40-00:45 Revisit post-it notes to make a list
-Program leader instructs participants:
"In light of the chevruta study and our discussions, revisit the post it notes around the room taking note of what people have written. Make a list of 8-12 words or comments that stand out to you. Once you have compiled your written list, sit back down quietly."

00:45-01:00 Write spoken word poem/version of Aleinu
-Show "What it Means to Be A Jew" by Andrew Lustig as a way to introduce the idea of spoken word poetry (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJe0uqVGZJA)
-Instruct participants to circle three or four words from their list that fit best together and then use those to write a letter to their great-grandchildren explaining chosenness
-Program leader will do this too

01:00-01:10 Sharing
-Participants will have an opportunity to share their writings

01:10-01:15 Wrap-Up
-Summarize learnings and ask participants to share what they will take away from the session

Chapter Conclusion

These three lessons serve as examples of different contexts in which it is possible to extract dimensions of chosenness from this thesis and teach them to different constituencies. By doing so, we find a way to make chosenness relevant and multifaceted. This approach helps people connect to, instead of disconnect from, a complex and challenging concept that is inherently and importantly a part of Jewish identity.

Conclusion

Chosenness is an integral element of being Jewish and as such it can and should be approached, taught, and understood in such a way that it does not suggest superiority, elitism, or exclusivity.

This goal can be achieved by considering the historical context for the understanding of chosenness over time. Looking back to Tanakh and glancing across rabbinic literature and modern scholarship, we find many definitions and aspects of chosenness: mission, election, unique, special, choosing God, particular but not exclusive, plausible mystery we cannot understand, covenant, ever-changing, ongoing. This evidence suggests that the definition has changed over time and continues to be influenced by cultural context and history. Thus we can ask what will be important today that will shape the idea of chosenness for us and in the future.

One place where we see the evolution of the expression of chosenness is in the liturgy of the American Reform Movement. Through examples of liturgical expressions of chosenness, we can make inferences about the way Reform Jews making liturgical decisions approached chosenness, accepted and adapted aspects of chosenness, and wrestled with what it means to be chosen. The continued evolution of liturgy leaves room for our voices in the decision-making.

From the interviews with modern rabbis at the helm of the American Reform Movement's liturgical decision-making, we learn that some version of chosenness is a concept that still resonates with many today. Furthermore, some idea of chosenness can add value and purpose to our life. However, it is important to acknowledge that the best way to communicate the idea might be to avoid the term chosenness, as the word carries

with it a connotation that sometimes is misinterpreted. We can—and in fact must strive to— be particular without being superior. Perhaps, instead of using the word chosenness, we should instead develop the idea of particularism so that it might encompass the idea of being different, special, distinctive or unique, balanced with a commitment to some form of universalism. How can the Jewish people be both unique and alike? This is a question born with Abraham and Sarah, an immortal, enduring and powerful question.

Eliminating all ideas of chosenness or particularism in Judaism would jeopardize a core part of what it means to be Jewish. Yet we have an obligation to be sensitive and thoughtful about how we teach the idea and preserve it. We can and should teach chosenness without elitism or exclusivity. We can teach chosenness as an aspect of Jewish particularism that makes it worthwhile to be Jewish. After all, if there wasn't something special, different, particular, or unique about being Jewish, why would we make the choice?

Appendix: Interview Transcripts

Interview with Rabbi Peter Knobel
September 19th, 2014

LC: How would you define the concept of chosenness in Judaism?
PK: Well I mean. If it's a historical question it's one thing; if it's a question of how I was raised in the context…I'm a lifer when it comes to Reform Judaism…I grew up in our movement, I have been part of our movement since I was a little kid and my own rabbis defined chosenness as that we had a special responsibility to be an exemplar, a light unto the nations, to bring a message to the world; didn't mean we were better; just meant we had a special mission—in my days it was the mission of Reform Judaism—and so what we needed to do was we needed to and of course I grew up in the era of "prophetic Judaism" which I am still deeply committed to—and so it was bringing the message of the prophets—of course which I now know was the selective message of the prophets to bear but it was justice and equality and concern for the weakest members of society and so forth and so on. And we were supposed to be exemplars of that so that the world could learn to do that but that didn't mean we were better than anyone else.

LC: and you mentioned if you were answering historically you would say something different

PK: I think historically and I again I think there is a long history to the notion. For example, in the Kaballah there is a kind of sense that Jews have different souls than other people (although I am no expert in the Kabballah). And there is—if you read through—chosenness became very very important in periods of persecution for Jews so it really meant that while we were being knocked down so to speak that God really loved us and we had a special place in God's heart and it was because sometimes we had failed and sometimes it was the wickedness of the other nations and ultimately we were God's am segula—treasured people—and all of the phrases that we know but by the time—one of the concerns of course with the development of chosenness was that Jews were thought of us thinking about themselves as better than anybody else and so then there was this whole notion of changing the notion of chosenness to a notion of a special responsibility and there was some sense that chosenness might be even be a source of antisemitism and of course in the most extreme form Mordecai Kaplan drops the whole concept of chosenness partly based just on theology but also partly based I think on his concern for the integration of Jews into modern society and modern culture.

LC: Yeah and those are pieces that I have certainly uncovered as I wrote the framing first chapter of this which leads me to ask you—what would you say either historically or individually—you've alluded to a little—what does it mean to be a chosen people right now in 2014?

PK: Well again, I am still deeply committed to this notion that we Jews have a mission. That we are supposed to bring—again an old term, "ethical monotheism"—you can see I am an old line Reform Jew—but to bring really that message of the prophets—that

concern for social justice, that concern for now what we call tikkun olam—to the world and that Jews are supposed to have that responsibility in terms of doing. Now of course it becomes problematic because, for example, we have a tendency and the world has a tendency to hold Israel to a different standard than anybody else. So if you are supposed to be a chosen people and if chosenness is about your attempt to behave in a certain kind of way then you are held to a different standard. I don't think I would preach a sermon on chosenness today. I think in many ways it is an out-moded concept because it is subject to misunderstanding. The other problem is a theological problem and it is a theological problem how do you understand the nature of God but at the same time I would say that I remain committed to that mission of Israel concept—and I probably wouldn't use ethical monotheism today as a _____ but I am committed to the notion that Judaism is at its core about social justice and tikkun olam etc etc.

LC: What would you say has changed that lead you to—you said you probably wouldn't deliver a sermon about chosenness today—what I heard was that maybe a little while ago you would have—or maybe not—so you can correct me there—but what would you say has changed in terms of where we….

PK: I just think that the whole question of chosenness is largely irrelevant to people and doesn't add anything to the discussion at the moment of what our role is as Jews. The second thing is that I really believe that the move towards spirituality—which I was very much a part of—has now much more moved into a kind of individualism, a kind of "what can Judaism do for me?", a kind of self-help notion of Judaism and so I don't think that talking about chosenness and I think that partly because people are not theological today we don't have a really good sense of what we mean by God—people talk about 'God concepts' rather than God; we don't have any important theologians at the moment since really quite frankly Gene Borowitz who has probably been the most important figure in the late 20th century and we really haven't had many people that replaced Buber and Rosenzweig and Levinas has become you know—but most people can't read Levinas—so it really turns into a question of ethics—so in that regard it seems to me that there are much more important things to talk about than to talk about chosenness. And I think in the past I would have talked about chosenness because one of the things that was important in my era was to be an ambassador to the non-Jew and so how do you explain yourself to the non-Jew and how do we understand ourselves in terms of the concept of chosenness but it just wouldn't occur to me to talk about chosenness qua chosenness. I would talk about to be an or l'goyim, an am kadosh, mamlechet kohanim, you know all of those kinds of concepts—which I think buy into chosenness—but chosenness in and of its self. On the other hand, the liturgical text of asher bachar banu doesn't bother me in any particular way and I don't think that when people use them they think very much about them.

LC:That's actually a really great way to sort of the next part of the conversation about ligurgy. The first question I have for you is a general description of how you would describe the tension between particularism and universalism in our liturgy.

PK: Well I think that the most interesting piece of putting together MT was the ongoing discussion—because we put it through innumerable versions which we sought the feedback of people—and so we would get things like "there's not enough Israel in there" and "There's not enough social justice in there" and so it was really a fairly clear balancing act to make sure that we didn't give up on the old Reform notion but that we were very much into Peoplehood, we were into Zionism, and that was not necessarily, however, the specific language of chosenness. There was never a debate as to whether—as in the old Union Prayer Book—whether asher bachar banu should be in the Kiddush or not. Why is it out of the Kiddush and Rick Sarason can tell you much better than I…

LC: oh that's funny he said to ask you!

PK: I would say that there are two versions: one is that there was a printer's error and the second version is that it was deliberately left out by whoever it was—either the printer or the editor; I don't think we have ever been able to sort that out.

LC: Okay.

PK: I mean maybe somewhere deep in the Archives someplace but I don't think they kept the kind of records when they created UPB as we kept when we created MT. Over the last couple of years I have turned over huge numbers of my papers—I have a whole two boxes of files and tapes from the studies we did which I've got to get over to the Archives and I'm hoping at some point Elyse Frishman will turn over her papers. But there were never—I do not remember in all of the years that I have worked on the liturgy—and this goes back basically—MT took about two decades of my life—now it wasn't all MT but leading up to it and its development. I cannot remember anyone delivering a paper about chosenness. I cannot remember a specific discussion of chosenness qua chosenness. What we were looking to try to do was to produce a siddur that was as faithful to the matbeah tfilah as we could with alternative materials which would speak to a wide variety of Jews. So, for example, we had the Sheldon Har test. Sheldon Har sadly had a daughter who was killed in an automobile accident. His wife had cancer. So he wanted a theology that was much more naturalistic let us say. So we used to call it the Sheldon Har test. But there were others who wanted a very traditionalist theology. So if you go through MT, the attempt was to provide on the same page multiple theologies. We didn't always succeed. But it was a clear rejection of the 1974 G of P which decided to do consistent theologies as an anthology. It was done for two reasons—one was because we didn't think it was liturgically effective and secondly because most people didn't get it. Except, perhaps, the one theology in there which never mentioned God in English. It was basically a rhinesean response. But there was the service for those who were alienated—it would say in the prayer book—we know you are alienated from Shabbat so it's great you are here at Shabbat services. We believed in those days that the problem of prayer and the problem of service attendance was the problem of theology and what we ultimately learned was that that was not largely a factor and that largely the problem was the question of what was happening within the context of the service—not necessarily the words that were being said. So you can go to a service today that uses MT and it is deadly. You can go to a service that doesn't use MT that is alive. You can go to a place that uses MT in a very

creative way and you want to come to services. You go to another place that uses it and you want to go to sleep. And I think that as people actually pray a prayer book—except if they do it individually—they don't really pay that much attention to the words. So if you were to ask somebody who wasn't really knowledgeable, "so what was the content of ma'ariv aravim," I think they would have a great deal of difficulty telling you. If you said to somebody, "so what does the blessing before and after the Torah say about who we are?" they would have some difficulty; even if they were able to say "it was God gave us the Torah." So now unpack that or think about that. I think rabbis think about it when we talk about what is the role of the non-Jew in the service—so what can a non-Jew do? Can a non-Jew do a prayer which is "God commanded us to perform this mitzvah" so the question is can a non-Jew do the candle lighting blessings, can a non-Jew have an aliyah—and there's an ongoing debate; as much as we've tried to standardize that, we've never been successful because rabbis are all entrepreneurs anyway. [laughter] And also respond to the issues to some extent within our own congregations. So if you are at a small congregation in the south where 80% of your congregation is intermarried, and it's the non-Jewish spouse who is keeping the congregation alive because they do all the work, you are going to have a different view than if you are in the middle of Manhattan.

