Feminist Content in Five Progressive *siddurim:* Summary of Thesis

Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

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Goals: The goal of this thesis was to explore the feminist content in five progressive *siddurim.* How did the editors of different prayer books make decisions about what feminist content to include? The contribution of this thesis is a deeper understanding of the social, political, and theological dynamics that contributed to the creation of *Mishkan T'filah, Siddur Sha'ar Zahav, The Book of Blessings, Siddur haKohanot,* and the forthcoming new Israeli Reform *Siddur.*

Contribution: A prayer book is both personal and public, for the individual and communal. Through prayer, we express our deepest fears and far-fetched hopes. A prayer book can facilitate or frustrate this process, particularly for Jewish prayer books. This thesis may be of particular interest to anyone interested in creating a new *siddur*. This thesis explores the process of shaping a new prayer book, including the challenges of the process. Further, the study of these will help those interested in writing new blessings as well as new prayer forms. These prayer books have opened the door for new ideas, sounds, and words to be used in worship, and this thesis seeks to help hold that door open for those who wish to continue expanding the possibilities for mainstream Jewish feminist worship.

Organization: There are four chapters.The first chapter analyzes the introductions of the *siddurim,* or how the editors describe their own work. The second chapter analyzes the God language and implied theological content, through the lens of each prayer book's stated values. The third chapter analyzes the poetry included in the *siddur.* The fourth chapter analyzes the form: exterior and interior, and includes an appendix with images.

Resources: Materials included books and article on feminism, Jewish feminism and prayer, but most importantly, the prayer books themselves. In addition, I conducted interviews with prayer book editors when possible. I interviewed Rabbi Dalia Marx, Ph.D., Rabbi Elyse Frishman, Rabbi Camille Angel, Rabbi Jill Hammer and Taya Shere.

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Introduction to the Course of Study

This thesis explores new prayer books published in the past 20 years that make use of feminist and egalitarian principles. Specifically I have chosen to study five *siddurim*: *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur, Siddur Sha'ar Zahav, Siddur haKohanot, Book of Blessings,* and the new Israeli Reform *siddur* that is currently in draft format. Each is written for a different audience, but each makes liturgical insertions and changes that demonstrate an awareness of and a desire for women's equity within the Jewish tradition. In studying these five prayer books from a feminist and an egalitarian point of view, I consider a number of questions: What kinds of language do the editors include in these prayer books and what (or whom) do they exclude? What decisions were made with regard to physical design and contents? What forms of feminist change do the editors hope to bring about through their particular prayer book?

I. What is feminism?

For the purpose of this thesis, feminism is understood as the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes. Beginning in the 1800s in America as a political movement with the goal of suffrage for white American women, the feminist idea has advanced over the past 200 years and now includes concepts of radical inclusion. The focus on voting rights is known as the "first wave" of feminism, and the second wave (beginning in the 1960s) was characterized by a shift toward fighting social and cultural inequalities (Freedman 2007, 75). The third wave of feminism (beginning around the 1990s) sought to challenge the second wave's more essentialized view of gender, and goes beyond the binary to systematically uphold and advance the rights of all

people who have faced discrimination, not just women (Walker 1992). Today, feminism is multifaceted and intersectional, defining identity as a combination of gender, sex, race, ethnicity, ability, class, and many more traits (Crenshaw 2015). Today, feminists seek to advance the human rights of all people: women as well as transgender and nonbinary persons. Feminists believe that all people should have equal access to basic rights such as voting, access to reproductive health care and the ability for women to make their own choices about their bodies, and pay equity. Women face discrimination and unconscious bias and feminists seek to level the playing field, equipping women with the skills to advance and men with the skills to be sensitive to these issues. Feminists also fight for all humans to fully experience all emotions and play all gender roles (Walker 2018). Feminists challenge the idea that to be masculine is to be physically strong and tough and provide financially for a family (Adichie, 2012). They support men experiencing feminine emotions and the ability for men to be vocal about their love (Adichie, 2012). Similarly, feminists challenge the idea that to be feminine is to be weak and submissive, to follow their husbands (Adichie, 2012). Feminists believe that families may have two differently-gendered parents, or may include two parents of the same gender, or two people in partnership who choose not to have children. Feminists work for equality in all of these realms: the public and private, at home, at school, in the office place, and in religious spaces.

II. What is Jewish feminism?

Jewish feminism applies these theoretical principles and attempts to look at our tradition and make use of the ways in which we can advance gender equality within

Jewish tradition. Jewish *halakhic* tradition has always looked at men and women differently, assigning different roles and responsibilities to each. Jewish men are obligated in prayer and historically, only Jewish men have been counted in a *minyan.* Jewish history and received Jewish texts have focused overwhelmingly on male characters as well. While Hagar has a theophany (Genesis 21:17-18) and Rebecca receives an oracle (Genesis 25:23), God communicates primarily with the patriarchs, ensuring them that their children will inhabit God's chosen land. When traditional liturgy invokes biblical history, it maintains a similar patriarchal focus. Jewish feminism thus seeks to right this balance: to uplift the voices of and roles for women within religious contexts. In short, Jewish feminism is about inclusivity.

Jewish feminism within the context of liturgy understands that the words that we use in prayer are not only the words that we use to express ourselves to God, but are also the way in which we see ourselves: our inherent worth and value. When men see their own masculinity reinforced as the patriarchs and originators of our tradition, they see that value in themselves. When they see masculine traits embodied by God, they understand those as their own. In the introduction to *Womanspirit Rising,* Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow draw on the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz to explain the importance of prayer and prayer language in shaping our world. They write:

> "Religious symbols are both models *of* divine existence and models *for* human behavior... Geertz's understanding of the function of religion is particularly useful for feminists because it provides a way of understanding the interaction between sex roles and religious symbols. God in 'his' heaven is both a model *of* divine existence and a model *for* women's subordination to men." (Emphasis theirs, 2)

In other words, the language that we use in prayer also constructs our value in relation one to another. We internalize the messages about who matters (men) based on

the language used in prayer and in our law codes. For egalitarian communities, it has become all the more critical that our liturgy reflect the inherent human value in all members of the community, regardless of gender. Each of the *siddurim* studied in this thesis explores this concept and makes different choices to represent women and women's voices. Some of the examined prayer books celebrate women and femininity outright; others emphasize gender neutrality.

III. Why study *siddurim?*

A *siddur* is the method of communication for a community's deepest values. In writing a *siddur,* a community or group of community leaders decides how it will pray and what their prayer is about. Within prayer, we praise, we express gratitude, we plead. Prayer can be an expression of anger, of frustration, or of hope. Through the language of prayer, we seek to offer honest words from our hearts to God. A *siddur* is a collection of these sentiments for an entire community. When we see our values, fears, and desires reflected on the page, and when we say or sing the words aloud together, we know that we are not alone. We feel connected to our ancestors, to future generations, to Jews around the world, and to the Jews in the sanctuary with us. The *siddur* is thus the values statement of a community at its highest level. Because feminism has radically shifted the fabric of liberal Judaism, our *siddurim* have shifted as well. The major movements have updated their *siddurim* and particular communities have created their own prayer books to express their own hopes and aspirations.

In studying *siddurim,* I hoped also to further my own relationship with my community and with God. How could expanding my prayer language expand my

relationship to God? How could my relationship to God and to my community be tested? Do I truly want a fully feminine liturgy, or simply to see and hear myself more strongly reflected within the liturgy? Through this study, I have learned that I am not (nearly!) the first woman to wonder about my role in the Jewish community, having felt the weight of a Hebrew liturgy that is almost entirely made up of masculine grammar. Judith Plaskow argues that the otherness of women is directly related to the language that we use to describe God. Writing about traditional liturgy, she says:

> The images we use to describe God, the qualities that we attribute to God, draw on male pronouns and male experience and convey a sense of power and authority that is clearly male in character…This [God-] language both tells us about God's nature (it is, after all, the only way we know God) and justifies a human community which reserves power and authority to men…. If God is male, and we are in God's image, how can maleness *not* be the norm of Jewish humanity? If maleness is normative, how can women not be Other? (227-228).

In other words, the language and metaphors that we use to describe God and our relationship to God form our thoughts on God, as well as our relationships to one another. Yet I have not been discouraged, and often I have found myself in these words, passed down by the men of the tradition. I thought that I might want simply to pray with feminine grammar, but I learned that that was not enough. Feminizing the traditional language does not go far enough to change our relationship to divinity; I needed to reconsider my relationship to divinity. Plaskow's questions often ring true for me, and I do often feel like the other in my communities. The community has not changed as quickly as I have, and I cannot push my community to catch up. Furthermore, I do not want to. I do not wish to break my links to my beloved, patriarchal tradition. I wish to honor these bonds while also forging new language that honors both other women, and my non-binary friends, colleagues, congregants, and myself. I hoped to study these

siddurim to learn what exists already: what does the Jewish feminist landscape look like? Where do I stand in relation to other communities? What can I learn from their liturgies?

IV. Why study these *siddurim?*

I chose these five siddurim for both academic and personal reasons. As a Reform Jew, I am committed to the Reform movement, both in America and in Israel. Furthermore, as a praying person, I have gotten to know *Mishkan T'filah* (MT) in particular through my daily prayer as well as Shabbat. I love MT, not only for its gender-neutrality but also because it was the first *siddur* in which I felt a spiritual home. I could relate to the God language and I could relate to the alternate readings that emphasized a human role in the world. I was eager to dig in and learn more about the prayer book of my spiritual home.

Similarly, when I learned that Drs. Marx and Lisitsa, my own liturgy professors during my time in Israel, were working on an Israeli Reform *siddur*, I was overjoyed. I was excited to study a prayer book with poetry, Reform ideology and Israeli influence in both the liturgy itself and in the accompanying readings.

I had been introduced to *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* (SSZ) by a colleague at Yale Hillel: Marlee Goldshine. I was touched by the introductory section on blessings, struck by the radical inclusivity, moved to tears by reading the blessing for taking an HIV test. Additionally, it was the first time that I saw liturgy printed with feminine grammar, besides text sheets I had prepared and hesitantly introduced to my classmates. I had to study this prayer book and learn more about its creation.

In seeking feminist prayer books, *Siddur haKohanot* (ShK) had been mentioned to me for its inclusion of radically feminist liturgy. It was with excitement that I sought out a copy of this *siddur,* ready to dive in to a book that did not only place masculine and feminine Hebrew side by side but that went further, using new, yet rooted, Jewish language to describe their relationship to God.

Finally, *The Book of Blessings* (BoB) is something of the Ur-text for feminist *siddurim*. Of course, there are others, such as *Siddur Nashim,* by Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig and Naomi Janowitz, but Falk's work has been more widely published and is revolutionary in terms of creating a new, feminist prayer language.

One beautiful *siddur* that was excluded was *Siddur Lev Shalem.* Though it provides beautifully laid-out educational commentary, and was published recently (2016), it still includes versions of the *Amidah* without the *imahot*. The printed option to exclude women is not a strong enough values statement to categorize it as a "feminist" *siddur*.

V. Thematic and Contextual Overview of Each Siddur

I. Israel: the New Israeli Reform *Siddur*

Rabbi Dr. Alona Lisitsa and Rabbi Dr. Dalia Marx are two Israeli Reform Rabbis who are currently creating a New Israeli Reform Siddur (NIRS). As the Reform movement in Israel grows and expands, the movement is in need of a new *siddur*. Entirely Hebrew, this *siddur* includes a largely traditional Hebrew liturgy along with selections from pre-modern and contemporary Hebrew / Israeli poetry.

The Israeli context is steeped in Jewish religious language and the Jewish rhythms of life. In contrast to the American Jewish context, where many American Reform Jews go to the synagogue to feel or experience Judaism, Israeli Reform Jews can feel Jewish just by waking up and speaking Hebrew. Furthermore, the Israeli religious context is dominated by the Orthodox. The *Rabbanut* controls who can be married and privileges Orthodox prayer experiences and ways of life in many ways. The effects of that are seen in the New Israeli Reform *Siddur*, which generally maintains a traditional liturgy. Marx and Lisitsa make changes to some blessings and provide gender-inclusive language and readings typically outside the context of the *Amidah* and the main prayer rubrics, leaving the more progressive content to *Kabbalat Shabbat* or the home prayer sections, which is less codified in tradition. In addition, there is an emphasis on the land of Israel. This emphasis is not explored for the purpose of this study. Overall, the *siddur* acknowledges the role of women in tradition yet maintains a clear line of continuity with the more Orthodox religious context.