LC: Right. Absolutely. So I guess the question that I want to ask about liturgical decisions—in general, how some of those were made. But specifically, one of the main focuses of what I look at in my thesis is going to be examples of liturgical expressions of chosenness that the Reform Movement has kept, has taken out, and is still wrestling with. So first, I guess I would ask what your suggestions would be about examples and then I will also share what I was thinking.

PK: I must say that depending on how you understand it, a number of the references to Israel that were left out in previous versions were brought back in. Now, I'm not sure that they were brought back in, in terms of chosenness.

[phone rings; brief interruption]

PK: I don't know…they were brought back in because of particularism and because of a commitment to Zionism. There was a sense that we wanted to be sure that there was other than sort of a general ethic we wanted to say that were are a people; that there are/were practices –specific Jewish practices that we were committed to even if we would interpret them in some kind of ethical or spiritual way. But largely—I mean what I had wanted to do which turned out that we couldn't do was a theoretical project which was to take—and I am going to use the word in quotation marks—"the traditional siddur"—and go through every single prayer and ask what could be included and what could be excluded within the context of the Reform Movement. For example, what about the angelology in the kiddusha—which I happen to like—but part of the ongoing debate within at least the rabbinate was could our people deal with metaphor. For some reason, either people really—or rabbis think that people when it comes to synagogue; when it comes to Judaism—cannot deal with metaphor even though they can deal with metaphor in everything else. For example, if you look at the rabbi's manual and you look at the sheva brachot, and it says "b'gan eden mi kedem." Now some of us wanted to translate it

Garden of Eden. Now ultimately it doesn't translate it that way because—my God—people might actually believe that we believe Adam and Eve were real people! Now that's such bologna but that was one of the many arguments I lost over the years. The question ultimately becomes as you look at MT, we were committed to something called "faithful translation" but now if you take a look at the prayer for the State of Israel and see the way we translated that, it is hard to say that's a faithful translation. Now we can argue about how that happened and some things happened by happenstance..we got to a point where we were doing a lot of re-translating and we got to a point where basically Eric Yoffie and others said, get the damn prayer book out and so we ran out of a certain amount of time but interestingly at least is that no one sort of complained about that translation. You'll also notice for some strange reason there is no Tisha b'Av service in there. Now I'm not sure why. When somebody asked me why there isn't a Tisha b'Av service there I said "Of course there's a Tisha b'Av service in there!" but I went to look for it and couldn't find it because it isn't in there. Now I remember any conversation in which that was a specific decision; that doesn't mean there wasn't one but I don't remember. On the other hand, if you tak ea look at the tekes—I wouldn't say it's really a service but the tekes for Yom Ha'Atzmaut—Kinnert and Karen took the declaration of independence and turned it into kitvei kodesh. And took the menorah which is the symbol of sovereignty and rekindled the menorah. Now I can't think of a much more particularistic ceremony than that one. So these were the kinds of questions we were balancing.

LC: Aleinu is going to be one of the main focuses of my thesis. And honestly the interest to look into some of this came from discussions I have had with classmates, some who refuse to say any version of it in t'filah which

[a joint "Let us adore" recitation happened in jest here]

Obviously there are four different options so I am curious to know first how there got to be four versions, how they were organized in the way in which they were and any discussion that happened around it, assuming on my part that Aleinu is one of the more controversial pieces of liturgy when we are talking about chosenness.

PK: Actually, at the end of the process, there was a gang of 5 that was myself, Bernard Mehlman, Larry Hoffman, Elaine Zecher, and Elyse Frishman. When it came to Aleinu, we knew that a large number of congregations were using a more traditional version of Aleinu, however there were others who were still committed to a more universalistic [version]. Originally, meaning before the book was published, it was the Aleinu l'shabeiach version that was listed as number one but Bernard strongly suggested that we wanted not to de-emphasize our universalism and therefore the Aleinu that is first is the more universalistic one and it was placed first as a way of saying "no matter which one you choose to use, universalism is an important principle within the Jewish people—or at least Reform Judaism." So that was a conscious decision and to some extent—I think Let Us Adore is even in there if I recall

LC: It is.

PK: And again, some of it was, I would argue, nostalgia, but some of it was—that is still a version being used especially in the south and in other places. If you take a look at m'chayei metim…and this isn't about chosenness but you'll note—there were some of us who wanted to restore the metaphor of m'chayei meitim; some of us thought it was a *great* metaphor and a very important one. There were others who said that the defining element of the Reform Movement was the rejection of resurrection. We tried everything in terms of various versions of MT—one version is on the right, one version is on the left—it is the only place in the whole MT where you have the parenthesis. And it was because we found ourselves very much divided with a strong element wanting m'chayei meitim and a strong element rejecting it. I must say, although I have not been to a Reform service since MT has been published where m'chayei meitim is used. Now I don't know what's happening in colleges or whatever but I mean I've never heard it used in a Reform service.

LC: Here [at HUC Cinci]you will hear some people using it but the service leader doesn't usually use it. Interestingly, at my pulpit in Kokomo, they were using a very early draft that only had meitim……to me it's a very interesting debate to have taken place.

PK:Yeah very interesting and very important. Look, it was very clear what was in and what was out in UPB; especially because of the Pittsburgh Platform and even to some extent Cohon's. By the time we got to 1974 and published Gates of Prayer, again, there were certain clarities. By the time we got to MT, you already had the 1999 Pittsburgh Platform which repealed, in my view, 1885. And so the choices were no longer clear. Could we put back the sacrifices? Could we put back the concept of a personal messiah? All of those were questions that couldn't be answered based on simply the fact that you had a platform which ruled certain things out. Then you had the Miami platform on Zionism which is a *radical* theological doctrine which says that Israel—the restoration of Israel—is a necessary condition for the redemption of the world which places us in the most traditionalist camp. I wrote a paper a few years ago on Israel and our liturgy and the whole question of can we—for example, in some cases you have the ya'aleh v'yavo. In some cases you have the Kiddush—so what is Yom Ha'atzmaut? Is it one of the shalsoh regalim? Is it modeled on that or is it modeled on Chanukah and Purim? And we're not settled on it—prayerbooks across the world. And then of course you have what Karen and Kinnert did in terms of the Yom Ha'atzmaut service [in MT]. So particularism comes back in a very strong way but I don't know whether that is chosenness or not. It is to say that we are a people which means we are different from all other people; we have a land…..and to some extent isn't that what Aleinu says? Aleinu says God has singled us out; now of course then you have to come to grips with basically the whole Zionist question; what is the meaning of the re-establishment of the land; does it have theological meaning or does it not have theological meaning? All of these are very important questions; I'm not sure exactly how they all tie in to what you're doing but…

LC: Me neither but they might. And then I can ask follow up….so you mentioned a little bit the platforms. Do you view them as proscriptive in terms of making easier or more difficult different decision making? Do they hold that kind of weight would you say?

PK: Again I wrote an article a few years ago about prayerbooks and platforms; it was a whole book actually done by Dana Kaplan. The prayer books and the platforms actually come out at the same time and they represent at least the rabbinic consensus of where we are ideologically. I think that Pittsburgh was meant to be more authoritative and even perhaps Columbus was meant to be more authoritative. But by the time you get to 76 you have to remember that the San Francisco platform is a perspective and I think the 99 platform is called a statement of principles. I think that almost nobody looks at them. I think if you have someone who teaches a course in Reform Judaism then they look at them; if you ask the average Reform Jew, they would have no idea what you are talking about except if you did an adult education about it and I doubt that even rabbis look at them except for maybe homiletically purposes for certain points if they conform to their own particular view of something.

LC: So you mentioned before that chosenness doesn't really mean much to our people at this point in terms of having discussions about it; that it wouldn't necessarily be the most fruitful discussion. In general, would you say that/do you believe that we should continue to teach some sort of conceptual idea of chosenness?

PK: I personally do. I mean I would like to argue that in some sense we are distinct and unique and that we have an important mission to perform and that without going through the whole theological question of what does it mean to be chosen, iw ould say that the concept at least as a metaphor is a worthwhile concept to hold on to.

LC: What do you think we gain from doing that?

PK: What I think we gain from doing that is the notion of mission. One of the things that Christians have been able to do is talk about each person having a ministry. That word doesn't work very well and you can't translate and use it and say every person has a rabbinate. It doesn't work. So the closest word so far that I have found and again it's not a good word because it's largely been taken over by Christianity is the word mission.

LC: In what ways do you see a discussion of chosenness intersecting with the Movement's commitment to audacious hospitality and inclusion?

PK: It's an interesting question. I think if we want to [draw] people in to something meaningful, then you have to have something that makes you distinct from everybody else and therefore chosenness, if rightly framed, can be that. "Come join us in this great enterprise" but my problem today is I'm not sure the average Reform Jew sees themselves as part of a great enterprise. The average Reform Jew is looking for personal meaning, community. I don't think the average Reform Jew has a sense of commandedness. We removed the concept of what tana means from a clear philosophical concept about choosing freely to do what you must do; do or don't do anything you want.

LC: Are there any questions you think I haven't asked about chosenness that you have thoughts on that you think might be relevant.