II. Mainstream American Reform Context: *Mishkan T'filah*

Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur (MT), was published in 2007 and is the first major innovation in *siddurim* created by the American Reform movement since *Gates of Prayer* was published in 1975. It is meant for widespread use in diverse Reform synagogues across the United States. MT is significantly more inclusive than *Gates of Prayer,* both with regard to gender and God language. One significant change is that MT includes transliteration for all the prayers, not just a few in the back (*Gates of Prayer* included transliteration for a few key prayers in the back of the book only). Moreover, an

example of gender-inclusive change is the inclusion of the *imahot* in the *Amidah*. Furthermore, another major change is that instead of translating the tetragrammatron as "Lord," MT simply translates it as "Adonai," or "God." This will be discussed further in chapter 2.

The American Reform movement includes members who have grown up in the movement as well as families and members who have joined more recently, including from non-Jewish backgrounds. This may contribute to the choices to provide transliteration for everything, as well as an educational commentary on the bottom of many pages. MT is primarily for synagogue use, though it does have softcover versions for traveling and for camp. While it may be a tool that is explored at home for some individuals and families, most Reform Jews get to know this prayer book only from their interaction with it at synagogue, meaning that their interaction with prayer is also mitigated by the prayer leader and music.

III. American, Reform, and Queer: Siddur Sha'ar Zahav.

Siddur Sha'ar Zahav (SSZ) is the product of the Congregation *Sha'ar Zahav*, located in San Francisco. Congregation *Sha'ar Zahav* is a member of the Union for Reform Judaism. On their website, the community defines their identity:

> "Rooted in our history as San Francisco's gay and lesbian synagogue, we offer the warmth and comfort of chosen family. To that end, we embrace a diversity of individuals of all sexualities, genders, races, and abilities. We welcome a diversity of families, including single members, interfaith, single-parent, and multicultural families. (https://shaarzahav.org/community/)

The community decided that it needed to create its own liturgy and prayer book, and began a community-wide study that included prayer writing workshops and the

creation of an editorial committee. Each of the type of families mentioned above is represented in the prayer book's section on blessings. The result is a prayer book that has expanded its liturgy and is very broadly inclusive. Hebrew prayers appear with masculine and feminine grammatical forms, and there is an entire section at the beginning of the prayer book that includes blessings for occasions such as taking an HIV test, gender transitioning, and exploring one's complicated relationship to Israel. Their ethic of inclusivity includes people of all genders and sexual identities.

IV: America, A New Theology and New Blessings: *The Book of Blessings*

Marcia Falk's *Book of Blessings* is the product of a radical change from traditional theology. Falk was one of the first American Jewish feminists to seriously engage with the question, "Who is my God and how do I wish to relate to my God?" The result is a book of blessings born out of that personal grappling. Published in 1998, Falk does not pray to God with the words "you," instead speaking to a more immanent God. She radically recreates the liturgical rubrics, replacing some psalms with poems and focusing both on the effect of the Hebrew and the English on the reader. She blurs the line between poetry and blessing. As her work is not meant for one specified community, Falk has the freedom to take theological risks.

V. America, A Radical Departure from Traditional Jewish Life: The Hebrew Priestesses' *Siddur haKohanot*

The Hebrew Priestess Institute is an organization created by Rabbi Jill Hammer and Taya Shere. Through the institute, they educate and train women spiritual leaders. On

their website, the *Kohenet* Hebrew Priestess Institute states their mission: "*Kohenet* celebrates the sacred in the body, the earth, and the cosmos, holding the world to be an embodiment of *Shekhinah*, divine presence….*Kohenet* is creating a paradigm of earth-based, embodied, feminist, Judaism." (http://www.kohenet.com/mission/) Today, about 50 women have completed the program, which is about 10 years old. The *siddur* that Hammer and Shere have created for this community is one that celebrates both women and their vision of the earth and the cosmos.

In *Siddur haKohanot: A Hebrew Priestess Prayer book*, (ShK) Hammer and Shere bring together traditional Jewish texts, new poetry, and original artwork. Their *siddur* consists primarily of Hammer and Shere's own work but also includes a large number of compositions by members of the Hebrew Priestess community. In part because their community is still small, Shere and Hammer retain complete creative control and have been able to expand their liturgy as they wish and at the speed that they wish. They emphasize feminine language throughout.

Each of these *siddurim* follows their own approach to honoring the divinity of women and all people. *Mishkan T'filah* and the New Israeli Reform *Siddur* speak to a diverse group of people affiliated with one movement that is made up of smaller communities. *Siddur haKohanot* and *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* are focused on the needs of their own particular communities. *The Book of Blessings* is not created for a community that already exists in a unified form. Each of these books addresses inclusivity from their own point of view, as we will see in the following chapters.

Chapter 1: Analysis of Introductions

The introduction to any written work provides justification and explanation of the author or editorial team's goals. It can be read, in a sense, as a kind of manifesto on the underlying philosophy of the authors. In liberal prayer books, the introduction often includes a manual on usage of the book, as well as an introduction to the ideology and theology of the prayer book. The authors or editors explain why their book was necessary. In this chapter, I analyze the introductory remarks to provide context for the prayers and language themselves, which will be discussed in later chapters.

As noted in the introduction, a prayer book conveys a community's values to its members. As feminism and women's equality has become more widespread it has become essential that progressive prayer books reflect these values. In examining the introductions, I looked for statements about women's equality and the necessity of representation of women from Jewish history in our prayer language or accompanying readings. Do the introductions mention women at all? Do they clearly affirm the equal standing of men and women in their community? How do they explain the language that they will use? Some prayer books focus not on gender but rather on God, others make explicit their desires for a feminine God language. Each of the *siddurim* focuses on accessibility by providing translation as well as transliteration. In this chapter, I will explore the overall statements and ideology of each prayer book, from the broadest humanist to the most overtly feminist. There was no available introduction to the *New Israeli Reform Siddur* at the time of this study**.** The prayer books for large movements speak broadly about humanity without explicitly mentioning gender, while the *siddurim*

for use in particular communities clearly assert their desires for a prayer language that honors the divinity of men, women, and the non-binary (where applicable).

I. "A *siddur* must challenge narcissism:" *Mishkan T'filah*

The introduction to *Mishkan T'filah* is a broad thematic introduction and does not address gender whatsoever. Instead, the introduction to MT focuses on self-centeredness. Written by an editorial team for an entire denomination of American Jews who live across the continent, *Mishkan T'filah* is written for a broader and more centralized audience than either the *Book of Blessings, Siddur haKohanot* or *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*. The broad nature this editorial mandate poses very real challenges of communal and geographical diversity, and MT responds not by focusing on a politicized social issue, but on narcissism instead.

In the first paragraph of the introduction, the editors declare their primary goal in changing the prayer book: they wish to create a prayer book that reminds the individual that he/she is member of a collective. They claim that each generation needs a *siddur* that speaks to them as a member of a group: "not merely each individual. A *siddur* must challenge narcissism" (ix). It therefore proclaims its role as reminding the Reform Jew of their obligations to the community, rather than one's obligation to oneself. The editors continue, explaining that the congregant must "realize that prayer is not merely an outpouring of self; it is the opening of our senses to what is beyond ourselves" (ix), and "God is not in our image, we are in God's. It is critical that Reform Jews understand what is expected of them" (ix). Thus *Mishkan T'filah* alerts its user that they are responsible to the world around them as well as to God. Use of the prayer book should not be for

personal edification alone, but rather provides a communal, moral education. On one hand, the project of feminism is very much about looking outside the self and considering one's obligations toward the community, toward advancing the cause of women and gender non-conforming persons everywhere. In this way, MT can be considered feminist, however the editors make a clear decision not to center gender in their introduction. Perhaps by focusing on individuals, they seek to avoid creating division by group (men vs. women) and uphold the need of each human person to take part in working with the group in order to ensure that this prayer book is for all.

Furthermore, the editors hope that by using *Mishkan T'filah,* the congregant will remember that they are not alone, regardless of how that individual understands or relates to God. The editors continue explaining that their *siddur* intends to use poetry and translation to "be not only multi-vocal, but poly-vocal: to invite full participation at once, without conflicting with the *keva* text" (ix). Explaining that there are many pathways for the worshiper to connect with a given prayer, they seek to serve their diverse population of worshipers. The editors further define their broad theological statement: "Theologically, the liturgy needs to include many perceptions of God: the transcendent, naturalist, mysterious, partner, the evolving...over the course of praying, many voices are heard, and ultimately come together as one" (ix). It is clear that their poly-vocal view of God aligns with their overall goal for the prayer book: that in speaking to many people with different relationships to God and thus to worship and religion, they can allow a unified whole to pray. They must walk this line attentively and cautiously in order to avoid isolating individuals. Some members of the Reform community find language that centers on women threatening, thus explicit mention of feminism or women as members

of the collective whole is too risky. Along similar lines, the editors of *Mishkan T'filah* do not directly address the question of gendered God-language. Instead, they describe their goal as creating the tool for a worship experience that speaks to many different people. Though they avoid addressing God's gender, they focus on a layout that invites many different readers with different theological concerns into the prayer experience.

None of this is to say that MT avoids the question of God's gender, and in some cases *Mishkan T'filah* changes the wording of the traditional Hebrew text. In explanation, the editors write that the fixed texts "must be acceptable; hence the ongoing adaptations of certain prayers, over time, such as the *G'vurot*" (ix). They chose to include the matriarchs in the G'vurot because in 2007 it was a given that the women of our tradition must be included in our liturgy. A gender-egalitarian movement must be gender inclusive in its prayer language. No longer does the Reform movement accept the mentioning of only the patriarchs as enough for the modern Reform Jew. In addition, the editors write, "The publication of *Mishkan T'filah* continues the Reform movement's tradition of liturgical innovation" (x), insisting not on their right but on their responsibility to create new liturgy. This is almost the exact phrasing used in the introduction to *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*. Though "tradition of innovation" may seem to be a paradox or contradiction, it is the history and creative spirit of the Reform movement and all of Jewish tradition. The vitality and continuation of Reform Judaism depends on our active participation and fearlessness in bringing new words and new forms to our religious life.

Mishkan T'filah addresses the layout of the book directly, in part because the format is completely different from its predecessor, *Gates of Prayer.* In explaining the layout, the editors allude to opportunities for creativity in worship and for each

congregation to make its own choices: "Layouts of the prayers invite different usage" (xvii). They acknowledge that different congregations will use the prayer book differently. In addition, they explain that the alternate readings are included because they are "thematically tied to the *keva* text but reflect diverse theological points of view" (xvii). Their desire to create a poly-vocal text is repeated throughout their introductory remarks to the *siddur*. Having read this entire introduction, the worshiper expects to find themself reflected in at least some if not all of the readings provided. Implicit in the layout and inclusions is a principle of diversity and choice in how one wishes to pray.

Overall, MT walks a line between being inclusive and challenging narcissism without explicitly naming who they are including in their community. Discussing feminism or equal rights was too delicate to be explained in a straightforward manner, but the editors speak to this point in their focus on the polyvocality of the text and the need for the prayer book to be "acceptable" to the reader. Without being conspicuous, they share their desire for all Reform Jews, including women, to find themselves reflected in the *siddur* in some way.

II. Gender equality in *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*

In contrast to *Mishkan T'filah, Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* is for a specific community whose principles of gender equality guide their community. (https://shaarzahav.org/community/) Thus, *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* sets out its intents and guiding principles very clearly: "The richness of this *siddur*, like the *Sha'ar Zahav* community, is rooted in its integration of Jewish tradition with egalitarian, feminist and LGBTQ-positive ideas and language. With this edition, we have sought to continue and

expand the *Sha'ar Zahav* tradition of creating liturgy that reflects who we are" (viii). In this statement, the editors define the community as egalitarian, feminist, LGBTQ-positive and Jewish, who need a liturgy that reflects their identity and life experiences. This brief statement also helps the reader contextualize Congregation *Sha'ar Zahav* as inheritors of the Jewish tradition and as people who may have been persecuted or discriminated against based on their gender or sexual identity or orientation. Unlike *Mishkan T'filah*, *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* is for worshippers in one geographical location. Identifying with the community facilitates the coming together of the various interests and subjects positions represented by the editors.

The average worshiper using *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* is likely to be praying at *Congregation Sha'ar Zahav* in San Francisco, because the *siddur* was created by and for that specific community. The worshipper thus finds themself rooted in history and community, even as they pray using new language. The innovations found in *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* are not primarily born out of a desire to create a more beautiful egalitarian world, but rather out of a need for the community to see itself in its liturgy. In other words, though members of Congregation *Sha'ar Zahav* may be interested in changing the world, their primary goal in creating this prayer book was to produce a book that enabled them to pray authentically, by including language and reflecting their particular experiences as queer Jews.