PK: Not specifically unless there is some specific liturgical passages that you wanted to ask about a particular inclusion or a particular exclusion that you noticed that I might remember something about it.

LC: The Aleinu was one of them. The blessings before and after Torah was another one that you mentioned that there was never really a discussion; that was just in. And then candle blessings or any "god commanded us" blessings which you also touched on and if I heard correctly, the assumption is that people aren't necessarily thinking about it in that setting or frame when they are reciting it and that maybe rabbis in individual congregations, depending on the situation, are changing and adapting however they see fit but bchlal in the Movement…

PK: The other question was in Oseh Shalom the addition of Yoshvei Teivel and I think we have added it at least once and it was a major discussion about adding it to the Kaddish and the decision was not ideological in the sense that we didn't think it would be a good thing but we said since so many people know the kaddish the way it is that it would have been a liturgical mistake to change that text.

LC: Dr. Sarason suggested I should also ask you about the havdallah debate—bein Yisrael v'ami. If there was any….

PK: To the best of my knowledge there was no discussion. I think it is there.

LC: I think it is too, but it wasn't in earlier….in Gates of Prayer?

PK: It's not?

LC: I am not sure.

PK: Again, given that Israel was coming back into prayer book, from a practical basis, our sense was again, there is: are we a distinct people or are we not a distinct people? And the answer for many of us is we would like to be a distinct people although it is not clear exactly what to be a distinct people is. I mean you take a look at me—there is nothing about me—except maybe my big nose—that would say I'm Jewish. I don't wear a kippah on a regular basis, I don't wear tzitzit, I don't have a special Jewish uniform. I'm about as American as you can get, etc. etc. But on the other hand, I have a sense that we Jews have a special role to play. I see myself as part of the Jewish People. We used to have this big debate—I can't remember what the difference was anymore—of whether you were a Jewish-American or an American-Jew. There was a difference back in the 50s and 60s; I can't remember what the difference was but I do remember it was a *huge* debate because it was really a debate of particularism over universalism.

LC: The last question that I have is you already mentioned a couple of pieces that you mentioned that were related to the subject—I wrote down the Prayerbooks and Platforms

and Israel in Our Liturgy; are there other things you have written that I may have missed that would be helpful and important for me to read on the subject?

PK:
-"The Challenge of a Single Prayerbook for the Reform Movement" in Prayerbooks and Platforms.
-CCAR journal maybe---Israel and our Liturgy (contact PK if can't find it)
-Archives/copies of papers from original siddur group that dealt with some of this

-Other people: Elyse, Eliot Stevens (director of publication), Dr. Hoffman, Dr. Borowitz (but he's not well enough→RSBH instead; paper she wrote about God), Rabbi Richard Levy, Elane Zecher, Bernard Mehlman, Debbie Smilow (works at CCAR; was notetaker for MT stuff)

Interview with Rabbi Elyse Frishman
October 20th 2014

LC: The first group of questions are about chosenness and how you define it in your own work and life and involvement in the siddurim of our movement and the second group of questions are more specifically about liturgy and the way chosenness is expressed in our liturgy and then the third part is to get a sense of where are we and where do we go from here and looking ahead at what it means for our movement and our rabbis.

So the first question: how do you define the concept of chosenness in Judaism?

EF:So I know that many people understand chosenness to mean in the sense of particularism to mean that the Jews are special and often that is interpreted as better than. I don't agree with that. I do agree that we were chosen. I believe that the Torah blessing reflects that very clearly but I believe it in the context of I'm not a ballerina. I'm not wired to be a ballerina and I could have tried to become a ballerina but it would not have worked out; it was not my chosen path because it's not where my inherent abilities are. The Jewish people were chosen for a particular path. There are many paths up the mountain; the Jewish path is based on Torah. If you eliminate Torah then, in essence, there isn't a Jewish path. So chosenness means that that's what ultimately defines our direction and to become a bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah recognizes this and affirms this, therefore saying the Torah blessing publically for the first time and recognizes that it's that commitment to living Torah that makes one Jewish.

LC: You mentioned the Torah blessing as an example and I'm wondering if there are other specific examples you would look to in our siddur of expressions of chosenness.

EF: Well I think there are a number of obvious ones in the birchot hashachar in nisim b'chol yom; the references to Yisrael are very specific and sh'asani Yisrael. So those are very specific. There is also, I think, through the SH'ma section that is highly particularistic; through Mi Chamocha; sections of the Tfilah—particularly in the middle brachot. And then of course, the entire Torah service and then Aleinu also. Aleinu then includes that conclusive statement: if we do all the things we talk about doing….I think our liturgy is highly particularistic but that being said, it's not exclusive and that's the difference. One can think of chosenness as being exclusive but it's not. It's a statement of "this is how we live" and you are welcome to join this path; you are not prevented from joining this, you are welcome to, but this is how we do it.

LC: So how would you say that chosenness fits into Jewish identity in 2014, in the 21st century where we talk about the focus on universalism and people don't want to affiliate or join particular communities…how would you say it sort of fits in to where we are in the world or society?

EF: I would never ask that question. The reason I wouldn't ask that question is because we're leaders and so as a leader, as a lover of the Jewish people and of Judaism, it wouldn't occur to me that I need to ask that question. What I do want to ask is why is it

that people don't affiliate? Why is it that people feel disillusioned about their particular identities? How is it that we failed people or what have we missed that caused people to not want to connect with synagogues. That being said, I actually don't think that the Pew study indicates that American Jews don't feel Jewish; they don't feel aligned with a particular institution. They absolutely reject, I believe too, the concept of both exclusivity and elitism.

So I talk regularly and publically about how I, too, reject elitism and exclusivity. And I try to get the message out there as much as I can so that our congregation becomes known as a place that is going to deepen your Jewish identity but not to the exclusivity of other people.

(You know it's funny I was thinking about a slogan the other day—yesterday or today—which is beineinu, it's not going to go anywhere; the slogan was, if you want to choose religion, join Chabad; if you want to learn how to be Jewish, join Barnart)

I believe that Judaism is a very particular lifestyle but I also don't think it's one that closes the door on anyone else and I think we know that even through the idea of inviting people to our homes for Pesach; Pesach the most particular of Jewish rituals that defines the beginning of the Jewish story in the most real sense—who we are as a people—and what do we say? We open or doors and say anyone can join us for this.

LC: Yeah. So when you talk publically and frequently about rejecting exclusivity and elitism, do you use the word "chosenness"? Do you affirm that in a nonexclusive and elite sense or is it something that you don't explicitely mention as a concept?

EF: Asher bachar banu…It says who has chosen us. Since the prayerbook says this, on every Shabbat morning when we have a bar or bat mitzvah and it's time for the young person to offer that blessing, I introduce the blessing and I introduce that this is the moment of becoming bar or bat mitzvah; look at the translation on this page; here is how we interpret. So I address it head on but I immediately turn around the meaning of it.

The other thing is that the alternative blessings on the facing page also I think deconstruct the blessing a little bit and help to eliminate the sense of exclusivity and elitism. It defines it. So we—I—wanted those blessings in there very deliberately so that a)non Jewish family could have something to say that is meaningful but b) by turning around the perspective it opens it up and I think it's more welcoming.

LC: That's a really good segue into the liturgy and decision making piece of this because one of the things I'm really interested in is how as a movement or as an editorial committee, how the decisions were made in MT specifically maybe if you can speak a little bit more about the Torah blessing and then the other two lenses I am looking at are through Aleinu and sh'asani Yisrael—verses what we have always rejected in sh'lo asani goy. So if you could speak a little to the decisions.

EF: Sure. So let's start at the beginning of the book. It's clearly a Jewish book, right? So it's important for us to affirm our Jewishness but that's also the value of the pieces on the left hand page and of commentary that it gave us an opportunity to explore a little bit different ideas. Look, there was a great deal of controversy as we edited the book. It's still not clear to me because it is still emotionally very close how much of that controversy was ego based. Meaning Rabbi X has to have his opinion and Rabbi Y has to have her's and it can't possibly be that our opinion is worth anything. There's a lot of that that goes on between rabbis. It's what it is.

But then there were some issues of principle I think that were important and there were debates about theologically what material should be included and why or why not and there were three Rs—Elaine Zecher used to talk about—of liturgy: resurrection, redemption, and revelation. So revelation, redemption, and resurrection. And revelation isn't an issue in our book because there's no language at all that makes it so specific that we have to worry about did God give us the Torah. We still sing v'zot and we understand it metaphorically. Redemption is an issue and so we didn't change the language in Mi Chamocha-we kept it in that very neutral zone that is safe for Reform Jews. And resurrection was huge—and we ended up compromising with hakol and then hameitim in parenthesis. And that was very controversial—not for lay people—lay people were very comfortable with these things; these were controversial for rabbis.

So we did two things in nisim b'chol yom; the first was we re-organized the brachot that we recognized that the traditional order of them has to do with getting up and going through a certain litany of behavior and response but we felt that that was absolutely irrelevant; no one knows that—certainly not Reform Jews—and we don't do them at home so it's completely irrelevant. So we took all of these—with the exception of sh'asani Yisrael—we took the last page of what we call the 'identity blessings' and we wanted the first one to be early on because we wanted it to be very clear from the beginning, you know that this is a Jewish prayer. But we took the rest of the identity blessings and put them on the last page so that we ended with that strength of this is who we are. And of course it goes right into l'aasok b'divrei Torah. So that was a very careful and thoughtful framing.

The Torah blessing was really controversial and to be perfectly honest the alternative blessing was never spoken about publically as meant for non Jewish family because it would have been rejected. But I wrote it with the absolute intention of this being for non Jewish family—I just didn't tell people. And it amazes me that there is still controversy about non Jews being on the bimah even……recently…..someone asked the question "do you let non Jews touch the Torah?" I was really struck by that question. What do you think?
LC: What do I think?

EF: Yeah. What do you think.

LC: Well. I don't know. I mean I don't mind…I mean I don't like touching the Torah and kissing it and all that I find it a little bit idolatrous but

EF:But you hold the Torah, you would carry the Torah…

LC: Yeah. Yeah definitely.

EF: Do you unroll the Torah on Simchat Torah?

LC: Yup.

EF: Alright. People hold it up?

LC: Yeah.

EF: Someone not Jewish do that?

LC: I think so.

EF: So then why couldn't they touch it another time?

LC: Yeah. Right. They could.

EF: Why is it okay with you?