Congregation *Sha'ar Zahav* also places itself in context of Reform Judaism, noting "*Sha'ar Zahav* is affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), and this *siddur* reflects many of the innovations of the Reform movement as well as the URJ's commitment to an evolving liturgical tradition" (viii). Thus, the *Sha'ar Zahav* community

locates themselves not just as part of Jewish tradition writ large, but as part of a major Jewish movement, affirming that their own liturgical innovations come from a context where liturgical innovation is a dedicated commitment. Their changes, thus, are not only acceptable but necessary in their context. This is similar to the argument for liturgical change made by the editors of *Mishkan T'filah.*

Siddur Sha'ar Zahav asserts their place in Reform Jewish tradition and the editors elaborate on their need to create a new prayer book. The editor's note reads: "Our goal is for all of us to see ourselves reflected in our liturgy...so that none of us experience the invisibility and exclusion we have historically encountered" (ix). The need for new prayers comes from their individual and collective experiences, both modern and historical. The prayer book for them is not a privilege or a desire, but a necessity. The goal is to serve a broad but particular range of people: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-identified persons, including feminists. They note their diversity of age, experience, and place of origin in the introduction as well. One almost wonders if their prayer book will be able to adequately serve people of such different experiences and backgrounds, but then recalls their unifying identities: modern queer and feminist Jews, praying in San Francisco.

When it comes to liturgical innovation, the editors of *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* map this out clearly as well. In the introduction, they explain their inclusion of "alternative English versions of prayers and alternative Hebrew and Aramaic, so that our values can be reflected in all our languages of prayer" (ix). By acknowledging the use of multiple languages and multiple readings, and calling those all "our languages of prayer," they make a strong inclusive statement. The editors do not give up Aramaic, Hebrew, or

English, further affirming their place in the *shalshelet hakabbalah,* the chain of received tradition. Although they provide some alternative Hebrew and Aramaic options, they lay out an ethic that includes passages that remain unchanged: "We did not alter any passages taken from the Torah, except to ensure gender inclusivity, which is noted in the text. Nor did we alter prayers such as the Mourner's Kaddish, which serve so powerfully to connect us to the Jewish people across time and space" (ix). Clearly, for *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav,* some prayers are canonical precisely because they locate the worshiper in connection to their history, or Jewish family. In choosing to leave some parts of the liturgy unchanged, they assert their desire to remain connected to Torah and history, as well as other Jewish communities all over the world. In remaining connected, they prevent themselves from being seen as too far outside the Jewish progressive mainstream. In addition, it is curious that they note that they do change Biblical passages for "gender inclusivity," as Hebrew is an undeniably gendered language. Grappling with the gendered nature of Hebrew is certainly one of the greatest challenges for a feminist *siddur.* Dalia Marx writes: "Hebrew speakers know better than to think that we can aspire to total linguistic equality" (135), asserting that linguistic equality is impossible. Clearly the editors of *Sha'ar Zahav* disagree with Dr. Marx's sense of limitation or resignation with respect to the grammatical gender of biblical/liturgical Hebrew. One of the interesting challenges of working with this *siddur* will be to examine the liturgical effect of this *siddur's* selective revision of Biblical passages so as to create greater gender equality or widen the inclusivity of the Hebrew text.

Overall, *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* seeks to create a prayer book for those who have felt historically excluded due to gender or sexual orientation. Locating themselves within

a stream of Judaism that views liturgical innovation as a necessity, they root themselves as a community and assert their right to make the changes that will enable them to feel represented. Having never been to Congregation *Sha'ar Zahav,* I believe that they do a satisfactory job of creating a liturgy that is not bound to their location in San Francisco, and speaks to Jews across the United States who care about gender equality and queer pride.

III. A New Paradigm of Blessing in *Book of Blessings*

Marcia Falk's *Book of Blessings* stands out from the other *siddurim* because it was written by one woman rather than an editorial team. In addition, she does not write from the perspective of a denomination or specific movement of Judaism, rather she is an independent Jewish voice creating an independent book of Jewish prayer. Though her theology aligns with Reconstructionism in refusing to locate God outside the self but rather within, she does not speak for Reconstructionism, as the Reconstructionist movement has its own *siddur.* Further, Falk is aware that her solo work is unique. She begins with the acknowledgment that most *siddurim* are written in committee, yet she wrote the blessings herself. However, she situates the question of her legitimacy by spending the next two pages thanking the partners in her work: Hebrew scholars, Jewish feminist scholars, Biblical scholars, and liturgy scholars. Thus, she challenges the reader's perspective that this book is hers alone. Furthermore, the scholars that she thanks are people of respect in the Jewish community, among them Rabbis Rachel Adler and Larry Hoffman. Though she did not work with an editorial committee in committee meetings, it is clear that she created the prayer book in consultation with a number of

educated and widely-respected theologians, historians, and scholars. By acknowledging them, she legitimizes her own work.

Falk states: “the heart of the book is the Hebrew blessing itself, presented in a variety of forms and always accompanied by an English transliteration (for those who cannot read the Hebrew alphabet) and by an English version (which is not a literal translation but a counterpart, an English poem designed to re-create the effect of the original Hebrew)” (xix). Explaining the multiple methods of accessing the prayers, she is conscious of an audience who may not have facility with Hebrew. Though she clearly prioritizes the Hebrew blessing, describing it as “the heart of the book” (xix), she is aware that her audience will include Hebrew readers as well as people who do not read or understand Hebrew. Furthermore, she cares about the English reader as much as the person praying in Hebrew. This is evident in her description that the English poem is meant to give the same effect as the Hebrew: she does not translate for literal accuracy, but rather for literary and emotional effect. Much of her book is prayer and poetry, but there is commentary written in essay form as well. Falk addresses this in her introduction, explaining: “the commentary is for general readers and scholars alike.” (Falk, xxi). She knows that she writes for a diverse audience: those seeking to pray as well as those seeking to interrogate her writing and approach to prayer. Unlike the editors of *Mishkan T’filah*, she does not explicitly create these blessings for congregational use. This may be reflected in its lack of use within synagogue services. No major movement has adopted it as its prayer book.

Falk describes her approach to God in the introduction and depicts God as ineffable. She states that many metaphors taken as a whole are needed in order to capture

the essence of God: “this cluster of images, taken as a whole, might begin to suggest the presence of the divine in the whole of creation…in a way not possible using any single image alone” (xviii). Falk’s aesthetic ideology of prayer thus assumes that prayer is best served by mobilizing new metaphors for God. However, she does not create a large number of new images, focusing only on a few new images that she repeats in multiple sections. Falk elaborates: “Where is the divine in all of these? Nowhere in particular - yet potentially everywhere that attention is brought to bear” (xix). In this way she defines a more expansive view of God in her introductory work than do *Mishkan T’filah* or *Siddur Sha’ar Zahav*.

Falk’s ideology includes an expansive view of God and a desire for accessibility. However, for those used to praying in a direction, toward a transcendent God, or at least a God outside of the self, her work may in fact be inaccessible.

IV. Embodying the Divine Feminine in *Siddur haKohanot*

The introductory remarks in *Siddur haKohanot* reflects a focus on accessible language and does not overtly centralize feminine language to the exclusion of the masculine. Before their preface, their first message to the reader is titled, “Notes on Language.” In this note, they include an explanation of names for God as well as a guide to pronunciation. The guide to pronunciation demonstrates an awareness that people using their prayer book may not be familiar with or used to transliteration. In their explanation of God-language, they write: “Our *siddur* uses multiple names, designations, and grammatical forms for God (where *Adonai* would usually appear) as well as … for humans, expressing a variety of ideas. Our *siddur* most typically uses *Shechinah* (Divine

Presence) to refer to deity" (2). Though they do assert their use of a feminine word for God, they also write: "We invite you to use the language that most speaks to you and fits your spiritual practice" (2). In doing so, they assert their choice but give the reader permission to make his or her own choice as well.

A number of choices in these brief statements are worth investigating. First, they take ownership of their *siddur*, "Our *siddur*," though they do not provide an explanation of who Hebrew priestesses are or how they came to be. Because this work is used primarily by the Hebrew Priestesses, including during their training, no introduction to the community is necessary. This also belies an assumption that members outside the community either know them already and do not need any introduction, or simply will not pick up the prayer book at all. Second, their use of parentheses provides an added layer of explanation for the reader who they assume has some prior knowledge of Jewish prayer. This assumption is evident in their lack of definition or explanation of the word *Adonai* and assumption that the reader is familiar with both the term and its appearance in liturgy. However, they do not assume that the reader has familiarity with the term *Shechinah* as they define that term and categorize it as a word for deity. They share their female-centered theology in explaining that the word for God that they use most often is *Shechinah*, a name that often refers to a feminine aspect of God.

In their preface to the prayer book, Shere and Hammer write that the book is "earth-honoring, woman-honoring spirituality with deep roots in Jewish tradition." This is somewhat similar to *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*, which also roots itself in Judaism, though *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* roots itself within Reform Judaism, rather than a Judaism about the elements of the earth. Earth-honoring spirituality is an aspect of Judaism that is rarely

emphasized in other prayer books, thus placing ShK even further outside the Jewish mainstream.

One consistent focus in *Siddur haKohanot* is the emphasis on variety. In the preface, Shere and Hammer write about their "devotion to *Shechinah* (Divine presence) in Her many guises, and our commitments to the paths through which she is embodied in our lives…" (3). On any page or spread of pages, multiple names and words for God are used. This reflects their emphasis on the many ways to connect with the divine and with Jewish spirituality.

Finally, Shere and Hammer offer a blessing of sorts to the person using the *siddur* that they have created: "May *Siddur haKohanot* bring inspiration, meaning, and expansive possibilities and depth into your prayer experiences and spiritual life." Their explicit purpose is to broaden people's understanding of Jewish community and worship. In having created a creative prayer book, they envision it being used in creative ways.

Conclusion

The introduction to each of these prayer books takes into account their readership: be it broad, narrow, defined by one specific point of commonality, or diverse and geographically varied. The ideology of *Mishkan T'filah* is one that de-centers the individual. In de-centering the individual, MT reminds the Reform community that we are more than the sum of our parts, that we must look to one another in order to heal ourselves and the world, and to be in relationship with God. This stands in stark contrast to the ideology of *Book of Blessings*, which centers the praying individual. The BoB honors the individual's needs for connection with God, democratizing God and taking

God off a faraway pedestal. By locating God within and around, some may have difficulty connecting, but many find the possibilities for connection with the Divine have multiplied exponentially. *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* and *Siddur haKohanot* are community-created works that honor their specific communal needs. SSZ centers queer experience and helps queer Jews see that they are not alone while ShK focuses on the celebration of the Divine feminine. Each of these books reflects different dimensions of the feminist project. By honoring the experiences and lives of women and queer Jews, they participate in the feminist project of honoring the lives of all humans, and upholding those who most need to be seen. It is up to each individual to consider to what community they wish to belong and thus what prayer book is right for them.

Chapter 2: Analysis of God language

Overview

This chapter will focus on God-vocabulary in the studied *siddurim*. Vocabulary for God is central for a prayer book, as it provides a frame for the relationship between the reader and the Divine. The traditional *siddur* itself contains a multitude of words and metaphors for God: from the most-commonly seen Adonai, often translated as "my lord," to *tzuri,* "my rock" and other phrases that describe an action, such as *go'ali,* "my redeemer." The images and forms used to describe God both have implications for how we understand and relate to God, as well as for how we relate to one another. In choosing language for God, the creators of each prayer book make decisions on how the community navigates these relationships. The words and phrases used in the prayer books ranges from direct translations of or maintenance of traditional Hebrew that are repeated throughout the prayer book, to the use of diverse phrases and new blessing formulas that are used less continuously throughout the *siddur*.

In order to write this section, I primarily examined English words and epithets for God, in search of patterns, except in the New Israeli Reform *Siddur*, where there is no English. I took a count of all words for God that appeared in the *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Ma'ariv* section of each prayer book. This included English translation and any English commentary or accompaniment: from poems presented alongside the liturgy to explanatory notes providing context or stage directions. The hope in conducting this count was to see what metaphors were drawn on repeatedly and how God was described both in the English translation of the liturgy as well as any other explanatory notes. All of this together provides clues to the prayer book's statement on or views toward God.

As noted above, the God language chosen by the creators of each *siddur* speaks not only to the creators' views on God but also to the needs of their particular audience. Most *siddurim* had one or two words or phrases that were frequently repeated, used a few metaphors somewhat frequently, and used many metaphors only once. The New Israeli Reform *Siddur*, in a conservative Israeli context, maintains the most traditional God-language. In *Mishkan T'filah,* there are few words for God, mostly direct translations, repeated many times. In *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav,* most words for God are gender neutral. In *Siddur haKohanot*, just as remarkable as the feminine metaphors are the vast vocabulary used to refer to the divine. In the *Book of Blessings*, the blessing formula—as well as the word God— is completely transformed to conform to an immanent (non-transcendent) God concept. Insofar as each prayer book is for a specific audience, the theology of each *siddur* reflects each presumed audience. In this chapter, the God-language of each *siddur* will be explored, beginning with the most traditional and ending with the most radical. While all the prayer books speak to the needs of their audience, the prayer books for large movements retain the most conservative theologies, while the *siddurim* for specific communities are more radical in their God-language.