LC: Why is it okay with me? Because by being there they are choosing to throw their lot in so to speak with the Jewish tradition. No one's making them—I mean who knows the family dynamics—but in theory they are not being forced or coerced into being there and if it's a learning opportunity and an opportunity to become engaged and involved then it would be tragic to sort of miss that opportunity and come off as not only not welcoming but as exclusive and elite.

EF: So I wrestle with these questions all the time. I have flimsy boundaries. For example, so this blessing, obviously, non Jewish family members come up on the bimah and they recite this blessing. I wouldn't have them say the—I explain that I wouldn't have them say the Hebrew even in translation because it says "I"; who has chosen me; and "I" am not yet Jewish so it's like communion, you wouldn't do that. On the other hand, when we take the Torah out of the ark and I hand it to a parent who is then going to pass it to the child, I don't hand it to the non-Jewish parent; I hand it to the Jewish parent. Now I do talk about how in this blended family there are different traditions and their family has chosen a particular path for their child but still I think that if the parent didn't convert, I think that's a boundary. But I don't have a problem with someone who's not Jewish touching it or whatever. But I also choose there not to be—I don't choose non-Jews to do some of the Torah honors because I feel there are Jews in the room who deserve that honor and they should have it. It's not a question of they're my family, it's a question of covenant related to the Torah and being part of the Jewish people. The bar mitzvah isn't about the bar mitzvah family it's about the Jewish people. So there are lots of things that I wrestle with….that's our identity.

LC: Do you take a similar approach to, for example, the candle blessings, where it says asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu?

EF: Great question. Great question. I don't for the following reason: the whole congregation sings the blessing and the people who are lighting the candles, their back is to the congregation so no one knows. So I actually consider that to be one of the honors that is easy for a non-Jew to do. The act of lighting the candles—the actual striking the match and so on—as it is, Shabbat is already started, it's dark, so I'm not going to play halacha games—it's the singing of the blessing, the acknowledging of the experience—that's what I think the real issue is, not the actual lighting of the candle so I'm okay with that. But it's a great question. But I wouldn't have a non-Jew lead the kiddish.

LC: Also because of the "asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim" or in general because they are up in front of people more obviously…

EF: Yeah and it's all in Hebrew and my feeling is if you've gotten that far and you are choosing not to become Jewish, we should talk.

LC: And then Aleinu in terms of decisions and layout and such.

EF: Aleinu was a great conversation. This really was a fabulous series of discussions at CCAR conventions and it became very clear that there were two camps of people and so we decide that on the right hand page we would privilege two Aleinus: the traditional one and the universal one. And we decided that we would put the universal one first to really make a statement. So I will tell you, personally, we always use the traditional one. So this is a great illustration of how there was a principle here that I thought was really important to push that we wanted to make a statement that it wasn't secondary to be universal and that you can be universal in the Aleinu in this kind of summarizing statement but the traditional piece also had to be privileged. And then we ended up including four because it became evident to us that through Gates of Prayer having all these choices, congregations were all over the place with this prayer so why alienate—there was nothing negative about any of them. It just made that whole section difficult to put together.

LC: In general, we're shifting a little to the looking ahead piece. Do you believe that the idea of chosenness is important to maintain in our education and in our teaching and if so, why and how and if not, also why not?

EF: I actually want to raise another issue and that is transliteration. So the debate about transliteration is if you give it to them, they'll never learn Hebrew. Or, you want people to feel welcomed and you want prayer to be accessible to them. I fall in the latter camp and I believe very strongly that if people want to learn Hebrew, they are going to learn Hebrew. So I was very struck by the new Conservative machzor which is a beautiful looking book and "includes transliteration". Well, includes transliteration in the congregational parts so for example in the Kedusha when you get to "kadosh kadosh

kadosh" they transliterate it. My response was, how do you know when you're there if the rest of the Hebrew isn't transliterated? How would anybody know what you were up to. So I think it's exclusive, I think it's elitist and I think it's condescending actually. So I felt very strongly that everything in the book needed to be transliterated as an accessibility for everybody including the vast number of non Jews who join us.

(side discussion briefly about Modim Anachnu Lach not being translated and the existence of Service II and the reading with the trope "modim anachnu lach" as a Unitarian prayer that Larry Hoffman edited

EF: There was a lot of controversy about whether or not to include non-Jewish poetry.)

EF: I feel strongly about the particularism of Judaism and I think we are essential to the course of the world and so I would absolutely teach about what chosenness means. The image I use, I mentioned it briefly earlier, comes from James Rosenberg, now retired, used to be in Barrington, RI. And he had this idea that you come to a mountain and you want to climb the mountain in order to reach something higher. So I like that image and I expanded it a little bit to suggest that there is more than one path at the bottom of the mountain. And depending upon what the path is, you need different skills and abilities and experience. So for example, if you are climbing Everest, you go the north face or you go the side or whatever you have to be prepared for different kinds of terrain and you need different kinds of equipment and whatever. So the same way religious paths require different preparation, the Jewish path is very particular, you get to the bottom and there is a pack of people—because we travel in packs—and I'm your tour guide. I say, "hey, I'm Rabbi Frishman, what's your name?" and you say "My name is Leah" and I say "Oh, is that also your Jewish name?" and you go "well, yeah it is, but I also have a middle name and it's Miriam" and I go "cool, do you know who you're named after" and we learn a little bit about your ancestry and then I say "So Leah, do you know a little bit about Jewish history, Jewish culture, Hebrew, ethics?" and you say "yes, yes, no, or whatever" and at a certain point I say, "Okay, you know enough to start climbing." And we have tons of food because we always have tons of food. So the moment you start to climb is your bar or bat mitzvah. And that's what I say to families: when you drop out basically it's like you learned how to ski but you never went down the mountain—what fun is that?
LC: Not fun.

EF: Right. So as we climb, some of us want to go higher than others, some of us get to a certain lookout point and we are satisfied—that's good enough for us. Sometimes, other groups come up and join us—they're moving a little faster. Sometimes, someone says, you know what, this isn't my path I want to go down but I still want to climb the mountain I just want to try a different path—that's conversion. They can't go across the mountain they have to go down, learn new skills, and start all over again. Ultimately, all those paths merge at the top, and that's the ultimate…….universal place. So the idea is that we need our particular route to get us to actually really be together. And when we pretend that religion doesn't matter, we end up being in a place of nothing. I believe we need the discipline of Judaism in particular—we were just studying to pieces last week

about tzedakah. One from Irwin Coolo and one from Joseph Telushkin. Telushkin's piece talked about tzedakah is a balance between mercy and justice and Coolo said it's really about love. That when you're obligated you feel obligated because you love. And love also brings in the balance of justice and mercy. The whole idea of obligation is at the heart of Judaism and so it's seen through our lens. That's how we look at the world. If I take this lens off (she takes off glasses), I should not be driving a car. I mean I can walk around, I can figure life out, but it just would not be terrific. Well this is Judaism (puts glasses back on). Maybe your classes are Christian or Buddhist or Islam, or whatever it is.

LC: I think that's a really beautiful image…it also aligns to the basic premise of this thesis….that we can't get rid of it because it is a key tenent of who we are and we have to find a way to make it work and that there are ways to do that without, using your words, the elitism and exclusion of other people.

EF: I honestly don't understand the concept of universal identity. And in every other way we define ourselves, right? Even, I think the newest realm of confusion in identity is in gender identity which I personally don't really understand yet. I have two young people in the congregation who are Z gender and I don't really get that yet but I accept it and I expect it.

All of us need to figure out who we are but we are something. And when we try to say like John Lennon—imagine there's no religion—come on! And, of course I believe that Judaism is more than a religion; I'm Kaplanian in that sense. It is a total way of being. And of course it's particular. But again, I don't think that's elitist.

LC: And in that way I think you have sort of answered this last question which was about where a discussion of chosenness fits with our Movement's commitment to audacious hospitality and inclusion…in your dicussion of rejecting elitism and exclusion, that's where that happens. But if there is more that you want to add about that please, do.

EF: I would only say that hachnasat orchim means that you look into someone's eyes and you see them for who they are. You don't pretend that you are all the same. But when you see someone for who they are and you want to engage with them, you figure out how to do that. But you have to do that in your context. So if someone comes into my home, that's different than if they come into my school or the supermarket. These places are not identical. They should be welcoming for their purpose.

LC: As a final concluding question, are there articles or books or things that you have written or that have informed your decisions and your approach to chosenness specifically in liturgy that I should make sure I have read or am aware of?

(some technical difficulties)

EF:
-introduction to MT

-Gates of Mitzvah (Peter Knobel edited)
→EF article in there about the idea of being commanded (sense of being commanded leads to sense of elitism)
(more details about the article).

When we say, asher kidshanu bmitvotav vtzivanu, I do understand kidshanu as set us apart.I don't think of God in a personal, interventional way…so I am not going to think of God as saying "Elyse you, or your husband Danny are commanded." Please. It's all human generated. But it's generated to help us have a very particular disciplined way of living the ethics that we espouse and disciplining ourslesve so that we will live on this higher plain. And anybody who wants to join us in doing that, you are welcome to join us in doing that. And if you really want to do it for life, you should become a Jew. Accept it as an obligation and not as a choice.

Interview with Rabbi Edwin Goldberg
October 20th, 2014

LC: initially I want to know how you would define the concept of chosenness in Judaism.

EG: Well as a serious Reform Jew I believe the Torah was written by human beings—or I wouldn't be a Reform Jew. So chosenness for me is a typical thing in most religious developments. People want to think they are special. I think it's understandable and regrettable when it makes other people feel excluded or it gives other people another reason not to like us. Regrettable not because I'm sure we could do it any other way but because people often see their own hypocrisy in that manner. I respect the Reconstructionists following Mordecai Kaplan who got rid of all the chosenness language—I always said Reconstructionts are Reform Jews with guts. But for most of us, we'd rather have the language even if it's not accurate.

When I do the Torah blessings I say bachar banu and the Kiddush and even though in practice I might be very open I haven't myself gone away from that language. It may be something we'll have to do eventually. It may be the right thing to do but I am comfortable with some gap between what the liturgy says and what I believe.

LC: I'm curious to know more about why that sits okay with you

EG: I just tend to see the liturgy more as poetry and statement of fact. And one of the things I like about Mishkan Tfilah and MIshkan Hanefesh is the English is presented more in a poetic structure; it's not prose, it's not saying what is so I really don't have that big of an issue with that. I don't think of praying every word to take it literally. But if enough people did and were offended, then perhaps we wouldn't want to continue. I mean with Mishkan Hanefesh we have issues like Unetaneh Tokef—I don't think we're getting rid of Unetaneh Tokef but it doesn't mean it's the only presentation we have. Though unlike some colleagues I am comfortable having Unetaneh Tokef in there although I don't agree with the theology behind it.

LC: You touched upon this a little bit in talking about if enough people were upset with it we might consider changing it. How do you see choseneess fitting into the Jew in the Pew; the Jewish identity of our people in the 21st century at a time where a lot of external forces are talking about people wanting to focus on universalism and not particularism. So how do you see chosenness fitting into Jewish identity in that sense.

EG: Well I do think it's more about the congregation---I think community is very important but I it's a sacred conversation in a self-selective community. I certainly don't want to turn anyone away who's behaving in a responsible way from the community and I don't want them to feel that they are not part of the community. Having said that, I do think about liturgy not just because we've always done it that way but there's something profound about some of the symbolic meaning behind some of the liturgy and again I'm not sure the words have to be taken literally. To me, that's the big difference. As the great

Leonard Fein once said I think, “you can take the Bible and God seriously without taking it literally.

LC: I’m curious to know about liturgical decisions you may have been a part of or involved in. You mentioned Unetaneh tokef—were there other things like Aleinu—pieces of liturgy that would be understood by most people to have a sense of chosenness or particularism—and what those discussions or decisions looked like.

EG: It’s a good question and we tried to find with Mishkan Hanefesh texts a balance between what I’ll call “zero based machzor building” which means we wanted to build a machzor that is effective for amcha 21st century and at the same time creative retrieval, not getting rid of things—in fact, even restoring particular things—so, for instance, we restored some allusions to the House of David not because we literally think the Messiah is coming and the Messiah is from the House of David but there’s some poetic symbolic illusions that I think are very powerful and to give our Amcha a little more credit to make choices for themselves as long as we give them choices. I mean if it were up to me, I would say there’s no—like Mordecai Kaplan—God didn’t choose us—I don’t believe in a God like that or as the old poem puts it, “how odd of God to choose the Jews. It wasn’t odd, the Jews chose God.” Back when we’d have these debates a lot—are we the chosen people—the better answer was “we’re the choosing people.” We choose to believe in a certain set of ideals and we want to live our lives by them. So this is not about ethnic triumphalism or anything like that; I don’t think we’ll see in Mishkan Hanefesh much of that kind of language at all because it’s a turn off—it’s a good way to raise money from people in their 70s and 80s but I don’t think it’s the future that people will resonate with at all. I’ve been happy to leave in a lot of particular things as long as we have on the other page more humanistic or theology of action, human adequacy, however you want to put it. That’s the brilliance of Mishkan Tfilah and Mishkan Hanefesh. It’s not about a theology it’s about different theological choices.

LC: I know that when MT was put together, there were big decisions and discussions about Aleinu. When creating Mishkan Hanefesh, was that also a conversation or was it approached as “the decision has already been made in MT” and it wasn’t revisited?

EG: We didn’t really revisit it much except, as you know, Aleinu comes from Rosh Hashanah liturgy so we talked a lot about how it would be presented in Rosh Hashanah morning. I think I am on the more pragmatic side of all of this—for instance, I argued when it came to Avinu Malkeinu that the most important thing to realize is that the god of Max Janowski is a zealous god and if you don’t have the Janowski version in every service—it doesn’t mean you don’t have others too—but that’s a problem. So that was not a theological issue at all that was a practical issue.

LC:Where else in the creation of Mishkan Hanefesh did these conversations arise? Or did they I guess?

EG: Oh yes. There are so many different areas—part of it was restoring liturgical insights. I am still not sure why they cut off the end of Unetaneh Tokef when the whole

point of Unetaneh Tokef was to introduce the Kedushah. And the last couple of lines, that's what we do. It would be like getting up to introduce someone and then forgetting to introduce them. That's just one of so many. Gates of Repentance has the following "hamelech hayoshev" which is what we have on Shabbat but in traditional machzors it's "hamelech yoshev". What's the big difference with the *hey*? Well I think it is a big difference because you are saying—as long as we are buying into this particular imagery for this particular service—it's not that there's a king on a throne it's that the king is right now on the throne ; court is in session if you will. So I don't know what was behind the Gates of Repentance choice—if it was even just out of ignorance possibly, I don't know—but that's the kind of small little restoration that we should feel good about.

LC: In some of the other discussions I have had with people we have had discussion about how you decide who participates and in what way based on language of chosenness and how that includes or excludes non-Jews in different liturgical participation. I am wondering if there was any discussion surrounding those kinds of rituals—whether it's candle lighting to start the holiday or any of the other places—aliyot—in MT there's the alternative blessings that exists—has that been revisited?

EG:Yeah I think we have done little new work there. For instance we have on Yom Kippur in a couple places the prayer for those whoa re fasting and a prayer for those who are not fasting so there are ways we are trying to be sensitive to what people can do and what people can't do.

LC: Have you yourself given drashot or taught classes on the subject of chosenness?

EG: I have taught classes on Reform Judaism where it has come up but I can't recall a particular course or class or drash on chosenness itself.

LC: Is there any particular reason? Is it something that hasn't come up or is it something you specifically choose not to address?

EG: No no, I think it would be a good thing to address.

LC: In your opinion, should we continue to teach the concept of chosenness?

EG: Only in the context of saying America believed in Manifest Destiny the word China means something like center of the universe. As long as it's taught in the context of this is what people do. Right now, I think the Kansas City Royals are the best baseball team in the world. And I'm sure those in San Francisco have a different opinion, hopefully to the extent we really are superior but who says; again for Reform Jews to say that there is a god who chooses, I think is sloppy. In reality, I don't think that we believe in a god like that. If we believed in a god like that, I'd be orthodox. And I'd have to quite my job and leave this beautiful temple so part of it is just being honest.

LC: What about the idea of chosenness as mission or responsibility?

EG: Right, that's different. That's the choosing people. I think it's great. I think we should practice "nobless oblige" and I have talked about that before. If we realize that we have a wonderful heritage, we should feel responsible to live up to that. Not because the deity demands it but because why not live for excellence.

LC: What do you see as the challenge of teaching chosenness in our congregations?

EG: I think the biggest challenge of teaching chosenness for grown-ups is they are very sloppy thinkers when it comes to this thing they just are. In other words, if you ask them if they believed in god, they'd probably say yes and even more so if they said they didn't believe in god it's probably the same god that they're talking about some old man in white in the sky; but they don't have that same lack of critical thought when it comes to the rest of their lives it's just sort of not been something they've been exposed to and my job is to help them grow in faith development and awareness so they can reject some of these childish viewpoints and build something stronger.

LC: How do you see discussions of chosenness or liturgical expressions of chosenness intersecting with our movement's commitment to inclusion and audacious hospitality and all of that?

EG: Yeah so I think it's where we're self-choosing and so anyone who wants to be part of our community and our conversation, bruchim habaim.

LC:So we're open and they can be part of it and that's where we welcome them and….

EG: Right.

LC: Are there things that you have either read or written that you think would be really important to consider when addressing the topic of chosenness in liturgy in our Reform Movement?

EG: what Mordecai Kaplan and his followers have done
"they have tailored their message to fit what they believe which is an interesting idea"

Early on in the Machzor process we talked a lot with a women named Katherine Madson (Bones Reassembled); her point as Reform Jew, a Jew by choice, is that some of the language needs to be kept; there's just a stark quality to it that if we get rid of it, what do we have left? And I think there's some truth to that. It's not logical….a lot of people hear Unetaneh Tokef and don't believe what it's saying but it wouldn't be the High Holy Days without it.

LC: Like with Kol Nidre when the German reformers tried to take it out and then put it back in.

EG: Exactly.

LC: (background and details about thesis chapters and etc)

EG: One of the nice things about RH will be the shofar service will be split into three sections in the actual worship service. Which means you don't have to rush through malchuyot to get to zichronot to get to shofarot. It's in different parts of the service which could lead to even a chevruta style conversation about the Aleinu fairly early on in the service. It's a different dynamic that I hope people will take advantage of.

Interview with Rabbis Shelley and Janet Marder
October 24th, 2014

LC: How would you define the concept of chosenness in Judaism?
Shelly: I've sort of done that through translations. So me and MN are almost in a way the same. It's been 5 years so where MN ends and I begin I don't know any more
Atah v'chartanu; kedushat hayom; Torah blessings; looking at translations, commentaries and left side readings for all of it (several different services; two or three Torah services) and look at the material around kedushat hayom and what you'll see is a translating of the concept of chosenness which speaks of "you choose us to be messengers of mitzvot"; chosen to embody the mitzvot in the world; to embody certain values and be the messanger of certain kind of values into the world

Janet: YK morning 'who embraced us and gave us this teacher an…us to embody Torah mong the peoples of the earth"; across from that, two alternative; one is different and particularly for non-Jews honored on that day. (check out the translation) IN addition to those kinds of translations—unique purpose Jews in world"

Lots of commentary about chosenness; Mordecai Kaplan; each person with own unique identity; additional responsibility; give people a variety way of thinking about concepts (either on left side of page or subliniar commentary)

Interweave universal and particular themes.

Shelly: what you would intuit reading the machzor carefully (and you'd be right if you did) we are always asking questions about who is using this and who is reading this and who are they and how do we address them. Thinking about people who are new to Judaism/converted to Judaism and people who aren't Jewish and how do we address them all in a way that is honest and Reform and true to us and yet somehow true to what we think Jewish tradition is.

What does it mean to be a "chosen people" in 2014?

Janet: setting forth chosenness as the idea that the Jewish people have a purpose in the world to embody the highest of Torah; living exmplars of the mitzvot

Shelly: yup I agree with that. Well put.

Liturgy and Chosenness
How would you describe the tension between particularism and universalism in our liturgy?

How do we (as the Reform Movement) make liturgical decisions that deal with chosenness? (Aleinu, candle blessing honors, aliyot)

Shelly:

Torah blessings are a good example of our process. We have been the translators and we will post it on base camp and it becomes accessible to other editors. We will put a translation out there and people might react to it. If it is a meeting in person or on the phone there could be a discussion or philosophical disagreement. With chosenness that could have happened. I remember putting out a translation for the blessings.

Janet:
This was not an area of great controversy or disagreement.