I. The Conservative Israeli Context Shapes a More Traditional Theology

First, the most conservative of all the studied *siddurim* is the New Israeli Reform *Siddur (*NIRS*)*, which walks a balance between traditional God-language and opening up new conceptions of vocabulary for God. This is likely due to the context: Israeli culture is characterized by Jewish language and Jewish rhythms of life. The conservatism of the NIRS is characterized by the relative lack of changes to the majority of the liturgical text. While the *imahot* are included in the *Amidah,* the overall gender pronouns and God-

vocabulary of the major rubrics of the service remains unchanged. For Israelis who travel within a society in which *dati-le'umi* and Orthodox expressions of Judaism dominate the religious culture, maintaining the traditional vocabulary makes it possible to experience Reform spaces with greater familiarity and to explore more confidently. Furthermore, this may help Jews who did grow up in an Israeli Reform community to travel within Israeli religious spaces with greater ease.

Overall, the liturgy in NIRS employs fairly traditional God-language. The NIRS includes 36 distinct words for God, 35 of which are masculine. The traditional tetragrammatron appears 141 times in the *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Ma'ariv* sections, and the masculine "you," "*atah*," appears second most commonly, 39 times. Thus, to the Hebrew ear, the continuous "*hu*" and "*melech*" (he, king) may be less jarring than to an American ear, which experiences gender neutrality and thus gender in a different way. Furthermore, for the young Israeli soldier in the army, a masculine God who is the rock and shield of Israel likely has a stronger resonance than for the typical American college student, rendering it more relevant and meaningful. By using language for God that is contiguous with the God-language of the cultural context, Marx and Lisitsa ensure that NIRS is a prayer book that will be relevant to its users.

While the *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Ma'ariv l'shabbat* sections are characterized by masculine God language, feminine language and feminine God-language does appear in other parts of the *siddur.* Though there are no changes to the God-language of the *Amidah*, though the matriarchs are included. It's possible that it would be too risky in the cultural context to use non-traditional words for God within the central prayers of the liturgy, and that including the matriarchs is sufficiently radical for this point in time.

Feminine language for God does appear in other parts of the *siddur*, such as in the section that is meant to be used at home on Shabbat, which includes the blessings for the candles and challah. Some of the poetic sections use feminine God-language as well. Perhaps the less formal home context is a safer place in which to include countercultural vocabulary than in the parts of the *siddur* meant for synagogue use. Commentary that questions God's nature is left to sections other than the central Friday night prayers. Rather than modify the liturgy itself, Marx and Lisitsa use poetry to offer new paradigms for relationships with and depictions of God. The poetic offerings will be discussed further in the poetry chapter. Though they maintain traditional God-language in the principal Shabbat prayer rubrics, Marx and Lisitsa introduce alternative views of and relationships to God in the less-risky, home sections of the *siddur*.

The goal is a prayer book that resonates, (Interview, Marx) and that Israelis will take with them wherever they go: home, to synagogue, to the army, on a camping trip. For this reason, making too many changes may be too radical or too unsafe. NIRS thus maintains traditional God-language in the most recognizable sections of the prayer book and Friday night service, while introducing feminine God language and progressive theological concepts in other components and prayer rubrics. Though it may still seem somewhat conservative, the God-language presented in NIRS is thoughtfully attuned to its user.

Vocabulary for God in the New Israeli Reform *Siddur*

Word or Epithet for God	Total # of Appearances
יהוה	141
אתה	39
אלהינו	30
אלהים	20
אל	18
אלהֵי	14
הוא	14
מלך	12
אלוהיכם	5
אדון	4
אלהיך	4
מלכנו	3
אלהָי	2
המקום	2
ה׳	2
רועי	2
אלי	2
אדוני	2
מלכי	1
אב הרחמים	1
אליה	1
האלהים	1
אבינו	1
אלוהיך	1
אב הרחמן	1
המלך	1
השם	1
עושנו	1
המרחם	1
עשי	1
צורי	1
גואלי	1
בורא	1
יוצר	1
מלכי המלכים	1
הקדוש ברוך הוא	1

II. The Broad American Reform Context: Gender Neutral God-language in *Mishkan T'filah*

The other movement-wide *siddur, Mishkan T'filah* is for a much larger prayer community than the NIRS. Similarly, while the God-language of MT is relatively conservative and there are few changes to the Hebrew liturgy, the gender neutral God-language in the English translation is significant. The choice to make the God language gender neutral is an effort to be modern, avoiding an obviously patriarchal, "Lord" God concept, without alienating more traditional readers. Though this study focuses primarily on the *siddurim* in relationship to one another, it must be noted that MT marks a major difference from the God language in the Reform movement's previous prayer book, *Gates of Prayer.* Though *Gates of Prayer* did include some sections with more gender-neutral God language, overall, it repeatedly included "Lord" and he/him pronouns. In contrast, nowhere in the *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Shabbat Ma'ariv* of *Mishkan T'filah* sections, is God referred to in English in a masculine form. This shift in MT is drastic. *Mishkan T'filah* is thus at once the most traditional of the English prayer books examined and the prayer book with the most mainstream and widest audience. Since the audience of *Mishkan T'filah* is the largest and the broadest, the changes made by the Reform Movement to their liturgy must be much more incremental than the changes made by an individual community.

The use of gender-neutral language for God is its way of speaking to a broad and diverse audience. In the Kabbalat Shabbat and *Shabbat Ma'ariv* sections, there are 26 different words or epithets for God, in the prayer's translations, accompanying poetry, and footnotes. Please see the table below for the complete list. *Adonai* appears 129 times

and God appears 179 times, while the phrase "O God" appears an additional 8 times. "O God," sounds like a personal appeal and invites the person praying in English into the experience in a way similar to "*Adonai.*" The third-most commonly used word is "Source," which has a feminine resonance. The word "Presence" 9 times, and all other words for God appear 8 times or fewer. Most but not all of the English words used for God in MT are direct, word-for-word translations of the Hebrew text.

Though it is not as radical in comparison to ShK, SSZ, or BoB, MT's constant insistence on gender neutrality is significant. The most notable shift toward gender-neutrality is MT's handling of the tetragrammatron. In all cases where it would be pronounced "*Adonai*," MT simply leaves it as "*Adonai*," in translation. Leaving this work in transliteration avoids the need to adopt the traditional masculine image of a lord or master without causing a huge disruption in the sound or feel of the prayer. However, God described as God is still God, open to our own projections and inherited education related to God's gender and power – and for those who still imagine God as a lord, the transliteration does not provide an alternative image. The choice to simply render "*Adonai" as "Adonai"* (along with the existence of translation and transliteration throughout the prayer book), belies the fact that many members of Reform communities do not have strong Hebrew skills, and do not know the meaning of *Adonai.* Because "Adonai" is not translated in MT, it may simply seem to be God's name, rather than a relational descriptor. *Mishkan T'filah* is a movement-wide prayer book used by a diverse group of congregations and this may be a way to avoid creating a conflict for those communities that embrace the implied all-powerful God concept, as well as as those who object to this imagery.

Just as MT avoids gendering "*Adonai*" in English, when another epithet for God is used, so too does MT avoid the use of obviously gendered vocabulary. When MT does use gendered vocabulary, it attempts to balance masculine and feminine imagery and metaphor. One example of pure gender neutrality is the treatment of the word *Melech,* rendered by MT as sovereign rather than king. Another example is found in the translation of *Shalom Aleichem*, for the phrase *"mimelech malachei hamlachim,"* the translation goes to great lengths to avoid both king and queen, instead choosing the gender-neutral "Majesty of majesties" (142). God's other attributes are described—majestic, holy, grand—but God's gender is not (or in the case of "*Adonai*" is not acknowledged by avoiding translation).

In addition to repeating the untranslated, "*Adonai"* multiple times, *Mishkan T'filah* uses a few other images of God repeatedly. In the Shabbat liturgy, God's role as creator is mentioned a number of times, both in prayer translations, as well as in the accompanying readings. God and *Adonai* are somewhat neutral terms for God and appear in varying contexts across both prayer translations and alternate readings. The repetition of God or *Adonai* allows the pray-er to project their own images of God, but also provides a sense of consistency throughout the service. The repeated use of God or *Adonai* also may allow the person praying to understand our one God; the God that we affirm is one when we pray the *Sh'ma*, with ease. The consistency of language may also be viewed as an attempt to be inclusive. When God only has a few names, God may be easier to access.

However, sometimes the traditional liturgy specifies descriptors other than God and *Adonai*. For example, shield and helper appear in the context of the *Avot* prayer of

the *Amidah*. In this case, the Reform liturgy itself provided the opportunity to use one masculine and one femininely-valenced word by adding "*V'ezrat Sarah"* to the *chatimah*. The "help of Sarah" balances the "shield of Abraham" both by adding the matriarch's name but also in the feminine resonance of help that is contrasted to the masculine resonance of shield. Shield has a military connotation, and certainly the masculine role has been the person in a male-female unit who is often assumed to be the protector. Oppositely, being a helper is often considered a feminine attribute. The root of this attribute can be traced to Genesis 2:18 when God decides to create a second human to aid the first human. Though it may be more accessible from a gender-lens, "sovereign" feels much less personal than King or Queen. Perhaps this is because as Americans, we reject the idea of a political sovereign: we vote for our leaders. It is possible that the metaphor of a monarch, or supreme political ruler is significantly less powerful, regardless of gender, in the American context. Thus we see that gender is wrapped up not only in character traits but our political psyche, and using gender neutral language for God may help the reader focus on the prayer and relationship at hand.

Mishkan T'filah presents additional images and metaphors for God in poems and alternate readings, rather than in the translations of the prayers themselves. Most powerfully, however, alternate readings often emphasize our human role of completing the work of creation, rather than God's unending power. In this way, MT creates a role for God in the lives and prayers of the skeptics or logical doubters, or scientific reasoners who doubt more than they believe. These will be explored in more detail, however, in a separate chapter on poetry.

Overall, *Mishkan T'filah* strives to be a gender-neutral or gender-egalitarian *siddur*. At the same time, it attempts not to veer too far from the traditional liturgy, and primarily uses two words for God, creating a cohesive prayer experience. When possible, words with masculine and feminine valences balance one another. MT breaks from prior Reform prayer books that presented a clearly masculine God, without moving too quickly and radically, and thus MT brings its large community forward toward a less patriarchal vision of God. Though it seems less radical than some of its contemporary counterparts, in the context of the history of Reform movement *siddurim* it is quite radical.

Vocabulary for God in *Mishkan T'filah*

Word or Epithet for God	**Total # of Appearances**
God	179
Adonai	122
Presence	9
O God	8
Sovereign	7
Eternal	6
(O) Most High	6
Creator	5
Rock	4
Majesty of Majesties	4
Holy One of Blessing	4
Source	3
Helper	3
Shield	3
Deliverer	2
Guardian	2
Redeemer	2
Heart's Delight	1
Source of mercy	1
Holy Blessed One	1
Ruler	1
Savior	1
Hidden One	1

Good One	1
Compassionate One	1
One	1

III. Gender Inclusivity in the God-Language of *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*

While the God-language of *Mishkan T'filah* falls more into the traditional gender-neutral category, *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* could be characterized as gender-egalitarian and gender-inclusive. SSZ falls in between the God-vocabulary in *Mishkan T'filah* and *Siddur haKohanot. Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* is for a population that includes and celebrates many trans members, as well as gay and straight Jews. Therefore, their translations are gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive, rather than affirmative of one gender in particular.

In providing a diverse set of vocabulary for God, SSZ uses 45 distinct words or epithets, almost double MT's 26 words or epithets. Greater diversity in God-language corresponds to more invitations in to relationship with God for more people. The most neutral word, God, appears 245 times in the *Kabbalat Shabbat-Shabbat Ma'ariv* sections, and the next most common word is Eternal, which appears 34 times. In choosing both God and Eternal, the editors chose to remove gender from the equation linguistically, however, like MT, they do not explicitly challenge our inherited understandings of God as patriarchal. SSZ uses not only gender-neutral words for God, but also vocabulary that is explicitly feminine alongside vocabulary that is explicitly masculine. They are not presented as opposites, or shameful attributes, rather as different dimensions of humanity and divinity that are worthy of honor.