Shelly:
Atah v'chartanu. Not disagreement about what we were saying but how to get it across.

Janet:
Blessings for after reading Haftarah. Beit David meshichecha….is an option.
Particularistic elements of Messiah. Discussion about that and feedback from piloting.

Was there discussion on Aleinu?

Janet:
A few different versions of Aleinu.

Shelly:
We've come to one standard one.

Janet:
RH morning.
Aleinu l'shabeiach on top.
Shomrei ha'adamah…….singable and rhymes and translation..messangers of Torah.

Shelly:
Hebrew originated with one of our colleagues. English was written for this machzor. Many versions in English with different ideas of what they wanted to say. Descendent of creative period of late 19th century.

Janet:
Goal is to cultivate Jewish distinctiveness without disaparaging other people or sense of hostility or elitism. A sense of distinctive purpose in the world.

Shelly:
From the very beginning wanting to reflect theology of the Enviornment.

Janet:
In every opportunity we are offering different commentaries; chosenness is a widely misunderstood concept.

From RH eve excerpt: pathway to holiness among the many people

Interesting translation in Mincha; very particularistic versions of mishnah of one holy nation one holy tribe one holy person. Translated it in a way to convey sanctity and a more egalitarian perspective (Avodah service)/pg 27 in Avodah Service (Among the people)/also returns later in Avodah in a different way

Looking Ahead

Have you given drashot or taught classes on the subject of chosenness? (If so, can you share those with me/tell me about them? If not, is there a reason why not?)

Shelly:
I do talk about it; I have shared MN stuff where I work but nothing in the formal sense; the writings I do (not this topic though).

Do you believe we should continue to teach the idea of chosenness? (Why or why not/If yes, how?)

Janet: Well we put it into the machzor
Shelly: I hope that the way we are translating things actually has an impact on this idea. That it makes it an idea that people now regard differently; seeing there are different ways to understand it than they might have thought before. It is probably grandeous to think that any translation of a prayer would transform history but I hope it reframes it

Janet: if we don't teach about it or if we take it out of the liturgy, it will continually be misunderstood. How does one maintain a sense of self-love and pride in Jewish identity without making comparisons to non-Jews; must cultivate particular understand Particular sense of family loyalty and family identity and shared purpose without casting expursions on the identity of others.

Eisen: if you do away with this have you lost something precious?

What other books have you read or written that I should consult about this topic?
Arthur Herzberg: Jews the Essence and Character of People
Gurkin The Jews as a Chosen People: Tradition and Transformation

In what ways do you see a discussion of chosenness intersecting with the Movement's commitment to audacious hospitality and inclusion?

Shelly:
Part of how we present MN to the Reform Mvmt is our understanding of who the Movement is; who we are as people and we are not just expressing the two of us or the four of us or however many on our committee (although that's also part of it) but we are trying to reflect what we feel; what we know about the Reform Movement now.

Janet:
An eagerness to welcome all kinds of people in our congregations; it is important we maintain a sense of our purpose in the world or there is a risk of turning ourselves into (to be very blunt) the Unitarian Church

Shelly:
We have to be welcoming them to some thing. There has to be a purpose

Janet:
Those who wish to welcome and join our endeavors are welcome to do so.
Nothing should be taught that disparages another religion or the absence of religion and there is a way to teach Judaism without doing that.

Towards others and towards other Jews.

Ask Hara for most recent version of MH

Email or call if I have more questions once I see the most updated draft.

Janet:
One can find wisdom in other traditions beyond the Jewish one conveys a non-exclusivist sense of what it means to be a Jew; in clear dialogue with Jewish sources/texts

Shelly: article on poetry (Summer 2013; CCAR Journal; article on using poetry in our prayerbooks)

Interview with Rabbi Hara Person
10/31/14

LC: How would you define the concept of chosenness in Judaism?

HP: I tend to lean toward the interpretation of being the choosing people; I think there is an active, participatory piece of that. I think—probably like a lot of Reform Jews; a lot of modern people—I'm not so comfortable with the idea of presenting as a better than but chosen as in having chosen then there's sort of a reciprocal covenantal relationship which we're constantly choosing and God's constantly choosing. Or we hope—we don't know what God is doing but certainly the emphasis is really on the choosing part and that as liberal modern Jews we're choosing time and again every day.

LC: Where would you identify in our liturgy as specific examples where chosenness is expressed?

HP: Well the Aleinu is the obvious case and I think; I lead High Holiday services and we use Gates of Repentance and I always forget because I'm not a congregational rabbi the rest of the year, so I don't encounter this on a regular basis but every year on the High Holy Days I am hit again by "oh right, that version of Aleinu" because that is one of the prominent ones in Gates of Repentance. And if I did it often enough I could sort of remember to be prepared for how to deal with it when I get to it and then I always forget and it just feels so uncomfortable. The idea of "when that day comes and we're all gonna….that sort of privileging of our choice above all others and the right way the world is alright—when the messianic age comes and everything is once again the way it is supposed to be—or not even once again—but the way it's supposed to be—is when everyone will sort of choose this god and this way and that just makes me uncomfortable. So the Aleinu I think is one of those places although of course we do have lots of other variants of the Aleinu but I think that more than anything else because I think actually so much of chosenness has actually been wiped out of our liturgy otherwise. The Bachar Banu in terms of Torah blessings that doesn't bother me as much as the Aleinu does because that I feel is more about—it's not about we're right and others are wrong it's about we've made a choice and you've made a choice and we're sort of in this together. Bachar banu feels more about that covenantal relationship which doesn't feel "better than" it just feels unique.

LC: What would you say it means to be a chosen people in 2014?

HP: So again it goes back to mean being a choosing people. We choose to live in a certain way; we choose to act in a certain way; we choose to make choices this way and not that way; we choose to be intentional about how we do certain things—ethical about the way we do certain things and to even, not just based on what the outcome is but to think about certain things and make a careful choice whatever that choice is going to be.
LC: Well this transition is beautifully built in because you have already mentioned two of the liturgical pieces I am particularly focusing on in the second chapter of my thesis…..(explain what I am looking at in my thesis)….

HP: In terms of sh'asani Yisrael, I have become more and more aware over the years of some discomfort with that because I always—and especially at my High Holy Day pulpit—I am always leading services with non-Jews in the room and it feels less odd on Shabbat (I occasionally lead services on Shabbat in the congregation where I belong to or here or there but not a lot)—but there, something about that feels sort of okay because it's—and it might be something particular about the congregation where I belong but there's—we're gathered because it's a Jewish time or moment and you just don't have to say it but you know, that's not even so true. I'm thinking out loud, sorry—I lead a Shabbat morning Torah study group and we pray before we study so that's Shabbat morning and the line's in there and there are definitely non-Jews around the table and I just wonder—I don't skip it, I say it—but I do wonder sometimes how is that being heard and how are you dealing with that because you are included in this group but you're not really included in that line. But I feel it much more at my High Holiday congregation because that is a very unusual congregation because a lot of the people there aren't Jews, their partners are Jews and they are there to be supportive and it's a congregation that only meets on the High Holidays because it's in a summer community and for a lot of the non-Jews who come it's a spiritual experience for them and they come not just to be supportive of their spouse or partner but because it's a kind of spiritual highlight of the year for people who don't necessarily belong to synagogues or churches, it's sort of a communal spiritual time in a weird way that is very unusual but so there I always really feel and sometimes I'll even say as I'm leading the prayer, "who has made me a Jew or the person I am" or something to try and find something that's comfortable and feels inclusive because it's this weird fine line I feel we walk as Reform rabbis—we're Jews. We're not apologetic about it and that's who we are and that's what our institutions are and then on the other hand, we want to be welcoming without excluding people who are there for all the right reasons even if they're not Jews so it's sort of a weird, yeah, bachar banu just doesn't bother me as much and I think also because it's not a congregational reading so the people who come up to say it are people you are choosing to say it to begin with and so it doesn't feel as uncomfortable.

LC: That's so interesting; I had never thought about it that way that because you're asking someone—or a couple of people or a group depending on how your congregation does it—that it's selective in that you are both choosing to as in asking people and also choosing that the people who accept are choosing to recite that as opposed to….so in terms of the Movement and our siddurim or our machzor, I am curious if you could talk a little bit to the decision making process and any conversations around things like Aleinu or HHD liturgy in particular where there might be expressions of chosenness—and how that got decided or discussed or any of that.

HP: You know, I'm so deeply in it right now; I'm so deeply in whatever pages we are in the middle of very fine tuning right now so I tend to forget everything else for those few pages so let me just see….I know that certainly there were a lot of discussions about Aleinu and we have a few different Aleinu options; I can't remember if we even left in the one that is so particularistic…

LC: Meaning sh'lo asanu?

HP: yeah. Sh'lo asanu.

(pause while she calls someone to get for her something related to this)

HP: So I'm looking at Rosh Hashanah morning; so we have she lo asanu k'goyei ha'aratzot but the translation is "who has made us unique within the human family with a destiny all of our own" so it's sort of emphasizing the uniqueness and I think the choosing ness rather than the "we're better than everybody else." It does say "you are our God, there is none else," but that's "there's none else for us"; it doesn't feel, you know. And then we have, well I guess the one we don't have is the one that says "someday, everyone's going to bow down before you and realize that you are the one god and they are wrong" so that we don't have but we have the sort of revised version of that which is actually very different because it's *aleinu lishabeach ladon hakol latet g'dolah l'yotzeir breishit sh'lo asanu k'shomrei ha'adamah*. I mean it's just a completely different focus "who trusts us to be the guardians of the earth and messengers of Torah", *k'slichei haTorah*, who has given us a shared destiny with all human beings and binds our lives to theirs, so it's actually completely the opposite; completely universalist so that's how we dealt with the Aleinu.

LC: Were there disagreements about that or was it pretty unanimous that the universal or less elitist approach should be emphasized?

HP: No, I think that was pretty—that wasn't our biggest argument. I know that there are going to be some colleagues who miss the version that they particularly like but no, it wasn't a big argument. The sh'ma was a much bigger argument, but you're not looking at that.

LC: I'm not but I am curious. We can save that for another part of this maybe if you want.