The range of God vocabularies in SSZ provides multiple opportunities for people to see their gender characteristics represented in God. Out of three of the most repeated

words, Almighty (28 appearances), Divine (15 appearances), and One (18), gender-neutrality, femininity and masculinity are all represented. Almighty, with its images of great strength, sounds masculine, while "divine," sounds feminine. "One" does not have a gender valence. Another example of gender-inclusive language is the use of *Sh'chinah tiferet* in the place of *Adonai tzva'ot* (61). *Sh'chinah tiferet,* or "Glorious Presence" is a distinct contrast to the ultra-masculine *Adonai tzva'ot*, "Lord of Hosts" – a God who is also an army commander. A glorious presence sounds both gentler and more beautiful: two feminine attributes. In addition, the following sentence mixes gender valences in both Hebrew and English. The sentence includes the phrase: "Well of Life and Preservation" (61). While "Well of life," sounds feminine, "preservation," with its connotations of savior, sounds more masculine. In providing both options on the same page, the prayer book broadens the concept of the ways in which God acts in the world. It also makes space for people of all gender identities and expressions to find themselves reflected in God. This may be particularly welcoming for a person who may have a fraught relationship to their gender. In addition, SSZ honors the divine feminine. To that end, three overtly feminine words for God appear in the examined rubric: *Shechinah,* Her, and Queen. *Shechinah* appears nine times, Her and Queen each appear only once. The presence of these descriptors is enough to challenge masculine ideas about God or to simply widen the language used in synagogue services to describe divinity. As demonstrated in the God language of SSZ, God does not have only masculine or feminine attributes: God has both at once. So too, can we. In a community established based on gender identity and sexual preferences as well as progressive Jewish values, gender-inclusive language is critical in order to affirm individual and communal identity.

The God language of SSZ not only reflects static gender characteristics but also represents queer experiences. A dynamic of celebration and surprise enters the God language of SSZ. For example, "Holy spark" and "Inexplicable energy" are epithets for God that could reflect queer Jew's experiences. An inexplicable energy or holy spark could refer to the experience of same-sex attraction, often left out of our cultural narrative that often excludes queer experiences. Furthermore, these phrases are rooted in Jewish concepts. "Holy spark" is a Kabbalistic term that refers to the Holy sparks of light that were scattered in the universe when God contracted and created the world. "Inexplicable energy" is also reminiscent of the theology of Maimonides who was unable to make an affirmative statement about God. Instead Maimonides chose to define God by what God is not. More research is needed into the prayer-writing workshops that members of *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* participated in to understand the origins of these epithets, and their resonances for the community today.

What is clear in the *siddur* is an ethos of diversity. Not only does SSZ diversify God vocabulary, it also provides multiple modes for Hebrew prayer. There are prayers that appear in masculine and feminine Hebrew grammar both in reference to God and to the reader. Furthermore, in the *Ma'ariv l'chol* section of the prayer book, after the *Barchu,* the first blessing is presented in the feminine, with no traditional masculine formulation. In the Hebrew, it appears as *Ma'arivah aravim* and in the translation, *Shechinah* is translated simply as "*Shechinah*" (61). This places *Shechinah* as equivalent to God or Eternal and is similar to MT's rendering of "*Adonai*" in English as "*Adonai*." It is worth further research to understand how this prayer is presented during worship: does the *shaliach tzibur* explain the use of Hebrew feminine or are members familiar

enough with the service to note the difference in gender, grammar, and sound? Are there less services on weekdays, and how often is that section of the *siddur* used?

In terms of providing options for different worship experiences, SSZ does not keep the same options across services. The same feminine Hebrew version of *Ma'arivah Aravim* appears in the *Ma'ariv l'Shabbat* section of the prayer book, but with a slightly different English translation than in the *ma'ariv l'chol* section. The traditional masculine *ma'ariv aravim* appears as well. The prayer leader therefore has a choice regarding gender when leading a Shabbat service, but not when leading an evening service on a weekday. Yet it is also possible that the congregation gathers most frequently on Shabbat and thus it is important for these prayer occasions for the prayer leader to have the opportunity to choose what is right for each service. Presumably the congregation has learned to be flexible with gender, and that the leader uses masculine or feminine with general consistency. The individual prayer leader most likely has a great deal of power in the overall tone of communal worship.

Overall, SSZ is a gender-sensitive *siddur* both with regard to God language and the language of the reader. SSZ reflects and honors masculine, feminine, and androgynous gender attributes both in English translation as well as in the Hebrew options. It uses Jewishly rooted metaphors to create a welcoming prayer experience for people of all genders.

God Vocabulary in *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*

Word or Epithet for God	**Total # of Appearances**
God	275
Eternal	34

Almighty	28
O God	27
One	18
Divine	15
Adonai	14
Sovereign	13
Source	12
Presence	11
Holy one	10
Shechinah	9
Creator	9
Ruler	6
Well of life	4
Rock	3
Redeemer	3
Life source/Source of Life	3
One light	3
Maker	2
Most High	2
Holy Name	2
Dear One	2
Parent	2
Help/er	2
YHVH	1
Lover	1
Source of Mercy	1
Beloved	1
Faithful One	1
Heart's Delight	1
Her	1
Queen	1
Source of Being	1
Great Compassion	1
Holy spark	1
Inexplicable energy	1
Bride	1
Preservation	1
Yah	1
Guardian	1
Shield	1
Someone Else	1
Divinity	1
Protector	1

IV. For the Creation of Radical Community: *Siddur haKohanot*

In stark contrast to *Mishkan T'filah,* the New Israeli Reform *Siddur*, and *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav, Siddur haKohanot* primarily uses feminine God-language. The honoring of the divine feminine through language is one of its hallmarks and of the Hebrew Priestess movement as a whole. Because their community honors the divine feminine and seeks to embody it, language rooted in Judaism that offers different paradigms for God than king and lord is critical. *Siddur haKohanot* is by and for a specific small community; the creators are free to choose the language that most clearly expresses who they are.

In their quest to shift the paradigm for talking to the divine, *Siddur haKohanot* uses varied God language rather than one or consistent epithets. Throughout the *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Shabbat Ma'ariv* sections, 68 words or phrases for God are used. In total, the word God appears 97 times in those sections, including in one reading where God appears 64 times. Omitting that reading, the word God appears 33 times, which is similar to the number of appearances of *Shekhinah.* They use two spellings: *Shechinah* and *Shekhinah,* and together they appear second most frequently: 28 times. While "God" is construed as gender neutral, *Shekhinah* is clearly a feminine descriptor for God. The vocabulary for God is diverse, and any one page includes multiple different words for God. The editors are intent to offer a preponderance of feminine images of God and a distinctly feminine God theology rather than conveying a gender neutral theology.[1]

ShK varies the gender of God language in both Hebrew and English. Of the 68 words and phrases for God used in the *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Ma'ariv Aravim* sections, 10 were simply transliterations of Hebrew (*Elah, El Shaddai, Adonai,* among them), and

[1] Though it is not explored in this chapter, this choice to center feminine God-language is strongly evident in the transliteration provided throughout ShK.

8 of the 68 were obviously feminine (*Havaya, Elah*, Her, She). *Elah* is a feminization of the masculine *El*, and does not appear in *Tanach*. Its inclusion is thus a strong, clear centering of the feminine within the liturgy. Its English equivalent, "Goddess," also appears 20 times, the third most commonly found epithet for God. Next most common is "Her," appearing 14 times. This is another clear, overt subversion of the inherited, masculine God. For the person accustomed to encountering "Him" as a way to refer to "the Lord," this may be particularly liberating. For others, it may seem particularly jarring, however many of those people are unlikely to be at a *Kohenet*-led prayer service. Another striking image included is "*El Shaddai."* The biologically feminine "*shadaim,"* breasts, masculine in terms of Hebrew grammatical gender, appears here with masculine designator for God (El) combining to create an androgynous image. Curiously, this image is not modern; rather, it is from *Tanach*. In the context of ShK, it both roots the liturgy in Jewish tradition just as it challenges the tradition. In contrast, ShK conserves three words for God are clearly masculine: *HaShem, Adonai,* and King. The use of "king" stands out perhaps even more because of its contrast to the overtly feminine God-language. In an interview, Hammer noted that they did not wish to completely omit traditional or masculine God language – but to center women's experiences.

ShK's new God language does not only honor the divine feminine, but the physical earth as well. Often, language for God mixes both feminine language for God with natural imagery. For example, the phrases pool of blessing, well of life and well appear seven times. Source, another image that elicits thoughts of water, appears an additional five times. The imagery of wells may allude to the prophet Miriam, as her death was linked to the disappearance of the wells that provided water to the Israelites

when they wandered in the desert in Numbers 20:1-2. Wells may also evoke the Biblical matriarchs, many of whom met their husbands next to a well in the Genesis stories. The use of wells evokes the natural world. In addition, the Hebrew word "*be'er*" (well) is a feminine noun, as is *bereichah,* pool. This also calls to mind the water of the womb: a distinctly feminine image. For the authors of ShK, women's bodies, bodies of water, and the divine are inseparable. These strong connections are clearly reflected in their liturgical choices.

Liturgical choices in ShK do not come only from the natural world and traditional liturgy, they also come from the community members themselves. While Shere and Hammer are the creators of *Siddur haKohanot* and authors of the majority of the translations and accompanying poetry and readings, many prayers and readings are written by *Kohenet* community members. This will be addressed at further length in the section on poetry.

Though *Siddur haKohanot* does not use an exclusively feminine language for God, it is certainly valorizes the feminine. ShK uses feminine images of God as well as natural images that have feminine resonances. However, ShK includes masculine and androgynous language for God, too, albeit to a lesser extent than the feminine language. This feminine God language is critical to their project of embodying the divine feminist and achieving a theological paradigm shift.

God Vocabulary in *Siddur haKohanot*

Word or Epithet for God	**Total # of Appearances**
God	97
Shekhinah	26

Goddess	20
Her	14
One	13
Spirit	10
Presence	8
Elohei x	8
Present One	6
Becoming	6
Source	5
Being	5
She	4
Tzimtzemai	4
Highest One	4
Pool of Blessing	4
Havaya	4
Beloved	3
Creator	3
Ruler	3
Infinite	3
Queen	3
Indwelling Presence	2
Holy One	2
Hashem	2
Holy One of Blessing	2
Shechinah	2
Weaver	2
Tree	2
Adonai	2
Divine	2
Blessed Holy One	2
Blessed Exalted One	2
King	2
Power	2
Wisdom	1
Eternal	1
Water of Life	1
Ruach	1
Well	1
El Shaddai	1
Knower of Secrets	1
Helper	1
Shield	1
G!d	1

Ever-living	1
Life force	1
Mystery	1
Redeemer	1
Elah	1
Immanent	1
Everpresent One	1
Wellspring	1
Oneness	1
Nourishing	1
Holy of Holies	1
Holiness	1
Great Soul	1
Peacemaker	1
Lover	1
Unweaver	1
Holy	1
Rock	1
Strength	1
Shell	1
Scribe	1
Changer	1
Mothersource	1
Yah	1

V. For the Radical Prayer Creator: *Book of Blessings*

Whereas *Siddur haKohanot* shifts the paradigm toward an earthbound, feminine God embodied by community members, *The Book of Blessings* shifts the prayer paradigm toward an immanent God who can be honored by but not directly addressed by individuals. *In The Book of Blessings,* Falk works with a few repeated images and words for God. She uses fewer images and words for God in part because her liturgy is significantly shorter than the other examined prayer books. Falk replaces entire sections of the traditional liturgy with poems by Hebrew and Yiddish women poets, including

herself, for which she provides English translation. Falk fundamentally believes that the line between poetry and prayer is blurry (xxiii). Many of the poems that she selects do not overtly deal with God, rather they tell the stories of women's experiences, or of moments in peoples' lives. Some poems do explicitly seek to bless, though they do not directly address God. Falk thinks and writes expansively, aware of the power of prayer-language to create or erase personhood and equality. By expanding the questions, she also moves away from a transcendent God. She does not feminize the inherited images of God. Rather she answers the question "who is God?" in an altogether new way. Falk differs greatly from Shere and Hammer, who do a great deal of feminized patriarchal images, alongside other images for God. This discussion brings up the question: does feminism require us to abrogate the notion of transcendence? How do we as humans relate to one another, and to what extent are our human relationships inherited from how we understand God? The entire prayer experience is transformed through her new selections.

Because her new prayer formulations remove God as such, neither the words God nor *Adonai* appear in her English translation. Rather, Falk composed a new blessing formula, *"n'vareich et ein hachayim,"* "let us bless the well of life" which is repeated 12 times in the sections that correspond to *Kabbalat Shabbat* and the blessings of *Ma'ariv* (including the Shabbat *Amidah*). In addition, Falk uses 12 distinct phrases to refer to God, four of which begin with "source of" and four of which include the word "well." As noted in the section on *Siddur haKohanot*, both "well" and "source" have feminine resonances both in Hebrew and in English. The phrase "Source of Life" appears 12 times and "*Shechinah*" appears 11 times.

In the case of two of the phrases that begin with "source of," they include two contrasts: "darkness and light," and "faith and daring." Both imply inclusiveness: the source of darkness and light must also therefore be the source of the dimness and the brightness in between darkness and light: they are the entire spectrum. By combining faith and daring, Falk touches upon the often-unspoken courage required in daring to have faith, or having faith to dare. The interpretation is not concrete or predetermined, it is left to the person praying to make of it what she will. Falk thus creates openness in her prayer language, by providing a wide berth of imagery used for God.

Another radical element of Falk's prayer language is her insistence on a non-transcendent God. Falk's God is not in dominion over humanity. Her insistence of a non-dominant God brings her to describe the divine as *ru'ach,* spirit, and *ein,* well. Both spirit and well can be considered as sources from which we can draw, sources to which each individual can feel connected, regardless of gender. In an article in the *Reconstructionist,* Falk explains that she did not simply feminize the inherited Jewish prayer and liturgy because a "feminized patriarchal image is still patriarchal" (11). In other words, because a feminized patriarchal image is still an image of hierarchy, it is still an image of a dominating God. She totally rejects this vision. Thus, Falk's images of God are non-hierarchical and are also not meant to be all encompassing. Rather, they are new images and ideas about our Jewish God that seek to rectify a societal imbalance of power that is rooted in patriarchal images of God. Falk explains:

> To me, *adonay eloheynu, melech ha'olam* is an example of dead metaphor, that is, I see it as a greatly overused image that no longer functions to awaken awareness of the greater whole. Moreover, because this image has had absolute and exclusive authority in Jewish prayer, it has reinforced forms of patriarchal power and male privilege in the world. But I have never believed that the alternative to this icon is a

> substitute image for the divine, since any single name or image would necessarily be partial and would, potentially, be the basis for further exclusivity and distortion. Rather, from the very beginning I maintained that we should set in motion *a process of ongoing naming* that would point toward the diversity of our experiences and teach toward a greater inclusivity within the encompassing, monotheistic whole. (xvii-xviii). (Emphasis hers).

Thus, her work is meant to be part of a larger, shared project of renaming God. She wants to be part of the praying Jewish community, yet needs to change the language in order to do so. However, Falk does not wish to be the only person engaged in this project: in order for the "diversity of our experiences" to be represented, others must also create new language for God. For Falk, only when we achieve greater inclusivity of prayer language are we able to create a more egalitarian society.

Furthermore, Falk shares that through the process of creating new liturgy, she had to grapple with the question: Who is the God with whom I wish to be in relationship? Answering that question required the imagination of and language for new images. Falk writes:

> The process has been instructive, however, in clarifying our theological concerns. In transforming the king into a queen, for example, we realize that images of domination are not what we wish to embrace. We find instead that our search for what is authoritative leads us to explore more deeply what is just, and that the results of these explorations are not well represented by images of a monarch, either male or female. And so we find we must create new images to convey our visions... (Falk, p 11).

As Falk iterates the language for and creates new ways of relating to God, she chooses immanence over transcendence. Thus she rejects the all-powerful, all-seeing, all-knowing, all-judging masculine God. Instead, she chooses to look for divinity in to all aspects of her lived experiences. As a result, Falk's Hebrew formulations feel far from the traditional. Not only does she come up with new epithets for God, there is no direct

address of God. Falk's God is not one that can be petitioned, nor does it judge us. Instead, she seeks to experience and express radical amazement. She explains:

> Where is the divine in all of these? Nowhere in particular – yet potentially everywhere that attention is brought to bear. If everything is capable of being made holy, as rabbinic Judaism teaches with its scrupulous attention to the details of ordinary life, then surely we need not – we *ought* not – localize divinity in a single apt word or phrase. We may find it wherever our hearts and minds, our blood and souls are stirred.

Her use of "we" may be a way of inviting the reader into the conversation, a way to convey her desire for partnership in re-imagining God and our relationships with the Divine. Another way that Falk invites the reader in to this process is simply by entrusting readers with responsibility for their own experience. The implication of this statement is that the person praying is charged with the responsibility of finding moments of relating to God, of taking responsibility for her own prayer life, rather than relying on Falk's language.

While the "wellspring of life" does not act in history, it can be understood as apart from us (impossible for any one person to embody), an ever flowing and ever renewing source that we draw from. We draw from it when we need inspiration or when we are grateful, yet the creation of each new life can be understood as coming from this well or source. Though this is a much more passive image than the God who redeemed our people from slavery in Egypt with a strong hand, it is a more feminine image that at once construes gentleness, force, and the promise of renewal. Through her new language, she asks if the Jewish people can survive with alternative ways of relating to God: can our Jewish God be immanent rather than transcendent? For some, the answer is a clear no.

Falk's drastic linguistic shifts have been the subject of critique. In avoiding addressing God directly, Falk centers the person praying, rather than the entity, the

divinity to which they pray. Ed Greenstein, writing in *Reconstructionist*, offers the critique that without a direct address of God, Falk's "Falk's compositions are at most invitations to prayer... [But] prayer must relate to God personally, in direct address...one must say 'You'" (15). Yet Falk refuses to place God under one name or in one direction and thus cannot directly address God. Instead she can only place herself within a collective ("*n'vareich*") who speaks together, acknowledging a divinity that exists in disparate places, everywhere and nowhere at once. While prayerful and spiritual in concept, it is challenging in practice. For many, an understanding of our relationship to a transcendent God is helpful in practice. For others, this practice of prayer may be liberating.

Overall, Falk moves beyond the inherited Hebrew in a variety of ways. Her poetic liturgical offerings are meant to include a large group of people who need "a resource for the forging of fully inclusive and embracing communities" (xxi). For some, her new Hebrew blessing formulas go too far beyond the limits of inclusivity in prayer. She is unabashedly feminist and feminine in her metaphors, yet rooted in Jewish tradition. Her route toward inclusion is expansive and broad, and requires deconstructing the prayer services and blessings themselves.

God Vocabulary in *Book of Blessings*

Word or Epithet for God	**Total # of Appearances**
Source of life	12
Shekhinah	11
The well	2
Eternal wellspring of peace	2
Source of darkness and light	1
Heart of harmony and chaos	1

Divine	1
One	1
Source of faith and daring	1
Wellspring of new song	1
Wellspring of life	1
Source of the fullness of our knowing	1

Conclusion

God-language is major crux of a *siddur's* theological statement, as well as the statement of where the users of the *siddur* stand in relation to one another and other Jewish communities and movements. The creators of these *siddurim* use God language to help people feel connected and seen. An effective *siddur* may very well be entirely depending on the liturgical language, and in progressive circles this often means being sensitive to gendered language. A God who is entirely masculine is remote, and other words and metaphors bring God closer. The *siddurim* for large movements are necessarily more conservative in their theological language as they necessarily include more conservative stakeholders than *siddurim* for specific progressive communities. As seen in this chapter, prayer books used by smaller groups of people can more freely be radical and specific in their God-language.

Chapter 3: Analysis of Poetry

Through prayer we have the opportunity to connect with the divine: to speak from the heart, honestly yet privately about our hopes, fears, and gratitude. Rabbi Larry Hoffman offers the concept that prayer is an opportunity to speak in a register that gives dignity to the human condition. The poetic form offers similar opportunities to dignify our language. Shira Wolosky defines poetry as "language in which every component element – word and word order, sound and pause, image and echo – is significant, significant in that every element points toward or stands for further relationships among and beyond themselves" (Wolsoky 3).

In other words, in a poem, we say more than the sum of our words. Seen through this lens, poetry is the perfect language for prayer. Historically, our people have written beautiful *piyyutim,* or liturgical poems, to be sung or recited during worship. Throughout history, our people have written poetry to God, and some of this poetry has been absorbed into our tradition and called "liturgy." Sometimes a blessing formula has been added to the end, and the poem has been transformed into a blessing.

The first Jewish woman who prayed was Hannah (1 Samuel 1). The prayer in which she promises to give her son to temple service is well-known, and our sages develop their model of ideal prayer based on her devotion and conviction, yet it is only recently that our models of ideal prayer have come to include the matriarchs and honor women's lived experiences. Yet even before engaging in the explicitly feminist endeavor of creating feminist Jewish liturgy, Jewish women have offered the service of their hearts to God. Yiddish collections of women's *tkhines,* or Yiddish prayers/supplications, sometimes included as appendices in synagogue siddurim, also demonstrate the existence

of women communicating their prayers in language that acknowledge women's spiritual experiences and needs.

This section will explore how the inclusion of poetry advances the ideology stated in the introduction to each prayer book. Feminist liturgical innovation entails a revision of some of the basic themes and subject matter of traditional liturgy. Accordingly, this chapter will also consider the thematic focus of the liturgical poetry in the *siddurim* at hand. Do the poets discuss God, humans, or both? Are the experiences described overtly feminine, queer, or Jewish? What is important enough to be interpreted poetically? How do the prayer books use poetry to champion their values? In order to answer these questions, I closely examined one or two poems in each *siddur,* focusing on the *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Shabbat Ma'ariv* sections, highlighting authorship and attribution as well as form and content.

Overall, the poetry in prayer books for large movements is more conservative. The poetry in the three communal *siddurim* represents the voices of members of each particular community. The poetry of the movement *siddurim* connects readers to the literature of Jewish history, while the poetry of communal *siddurim* connects the readers to their shared lived experiences.

A Note on Authorship and Attribution

In secular literature, the first thing that one encounters about a poem is the name of its author. In the biblical book of psalms, authorship or attribution is signaled by openings such as "*Mizmor leDavid*," or "*Lamenatze'ah*." With the exception of these kinds of biblical attributions, traditional and many modern *siddurim*, too, completely omit

attribution, conveying an impression of a text that comes to us whole-cloth. The more progressive *siddurim* that I am examining do not take this route. Authorship and attribution became important measures both for feminist and Jewish reasons. Jewish texts clearly demonstrate the value of teaching in someone's name: attributing the source of one's learning to one's teacher bring redemption to the world. It also emphasizes the importance of generational transmission, and often privileges continuity over originality. *Pirkei Avot* 1:1 sketches this learning lineage: the men of the Great Assembly learned Torah from the prophets, who learned from the elders, who learned from Joshua, who learned from Moses, who learned from God on Mount Sinai. The chain of transmission is clear and lends authority to the received text. When a prayer book, a fundamentally conservative tool, includes a new composition, how does it present the editorial and the authorial originality? In other words, how do these prayer books address the question of inheritance alongside the creation of a new sacred text? A complete study of all of the poetry in each *siddur* would require many volumes, this chapter will simply seek to tease out these issues and by extension, the core values at play in each compilation.

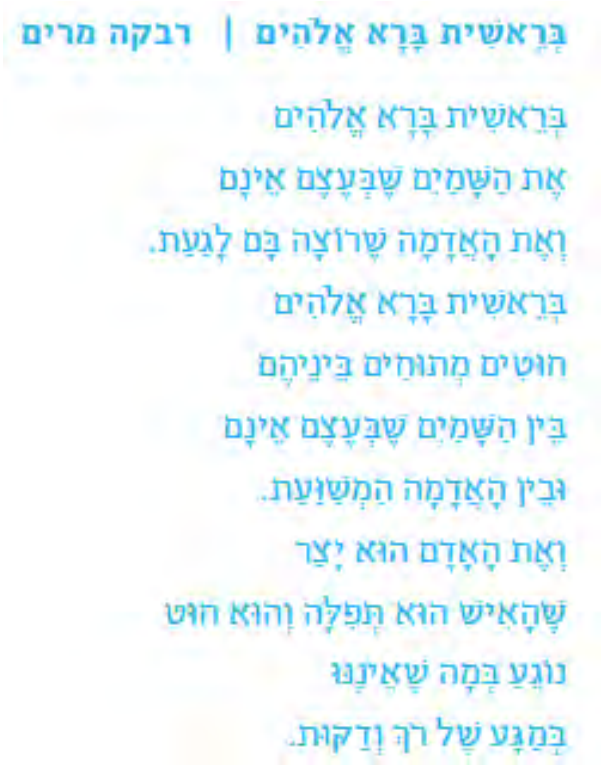
I. Traditional Poetry Meets Modern Poetry in the New Israeli Reform *Siddur*

The New Israeli Reform *Siddur* (NIRS) is a voice for progressive Jews in Israel who believe in equality for men and women and liberal religious values. It is meant to be used while on vacation or in the army, as well as in the synagogue. (Marx, 10/9/2018). Thus, the NIRS must resonate for a large group of people with different concerns, from a soldier completing their military service to a parent preparing Shabbat at home, to a person attending a Reform synagogue. In response to these needs, Marx noted that new material had to meet three requirements in order to be included in the prayer book: the

reading needed to have theological content, literary excellence, and a demonstrated role in Israeli culture. (Marx, 10/9/2018). Overall, Israeli resonance was more important to the editors than feminist import.