HP: I mean in a nutshell it's just about how much of the SH'ma to include and hay aim shemoah and the pieces that are not typically Reform; tzitzit, you know. But I am looking for bachar banu because I think we do…yeah we do have two versions of Torah blessings; so we have the standard one and then we only have an English of it, "O Source of blessing, your presence fills creation; you have enlightened our path with the wisdom of Torah, giving it to the Jewish people as their particular treasure" but so it could be read by someone who isn't Jewish acknowledging that; "We give you praise, merciful one, who gives this Torah to the Jewish people." So it's not really—I have seen other similar type versions that are much more universalist; this is still particularistic but it's particularistic without the chosenness piece. And I guess the blessing after is also different; we have the standard one and then we also have "Source of Blessing, your presence fills creation; This Torah is a teaching of truth and from it comes enduring life for those who embrace it; we give you praise, merciful one, who gives this Torah to the Jewish people for the sake of all humanity.

LC: So “for the sake of all humanity” also encapsulates that broader purpose.

HP: Yeah.

LC: This is smoething that is occurring to me as I’m listening and also one of the reasons I also asked about years of ordination; what I’m actually starting to think is that there might be a bit of a generational shift; and I don’t know if that’s something you notice at all—I think the people who are working on the Machzor represent several generations.

HP: Yeah I think we do. I’m probably the newest ordinee so we’re not that young of a group. I was ordained in 98 I think Leon was ordained in 96 and Eddie maybe like 93 or something like that. Eddie and Leon and I are all basically the same age or within a year or two but I waited a little while to go to Rabbinical school, but we are all contemporaries…Janet and Shelley I think are another generation older; maybe not entirely a generation but…

LC: Certainly there is at least a decade in the ordination year. Do you think or have you noticed any kind of differences that you might attribute to that?

HP: Not in terms of theology. To me, the biggest difference is actually between Eddie on one side of the spectrum and Leon on the other and they are contemporaries. I think they represent two different sides of what I think HUC was definitely around the time I was—well we all were—in school because Eddie is much more still connected to Classical Reform which I think is how he grew up—he grew up in Kansas City and he has moved very far from there—in a lot of ways he has really stretched but that’s a mode he’s familiar with and in some ways comfortable with; I mean that’s not who he is but it’s still a touchstone mode for him whereas Leon represents certainly another side—I don’t know about today—but when I was in rabbinic school there was this whole group of people—a sort of cadre of people exploring traditional Judaism in a liberal context and Leon was on that side and I would say that he’s probably one of the more traditional leaning Reform rabbis in our entire CCAR rabbinate. In terms of personal practice, theological understanding, and Eddie is probably on the other side in terms of personal practice and I think the rest of us sort of fall somewhere in the middle so there’s definitely a spectrum.

LC: And I imagine that also leads to a lot of discussion when you are trying to make decisions for the Movement that includes all of the people on both sides and in-between.

HP: Right.

LC: Have you ever given drashot or taught classes specifically about the subject of chosenness

HP: I think once. I think I gave one sermon once on it, but no.

LC: So it’s not necessarily an idea that has driven any longterm teachings.

HP: You know, because I'm not a congregational rabbi, no. I think if I was, I would probably have to deal with it more than I do. But I've certainly given at least one High Holiday sermon on the idea of choosing verses chosenness.

LC: Do you think that it's an idea and a concept that we should continue to be teaching?

HP: I know that a lot of people—not rabbis but Jews—struggle with it and some people feel very opposed to it and uncomfortable with it but I find that the more people actually study it, the easier it is to understand and kind of find interpretive ways to live with comfortably. A lot of the people who really feel offended by it sort of reject it are people who actually don't know very much about it; Jews but Jews who don't know very much about Judaism. So if that's one of the first concepts they encounter, it feels really abhorrent but they have no context for it.

And Israelies, who often feel—I'm married to an Israeli—and it was for a long time a very negative idea for him.

LC: I'm actually going to Israel in December….and one of the things I was thinking about doing was interviewing Israelis just out of my own curiosity about what they think and feel about chosenness.

HP: Well actually, you might want to interview some of our colleagues—they are working on a prayerbook now as well so that might be really interesting to talk to someone there…..Dalia Marx might be a good person to speak to; I'm pretty sure she's one of the people involved in the project.

LC: Okay, cool. Thank you. Is your husband a rabbi?

HP: No.

LC: I think you alluded to some of this but what would you identify as the challenge or challenges of teaching chosenness and continuing to teach about it?

HP: It goes back to what I was saying before. I think that on a superficial level, people think they know what it means. So either, people feel very proud of it—it's one of their things about what it means to be a Jew even if they don't really know anything else they know that they're the chosen people—on the other hand, people reject it, so it's challenging; it's a very very complicated issue and so it's easy to just love it or reject it without really understanding it. But actually, and maybe this goes in part to answer your other question about teachings and sermons—I do a class that I've been doing for years now at the synagogue I belong to about the bar and bat mitzvah journey. So I do two sessions for parents and two sessions for the kids with their parents and the question of choosing and chosenness actually comes up a lot because we're talking about mitzvah and what does it mean to be commanded. So one of the ways I frame that is about this idea of choosing and it's really complicated because to walk into a room and say "well

you're about to become bar/bat mitzvah or your kid is about to" and what that means is taking on the whole system of mitzvot and (interruption) taking on the whole system of taking on these obligations now that you are becoming bar or bat mitzvah these are your obligations to now wrestle with and a lot of what you get is "what? Obligations? But we're Reform we don't even have to do these things so why are you even talking to me about them?" to infuse that with some meaning for us as liberal Jews is really complicated even if you don't think in those terms at all. But it has everything to do with this idea of chosenness and choosing so I do spend a lot of time with them on this idea of "right we don't have to/we're not living in…Borough Park; following the Commandments doesn't mean that but it does mean something; it can me that we're choosing whatever." But it's complicated because people aren't used to thinking in those terms.

LC: In our Movement in the last year and a little we have talked a lot about audacious hospitality and in general a true focus on inclusion and wanting to do outreach. Where do you see discussions of chosenness intersecting with those principles on which we are really striving to operate?

HP: I believe in inclusiveness and I know the reality is that the people in our congregations many of them are non-Jews or have non-Jews in their families and significant relationships in one way or another. SO I don't think it serves any of us to reject people. I think it harms us to reject but it's a very fine line to walk because I do believe that being a Jew means actively making choices; so we have to walk this very fine line between what does it mean to have actually made a choice to be on this side of the boundary and what does it mean to be on the other side of the boundary and nothing wrong with being there it just means you haven't made these choices or this one particular choice but I think that's a challenge for Reform communities. We want to be inclusive but you can't ask a Canadian to say the pledge of allegiance. I mean you can, but it's meaningless. It's a really complicated issue. I think it requires a lot of compassion. I now do weddings where only one person is Jewish under certain circumstances (I didn't when I was first ordained) because to me it's the right thing to do and I believe it's better for the Jews than not. But serving non-Jews is not what any of us were trained to do. Did that really answer your question?

LC: I think it did; I think it really captured the complexity and the challenges of these two ideas that are often presented as competing and that finding a balance and a way to integrate them potentially is where they intersect. At least that is what I heard anyway if that's?

HP: Yes.

LC: The last question I have is a little more tachlis; I wanted to know if there are things that you have written or even works you have read that are related to chosenness that you think I would be remiss if I did not take a look at or that would add to the research I'm doing.
HP: Yeah I can't think of a specific thing. Sorry.

Interview with Rabbi Richard Sarason
11/3/14

(First part: erased by incoming phone call)
Definition: biblical/back to Abraham; The biblical narrative framework of God's election of Israel is as follows: ideally, God's plan is for all humanity, but in the meantime, after failing with Adam and Eve, the generation of the flood and the generation of the Tower of Babel, God decides to start small with one group of people, the family of Abraham
-Torah, calendar, are understood in Jewish tradition to have been given as an expression of Israel's chosenness
-Specific divine mission
-Jewish collective existence/religious heritage are uniquely valuable because they have something to say about the human condition

RS: The point is that even in the Biblical literature, there are critiques of chosenness lest people become smug. That is to say, chosenness also has its downsides. Like Tevye says, "Wouldn't it be good of you to choose someone else for a change?"

So that even in the bibilical literature it's not just this smug superiority kind of concept that it can degenerate into (see Amos 3:2); and certainly for the Rabbis who focus on Torah, the tangible sign of Israel's special status is, you gave us your Torah*: asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim v'natan lanu et torato*—that's the point and you gave us your festival calendar; the cosmic calendar and that's how it's expressed liturgically certainly. And even in the 19th century Reform context, where chosenness is reinterpreted as the mission of Israel, the idea is that not withstanding pressures to acculturate and assimilate there is a theological rationale for remaining Jews. That is to say, we have a specific Divine Mission to fulfill in the world, namely to be God's preist people. This is Einhorn, of course—referring back to the language of *or l'goyim* and being the exemplars. And of course that can come back to bite us as it often does—I think we've talked about this too in terms of how the western world sees the state of Israel—you should be the models of peacemakers, notwithstanding that there are real enemies at the gate who would love to destroy you!

LC: It's also; that's part of what Ari Shavit said last week about wanting to have Israel as an *or l'goyim*—even if we're not there yet—but also being realistic about what's around her.

(pause as we parenthetically divert our attention to talking about Ari Shavit's visit; RSS wasn't there)

LC: My next question is what does it mean in 2014 to be a chosen people?

RS: Needless to say, I—in part because I'm an academic and I understand the mythological language here—but in terms of speaking theologically and existentially and

in terms of the present—the outright language of chosenness is not exactly something I would use either but just like Peter Knobel, I believe very strongly in the importance of Jewish collective existence, not just as a matter of family or extended family, but because we do have a religious heritage that does have something to say about the human condition and the situation of the world and it's certainly true, that old saw the Jews are just like everybody else only more so, because we're always so anxious about the way we fit in and not wanting to stand out too much in terms of drawing negative attention to ourselves. But on the other hand, like Shelley Zimmerman said in his inaugural address back in 1996, once upon a time the rabbinic task was to Americanize the Jews; now the task is to Judaize the Americans.

I am a believer in Jewish particularism or I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing, and to quote that assimilated Jew Oscar Hammerstein, "I won't say I'm better than anybody else but I'll be damned if I'm not just as good!"—"The Farmer and the Cow Man"—I think to some extent that is in terms of Jewish particularism. I do think that certainly there is a contemporary tension between Jewish normality—the desire to be normal; a nation just like all the other nations—with our own prostitutes and thieves and Wall Street scammers and so onand so forth, and a desire to be—to model what should be a higher—we're responsible to a higher authority. I think that is a tension; I think when we respond to the better angels of our nature, to quote Lincoln—we do want to be models of how we should behave, recognizing of course that if we use that rhetoric too much we are liable to get hit over the head with it. Sometimes, we probably should get hit over the head with it, but—and of course obviously in an era in which there is a Jewish state which is such a novelty and a miracle in its own respect—we would like that Jewish state to be exemplary in some respects and I think that ideal was held by Israeli statesmen and politicians and so forth, but recognizing that we exist in the real world and there are situations and we have to deal with them and people don't always live up to their highest ideals and sometimes people are—can't. You can be dead right too. Some Christians would like the Jews to be dead right—we'd like you to go down turning the other cheek, right?. Thanks, but we'd rather be alive.

So there are political dimensions to that and then there are also just how we exist in the world around us. Do I believe that the Jews are the Chosen People? No. In a literal sense I don't think that traditional language is either true or necessarily helpful; we sometimes talk about we're the choosing people—we're all Jews by choice and we choose to be Jews who have kind of a special destiny. Historically, that's true; we have had kind of a special destiny, like it or not. In a pluralistic and in an increasingly smaller world, I don't think anyone can claim to be God's chosen people or we're all God's chosen people but that doesn't mean that there isn't a place in the world for the Jewish collective to do things collectively. In other words I'm definitely an advocate for Jewish identity. Thank you, but we're not Unitarian Universalists. That's not who we are.

LC: And one of the things that makes us who we are has to do with our liturgy. And you mentioned before in terms of *matan torah* and the calendar as examples. In your mind……let's focus on those three particular examples of liturgy that you know are in

Chapter Two and your involvement with the creation of the *siddur* and the *machzor* and discussions or decisions relating to those three things or other examples of chosenness.

RS: I will say, I am not a literalist when it comes to liturgy. I'm not a proponent of the Horton the Elephant syndrome: "I meant what I said and I said what I meant". And I also recognize that, as someone who is fluent in Hebrew, I have an advantage over lots of the Jews in the pews who don't or who maybe like Hebrew as a mantra, but when you translate it into English, suddenly it becomes prose and "who has chosen us from among all the peoples, etc." I read religious language figuratively as a rule because all God talk is figurative….yes, it is certainly true that the feminist movement has taught us that some of these metaphors are dangerous, fatal, discriminatory and so on and so forth. I am sympathetic to Kaplan's ideological position on the matter of chosenness; however, when it comes to liturgical performance, I don't feel the need to alter it in part because I don't take it literally anyway. Similarly with *Aleinu*, I don't have any problems saying s*h'lo asanu k'goyei ha'aratzot*, for on one level historically it's kind of been true but also because I am responding to the Hebrew text in a non-literal way—and I also don't have problems keeping the Hebrew and altering the English at a certain level because people tend to read English literally because it's our vernacular language. We're not used to thinking metaphorically unless the language is clearly marked out as poetry and metaphor and that's why the translation needs to be a little more poetical too—to force people away from literal thinking.

So I can kind of hide in the Hebrew on some level—and I do! And I'm not a classical theist, strictly speaking, but I am a musician and a poet in that respect, and human needs are what human needs are, and prayer is an opportunity to voice those needs to whomever it may concern and I identify with that profoundly. I guess I'm a head non-theist and a heart theist. That is to say I'm schizophrenic and I recognize that; I don't have problems with it personally. I wrestled with it a lot when I was a high school senior or college freshman or thereabouts in terms of thinking about the rabbinate…….i think I'm somewhat beyond that now. I'm also of course not working as a pulpit rabbi but I think I can have those conversations with people now because I'm more comfortable in my own skin which is something that you are all working through and I think that being out there in the real world once you're beyond school will help to congeal that. That who you are as Leah and who you are as Rabbi Leah can converge….
(phone rings and RSS picks it up)
One doesn't necessarily have to affirm all the classical theological beliefs—or even all the classical Reform theological beliefs—to be passionately concerned, involved, and affirm that "this is important and we do have something to do collectively." The role of liturgy, worship, etc. etc. is in part tobe a kind of a mirrior in which we reflect back to ourselves what our aspirations are and who we want to be ideally as a Jewish community.

LC: Would you say that we should continue to teach the idea of chosenness?

RS: I would frame it this way: I think we have to in terms of having a better sense of who we are, we have to know where we came from; I think it's a concept that can be taught historically and descriptively for sure. That is to say, this is how Jews traditionally

viewed themselves for the following reasons: it's not something that we have to affirm literally—it's something that we need to put an interpretive spin on to apply today and I think frankly we've been doing that for at least 150 years or 200 years, certainly in the Reform community there have been a variety of spins. So no, I don't see us as the chosen people but I do see us as a people that has a) as much right to be distinctive as any other people and b) a people with a distinctive religious historical cultural identity that is valuable---it's important to see ourselves as sort of God's language in the world, as God's ciphers in the world, as standing for God, as standing for a higher purpose, I think that's hugely important and that's how I would retranslate the concept, I think. I think it has to be retranslated.

LC: And as you know, that is an impetus for writing this thesis….

RS: In a world that is very pluralistic and very inclusive and in which everybody's opinion is valued—sure.

LC: I'm wondering if, in your role teaching rabbinical students, especially one who teaches liturgy, if you seen any kinds of shifts over time in terms of generational or cultural in the way that people interpret some of the liturgy that expresses chosenness?

RS: Some, not a lot. I have not been actively involved in the drafting of *Mishkan Hanefesh*. I have been sort of an academic consultant on the side. I was more involved in *Mishkan Tfilah* but I was not put on the large editorial ad hoc siddur committee until after the first piloting draft was out and I wrote comments on it and then was put on the committee. So I wasn't heavily involved in the original drafting. The only instance where this came up in my presence was the story I told you about *sh'asani Yisrael*, when one member of the committee said, "In my congregationm there will be people whom that will exclude" and my thinking was, "Yeah? But it's a Jewish congregation, right? I mean you have fellow travelers and *yirei shamayim,* but if this is a Jewish congregation, and if you're not Jews, you're not second-class citizens , you are "extended members." if you will. There's nothing wrong with saying that. I think *sh'asani Yisrael* is something important to say. *Sh'lo asani goy*, that's offensive, but affirming that it's part of our identiy—like Mel Brooks, "it's good to be the Jew."

LC: How would you say that chosenness or the idea of it in some form comes into play or intersects with our Movement's larger emphasis on inclusion or audacious hospitality?

RS: Let me return a minute to the question that you asked before that, have I seen this issue crop up anywhere in liturgical discussions. I have certainly seen that more exclusive forms or invidious comparisons with non-Jews certainly have been excluded from Reform liturgy, but chosenness both rhetorically in Hebrew and in the notion of the mission of Israel certainly has not been excluded. That whole question of the Kiddush in the 1945 revision of the *UPB*, where the phrase*mi kol ha'amim* does not appear—it may indeed be as it was officially stated "well that was a printer's error," but the printer didn't get the deletion from nowhere that was clearly a draft somewhere—it might not have been the final draft but they were wrestling with that clearly. Similarly, the fact that in

Gates of Prayer, amongst the *hamavdil*s, bein *Yisrael l'amim* is left out; that clearly was done on purpose too. So invidious comparisons have been shunned—the bringing back of *sh'lo asanu k'goyei* h*a'aratzo*t I think was a matter of ethnic Jewish pride—if you will—in terms of the 70s—and the symbolic attachment to a traditional Jewish liturgy, rather than a matter of theological assertion.

I think what we see across the board is not consistency; it's "little bundles of contradictions," to paraphrase Anne Frank, which is to say that it's human. We don't want to affirm it in an invidious way but we don't want to bend over like Uncle Jake, as it were—we want to be proud Jews. I think that's the spectrum on which that lies.

And now to get to your last question—repeat it one more time please.

LC: The intersection of chosenness with audacious hospitality and inclusion and etc.

RS: I have some problems with "audacious hospitality." There's a lot of rhetoric coming out of the Union these days and I don't always know what it means. Specifically, we hear a lot about "synagogue transformation, change agents, audacious hospitality"—these are good catch phrases but when the rubber hits the road, what do they mean? If audacious hospitality is going beyond Alex Schindler's welcoming non-Jews and intermarried couples . . (I personally do not do intermarriages. I will do things at intermarriages but I will not perform intermarriages; neither for members of my family nor at least so far for friends,and I tell people it has nothing to do with you it has something to do with me and my sense of my own authenticity.) I believe it is important to be welcoming. But I also believe in the value of a particular identity—we are not Unitarian Universalists.

LC: You are welcoming people *to* something.

RS: Yeah. You are welcoming people to a Jewish service; it's not "to whom it may concern." Jews are always the ones who bend over. I don't think we have to be door mats. I really don't. We want to be welcoming people but we want to be welcoming people, as you said, to something. We are not all things to everyone. We are not jello in that regard. Which is not to say we don't have porous boundaries. I'm sorry, Messianic Jews, no matter how they may define themselves, are Christians. I mean historically there was a period when there were Jewish Christians and they were problematic to Jews and problematic to Christians.

(JEB comment about Messianic Jews as Vegetarians for Meat)

I often think that there's no reciprocity here—Christians don't want to see Jews taking communion. I think people respect you if you have an identity in that regard, so hospitality is good. I don't know what audacious hospitality is. I think we ought to practice audacious hospitality to Jews if you want to know the truth. Which is to say a welcoming synagogue to Jews Part of our problem—there is certainly in traditional Judaism a custom of hospitality. If you see someone you welcome them in; you invite them over for Shabbos dinner; we've all experienced that—whereas liberal Jews have

basically assimilated to the social norms of a Protestant society which is a little more discriminating in that regard—with issues of class. But some of this is just being good Jews. Hospitality is something we do—*hachnasat orchim*—you invite people to Friday night dinner; that's what you do—I mean you have to have Friday night dinner to begin with…What sometimes drives me crazy when I see "recipe books" for being welcoming congregations:if the problem is how people are behaving, then a corporate structure for how to change it is just more of the same. We have "official greeters at the door" but if they're there doing a task, then they're not really doing it. You greet people because it's something that you want to do; being friendly is part of who you are, it's not something you are paid to be, or what have you. We are talking about in some respects changing a culture but you don't do that by reinforcing the institutional nature of the culture. So I think that audacious hospitality has to be tempered by proper self-worth and a recognition that certainly in the case of intermarried couples, we are not here to look down our noses at you or beat you over the head, but it's a Jewish congregation.

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