The NIRS includes new poetry as well as Biblical poetry, creating many opportunities for readers to explore relationships with God in both ancient and modern text. It uses poetry to supplement the traditional *siddur's* model of relationship with God in ways that both complement and contrast with the traditional liturgy. For example, it offers readers the chance to consider themselves God's lover when they read The Song of Songs, a book of Biblical poetry. Classically read in Sephardic communities before *Kabbalat Shabbat*, the poetry of Song of Songs is sensual and romantic and contrasts the prayer dynamic in such prayers as the *Amidah*, in which the reader praises, petitions, and thanks God. Additionally, the Song of Songs openly describes and valorizes women – and their bodies– in a way that is largely atypical of the rest of the Bible or the *siddur*. The NIRS thus provides a traditional yet modern opportunity for readers to explore their relationship to God and to prayer. Furthermore, the acknowledgment of Sephardi custom is an attempt to be inclusive of multiple Israeli ethnic identities.

In addition to Biblical poetry, the New Israeli Reform *Siddur* brings modern men and women's voices to supplement the traditional liturgy. For example, Rivka Miriam explores the role of humanity in God's created world in the poem "*B'reishit bara Elohim"* (23).



Miriam's poem is rhythmic; it includes Biblical allusion and the repetition of words and sounds. She opens with the first line of the Torah: "*B'reishit bara Elohim et haShamayim…"* but rewrites the story of creation, explaining that God created heavens "that actually are not," (*sheb'etzem einam)*, pointing to an aspect of the Creation that remains undescribed in biblical tradition. She then describes the earth's longing to touch the heavens, "*v'et ha'adamah sherotzah bam laga'at."* The language of *laga'at* and the longing are reminiscent of God's instruction not to touch the tree of knowledge as repeated by Chava (Genesis 3:3). Miriam has created a construct in which the earth (or those of us who live on the earth) has a deep desire to touch and know the heavens. Yet Miriam also provides a solution, explaining that an individual can be both a prayer and a thread, "*sheha'ish hu tfilah v'hu chut"* and that the individual does in fact have the capacity to experience the divine. In suggesting that God created not only the heavens but also humans, who have an infinite capacity to complete God's work, she invites the

reader into the possibility that they too, can touch the heavens. She navigates the tension between suggesting that God made a mistake by creating the heavens "that actually are not," and suggesting that God has infinite wisdom in having created humanity who can fill the void. Though Miriam employs a masculinely-gendered word ("*ish*") to stand in for individuals, the poem does not read as exclusively addressing men, insofar as it also invokes the feminine principle of the *adamah* calling out or yearning our for connection with the heavens. Rather, it reads as an invitation for each of us—masculine and feminine-- to come into relationship with the divine. Miriam's poem is presented alongside Psalm 96, which celebrates God's creation of the natural world. In contrast, Miriam's poem celebrates God's creation of humanity. Read together, the works complement one another.

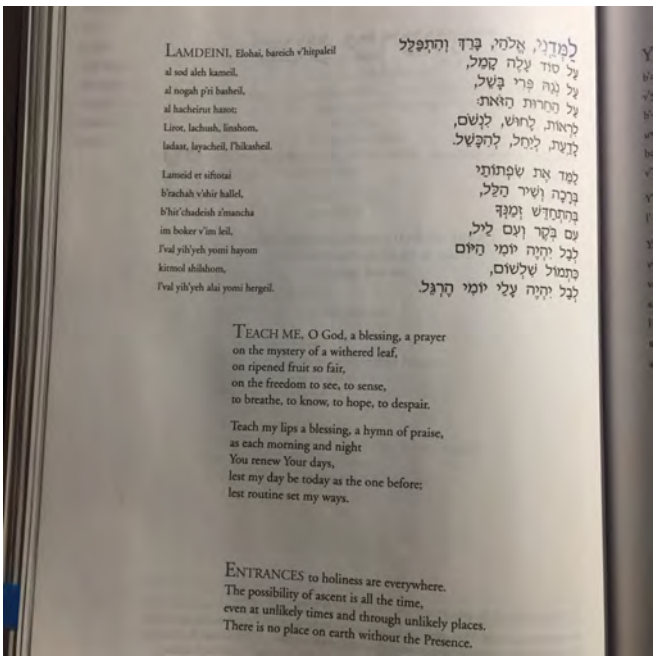
Through the use of poetry alongside traditional prayer, the editors of the NIRS widen opportunities for connection with God and with the tradition. One can read the ancient poetry of Psalm 96, or one can read the new work of Miriam – or both. Within a society that is largely religiously conservative, the inclusion of modern poems in the *siddur* by men and women is progressive. Furthermore, the authors are always cited by name. Though the NIRS includes poems written by both men and women, more poems and writings are by male authors. This is in part due to citation of traditional rabbis and sources, who are men, but may also be a way to prevent traditionalists from feeling that the tradition is in danger of being overtaken by feminists. Thusly, overtly feminine images of God may be too radical for a prayer book that is overall somewhat conservative in its liturgical choices. Within the confines of a relatively conservative

liturgy, the poetry of NIRS is progressive and most critically, resonant for its Israeli context.

II. Hebrew Poets in Translation in *Mishkan T'filah*

Like the NIRS, the poetic readings in *Mishkan T'filah* are progressive in content yet maintain the relatively conservative tone of the book. Though most of the liturgy in MT is accompanied by alternative readings, only some are poems. Many of these additional readings, however, are new prayers and some include the traditional blessing *chatimah*. The poems that are included are not given attribution within the text and while both male and female poets are represented, there is almost double the number of male authors. The *Kabbalat Shabbat* section includes more poetry by men, in part because MT cites excerpts of a number of traditional Hebrew poets, including Yehuda haLevi. Though MT does not include Biblical poetry on the scale that NIRS does, MT acknowledges the rich history of Jewish poetry.

MT celebrates the rich history of Jewish poetry but also recontextualizes it. An excerpt from Lea Goldberg's "Poems of the Journey's End" appears on page 145 opposite the *Chatzi Kaddish,* in both Hebrew and English.



LAMDEINI, Elohai, bareich v'hitpaleil
al sod aleh kameil,
al nogah p'ri basheil,
al hacheirut hazot;
Lirot, lachush, linshom,
ladaat, layacheil, l'hikasheil.

Lameid et sifotai
b'tachah v'shir hallel,
b'hit'chadeish z'mancha
im boker v'im leil,
l'val yih'yeh yomi hayom
kitmol shilshom,
l'val yih'yeh alai yomi hergeil.

לַמְּדֵנִי, אֱלֹהַי, בָּרֵךְ וְהִתְפַּלֵּל
עַל סוֹד עָלֶה קָמֵל,
עַל נֹגַהּ פְּרִי בָּשֵׁל,
עַל הַחֲרוּת הַזֹּאת:
לִרְאוֹת, לָחוּשׁ, לִנְשֹׁם,
לָדַעַת, לְיַחֵל, לְהִכָּשֵׁל.

לַמֵּד אֶת שִׂפְתוֹתַי
בְּרָכָה וְשִׁיר הַלֵּל,
בְּהִתְחַדֵּשׁ זְמַנְּךָ
עִם בֹּקֶר וְעִם לַיִל,
לְבַל יִהְיֶה יוֹמִי הַיּוֹם
כְּתָמוֹל שִׁלְשׁוֹם,
לְבַל יִהְיֶה עָלַי יוֹמִי הַרְגֵּל.

TEACH ME, O God, a blessing, a prayer
on the mystery of a withered leaf,
on ripened fruit so fair,
on the freedom to see, to sense,
to breathe, to know, to hope, to despair.

Teach my lips a blessing, a hymn of praise,
as each morning and night
You renew Your days,
lest my day be today as the one before;
lest routine set my ways.

ENTRANCES to holiness are everywhere.
The possibility of ascent is all the time,
even at unlikely times and through unlikely places.
There is no place on earth without the Presence.

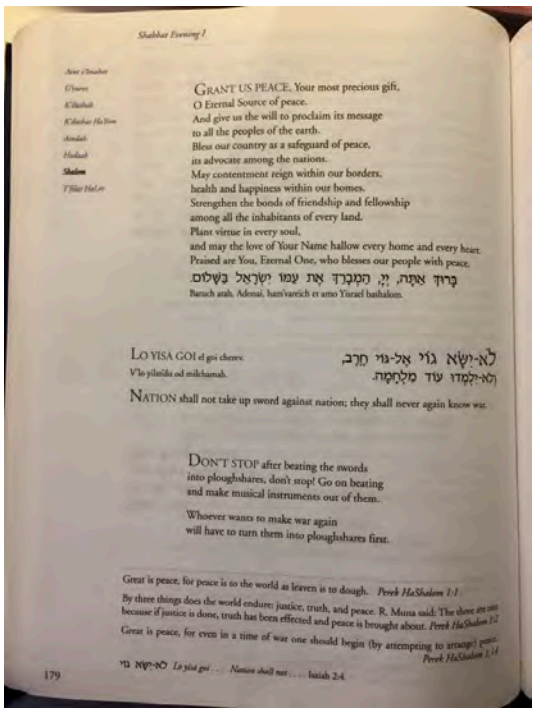
The translation into English maintains the exquisite rhyme of the original Hebrew. Goldberg's words are stunning, bold and gentle at once. She opens with the command *"Lamdeini, Elohai,"* "Teach me, my God." Through the possessive "my God," Goldberg speaks directly and personally to *her* God. Over the next five lines, she describes what she would like to learn: the mystery of a withered leaf, beautiful ripened fruit, and the freedom to experience the world in its entirety. By juxtaposing a withered leaf and a ripened fruit, she compares two moments in life: one aging, one in the prime of life, suggesting that the reader, too, can learn to pray, no matter her age. Goldberg continues, defining freedom as the ability to see, to sense, to breathe, to know, to hope, and to despair. By repeating verb forms (each appear in the infinitive), she does not privilege one aspect of being over another; she simply names them and allows them all to coexist. In Wolosky's terms, the "elements point toward … relationships beyond themselves" (3). These six verbs get to the depth of what it is to be human: to see is to start to sense the

world around us, to breathe is to be alive, and to know, hope and despair are all essential human experiences.

In the second stanza, Goldberg builds on the intimacy of the first: "teach my lips." She does not want to learn the theory of reciting blessings, rather she wants to understand physically how to praise. Goldberg continues to expand her learning into time: "*b'hitchadesh zmancha l'val yihyeh yomi hayom kitmol shilshom, lval yihyeh alay yomi hergel."* God's renewal of God's time enables her to renew her time each day and avoid falling into routine.

While a beautiful sentiment, this excerpt is a mere third of the entirety of the work, titled "Poems of the Journey's End." "Poems of the Journey's End" includes three sections: a conversation between a boy, young man, adult man, and grandfather, each of whom has a different perspective on the path; a meditation on the passing of day and night, and the perspective offered by aging; and this section. When as an entire unit, the final plea to learn to pray is much more poignant. Without context, the reader cannot experience the depth of yearning of the poem. Yet for MT, this section of the prayer, which has become commonly known in liberal Jewish circles, is the perfect amount. By printing a poem that expresses a desire to learn how to pray, the prayer book invites in those who may share this desire. This poem excerpt, so much about gratitude, is an opportunity to express appreciation for being alive without the pressure of prayer itself: rather, it's a humble request to learn how to pray.

Another example of a poem included in MT is Yehuda Amichai's "Appendix to the Vision of Peace," on page 179.



Shabbat Evening I

Ahot v'Ahavot
G'vurot
K'dushah
K'dushat HaYom
Amidah
Hodaah
Shalom
T'filat HaLev

GRANT US PEACE, Your most precious gift,
O Eternal Source of peace.
And give us the will to proclaim its message
to all the peoples of the earth.
Bless our country as a safeguard of peace,
its advocate among the nations.
May contentment reign within our borders,
health and happiness within our homes.
Strengthen the bonds of friendship and fellowship
among all the inhabitants of every land.
Plant virtue in every soul,
and may the love of Your Name hallow every home and every heart.
Praised are You, Eternal One, who blesses our people with peace.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ, הַמְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּשָּׁלוֹם.
Baruch atah, Adonai, ham'vareich et amo Yisrael bashalom.

LO YISA GOI el goi cherev. לֹא-יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל-גּוֹי חָרֶב,
V'lo yilm'du od milchamah. וְלֹא-יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה.
NATION shall not take up sword against nation; they shall never again know war.

DON'T STOP after beating the swords
into ploughshares, don't stop! Go on beating
and make musical instruments out of them.

Whoever wants to make war again
will have to turn them into ploughshares first.

Great is peace, for peace is to the world as leaven is to dough. *Perek HaShalom 1:1*

By three things does the world endure: justice, truth, and peace. R. Mutia said: The three are one,
because if justice is done, truth has been effected and peace is brought about. *Perek HaShalom 1:2*

Great is peace, for even in a time of war one should begin (by attempting to arrange) peace.
Perek HaShalom 1:14

179 לֹא-יִשָּׂא גוֹי *Lo yisa goi . . . Nation shall not . . .* Isaiah 2:4

The selection on page 179 appears opposite *Birkat Shalom*, at the end of the *Shabbat Amidah* and underneath a quotation from Isaiah 2:4 (see image above). The placement in the *siddur* below Isaiah's proclamation of peace is near perfect. However, its lack of attribution and title make it seem almost like liturgy itself, except that it is printed on the right hand side of the page. While Amichai does not address God directly, he does address those who take God seriously, as well as those who believe that it is our responsibility to save the world, not the responsibility of God. In this context, his words fit in with MT's desire to remind readers that God does not create peace or end war just for us, but that we have a role to play in living in and healing the world. This also plays into MT's desire to represent multiple voices in their *siddur*.

Yehuda Amichai's work is printed elsewhere in MT, eight times in total. Amichai is a politically safe choice for MT: a male poet, his work has been accepted and celebrated in America as well as Israel. However, the poetry is printed in English

translation and therefore loses some of its rhythm, rhyme, and rich resonance that exist in his Hebrew, which incorporate liturgical and Biblical language. On one hand, printing excerpts from his poetry ensures that Amichai's work is accessible to the largely English-speaking readers of MT. Conversely, much is lost when only a few lines of his work are printed on the page next to Hebrew blessings, and his name is only cited in the index of the book.

However, the representation of multiple voices is complicated in MT because authors of poems are attributed only in the back of the book, not on the pages on which their work appears. According to the editor, Rabbi Elyse Frishman, this was for political reasons. While the *siddur* was in creation, there was a great deal of pushback in response to reports that the siddur was too feminist. Community members threatened to refuse to buy the *siddur* because they did not like the content. Naming the authors of the poems was considered too great a risk, and authors' names were relegated to the index. (Interview, 10/31/2018). As a result, all poetic source contributions appear at the back of the *siddur* in the index. This attitude contributed to the inclusion of a large number of male authors: including the work of men was a way to refute the claims of erasure. Incremental change is still change, and may set the groundwork for the future, as long as future editors remain attuned to this issue.

Just as the incremental change in the inclusion of the number of women in the *siddur* reflects a need for conservatism, so does the content of the poems themselves. Overall, the poetic readings fall in line with the ethos of *Mishkan T'filah:* it is a book for a large, gender-neutral collective that includes those who are comfortable praying and those who are not. When women's voices are included, they are included quietly, as not

to distract from the overall sentiment or message of the prayer at hand. Poems and readings never distract from the theme of the prayers and thus gender is not the overt focus. Because the inclusion of new language and new metaphors for God within the liturgy itself was a clear departure from the past, the poetry itself takes few risks. The poetry must contribute to the prayer experience, not distract from it. The mere existence of the poetry in MT is the pivotal innovation, rather than the subject matter or authorship of the poems themselves.

III. New Queer Poetry in *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*

Just as the poetry of *Mishkan T'filah* is centered on the prayer experience, so too the poetry included in *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* maintains a recognizable prayer focus. However, while the content of the poems in SSZ are similarly aligned in theme to the prayers themselves, they also speak to the unique needs and experiences of the members of Congregation *Sha'ar Zahav*. In this way, they enact their ideology of representing their experiences as queer Jews.

Again, as in the case of MT, the new poetry of SSZ aligns very closely to the prayers themselves: new poems share the language of the liturgy. Many poems are new English retellings of the prayers and as such, could be considered modern *midrashim* on the prayers, including variations on the texts of the blessings. An example is "Wrap me in Fog" (170) by member Deborah Levy.

> "Wrap me in Fog,"
>
> Wrap me in fog, in fleece, in cashmere;
> Wrap me in the wind.
>
> The scent of jasmine and honeysuckle

And spiced tea and warm foamy milk.

Hold my essence, that which is me –

Makes me different,
Makes me my own.

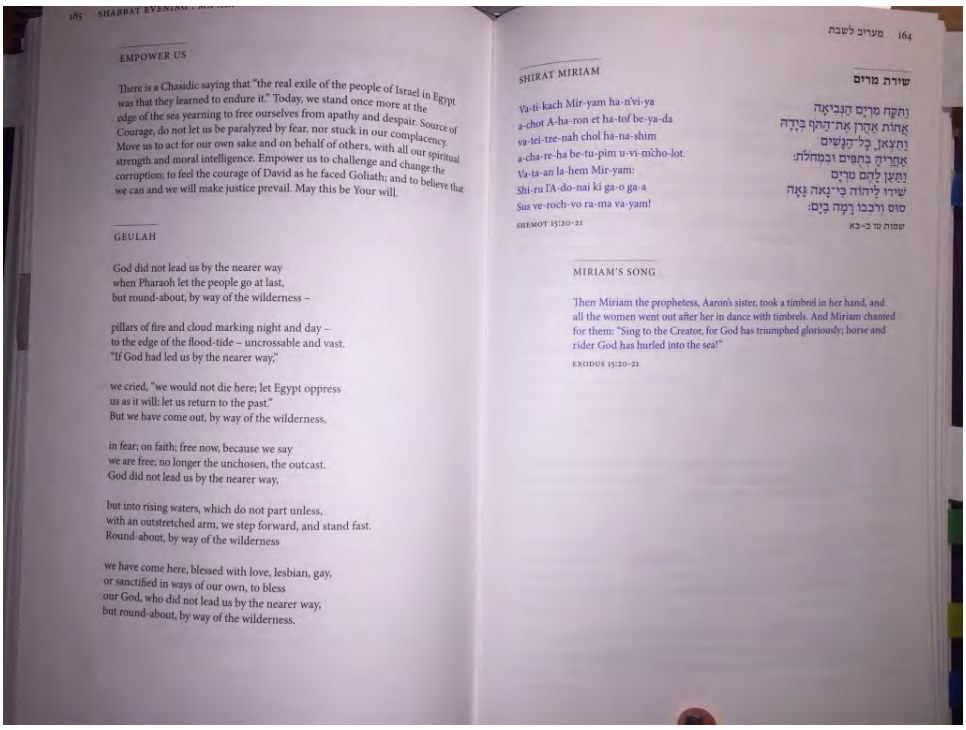
I sit in a redwood grove, soft in the mulch, the forest floor.
This centered self, this whole of me:

Stay with me today,
Stay with me through evening as I sleep,
Stay through the brilliance of dawn,

My essence, in the shelter of Your peace.

This poem appears after *Hashkiveinu* in the *Ma'ariv l'Shabbat* section of the prayer book. The final line of the poem, "My essence, in the shelter of Your peace" serves as a *chatimah.* For the reader who is quite familiar with the traditional liturgy, it is immediately obvious that this is a poetic reinterpretation of *Hashkiveinu.* It's easy to imagine that if the text of Hashkiveinu were not already fixed, this poem could replace it in the congregation's liturgy. Instead, the poem supplements the *Hashkiveinu*, offering another access point and interpretation of the prayer.

A majority of the poetry that supplements the liturgy is written by members of Congregation *Sha'ar Zahav* to reflect their experiences as queer Jews. For example, the poem "*Geulah*," on page 165, written by Congregation *Sha'ar Zahav* member Dan Bellm, speaks directly to the experiences of gays and lesbians through the lens of redemption. The poem "*Geulah"* appears opposite Miriam's song, on the page after the traditional *Geulah* blessing and *Mi Chamocha.* Bellm cites Biblical verses and midrash and beautifully draws a comparison to the lives and work of gay Jews and the Biblical story of leaving oppression for redemption.



165 SHABBAT EVENING

EMPOWER US

There is a Chasidic saying that "the real exile of the people of Israel in Egypt was that they learned to endure it." Today, we stand once more at the edge of the sea yearning to free ourselves from apathy and despair. Source of Courage, do not let us be paralyzed by fear, nor stuck in our complacency. Move us to act for our own sake and on behalf of others, with all our spiritual strength and moral intelligence. Empower us to challenge and change the corruption; to feel the courage of David as he faced Goliath; and to believe that we can and we will make justice prevail. May this be Your will.

GEULAH

God did not lead us by the nearer way
when Pharaoh let the people go at last,
but round-about, by way of the wilderness –

pillars of fire and cloud marking night and day –
to the edge of the flood-tide – uncrossable and vast.
"If God had led us by the nearer way,"

we cried, "we would not die here; let Egypt oppress
us as it will; let us return to the past."
But we have come out, by way of the wilderness,

in fear; on faith; free now, because we say
we are free; no longer the unchosen, the outcast.
God did not lead us by the nearer way,

but into rising waters, which do not part unless,
with an outstretched arm, we step forward, and stand fast.
Round-about, by way of the wilderness

we have come here, blessed with love, lesbian, gay,
or sanctified in ways of our own, to bless
our God, who did not lead us by the nearer way,
but round-about, by way of the wilderness.

164 מעריב לשבת

SHIRAT MIRIAM

שירת מרים

Va-ti-kach Mir-yam ha-n'vi-ya
a-chot A-ha-ron et ha-tof be-ya-da
va-tei-tze-nah chol ha-na-shim
a-cha-re-ha be-tu-pim u-vi-m'cho-lot.
Va-ta-an la-hem Mir-yam:
Shi-ru l'A-do-nai ki ga-o ga-a
Sus ve-roch-vo ra-ma va-yam!

וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה
אֲחוֹת אַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַתֹּף בְּיָדָהּ
וַתֵּצֶאן כָּל־הַנָּשִׁים
אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּתֻפִּים וּבִמְחֹלֹת:
וַתַּעַן לָהֶם מִרְיָם
שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאֹה גָּאָה
סוּס וְרֹכְבוֹ רָמָה בַיָּם:

SHEMOT 15:20-21

שמות טו כ-כא

MIRIAM'S SONG

Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels. And Miriam chanted for them: "Sing to the Creator, for God has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider God has hurled into the sea!"

EXODUS 15:20-21

Where the Bible explains that God did not take the people out of Egypt by the nearer way, (Exodus 13:17), Bellm reframes the people as "us," entering both himself and the community into the prayer. Each of the first three stanzas opens with an allusion to a line from *Parashat B'shalach,* and the fourth stanza ends with a repetition of the opening line. The end of the third stanza, "but we have come out, by way of the wilderness," is a statement of triumph, and does not refer only to the Torah narrative. The phrase "come out" specifically refers to living their lives openly as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer. Furthermore, that sentiment of pride and determination is echoed in the fourth stanza: "because we say we are free; no longer the unchosen, the outcast." They have not only been led to freedom by God, they have also claimed it for themselves. Bellm repeats the phrase "by way of the wilderness" four times throughout the poem, an acknowledgment that the process of coming out and claiming freedom is not simple or uncomplicated. Though queer people may have similar experiences, no one person's life

is exactly like the others. Each may face discrimination in workplaces, schools, or in their family. Many of them may have had to hide their identity for a significant portion of their lives. Bellm concludes with blessing: “we have come here, blessed with love, lesbian, gay, or sanctified in ways of our own, to bless our God…” After all, the poem would not have been appropriate for this point of the service if it did not lead to celebration and benediction. Though it concludes with an acknowledgment of God and desire to bless, the conclusion is not a formal *chatimah* as appeared in Levy’s poem.

Though SSZ thoughtfully features the work of community members, their work is not attributed within the text of the *siddur*. There are two indexes at the back of the book, one by page and one by author, which the reader can use to explore the original works. In an interview, Rabbi Angel explained that though she wanted the attributions to appear on each page with each work, she was outvoted in committee. Noting that not all community members have children, their contribution to this prayer book was a way for many members to create their legacy, she felt strongly that the attributions should be in the text of the prayer book. (Angel, Interview, 10/2/2018).

In featuring work by community members and on varied topics from the traditional blessings themselves to poems which reference the struggles faced by the queer community, the poetry is not only striking, but adds greatly to the character of the book. Insofar as SSZ claims to be a feminist and queer-inclusive *siddur,* SSZ demonstrates these values through the inclusion of a wide amount of poetry. By including the works of its members within the *siddur,* it elevates their poems to prayer.

IV. Radical Use of Poetry in *The Book of Blessings*

In contrast to the poetry that appears in MT, NIRS, and SSZ, the poetry in *The Book of Blessings* does not supplement the liturgy; it constitutes the liturgy itself. In the process of reformulating prayer, Marcia Falk has taken great lengths to rewrite both the Hebrew and English of the blessings with which she prays, and the result is that all the blessings are poetic. When she does not present her own poetry, she always cites the author and one section of the book consists entirely of Hebrew and Yiddish poetry written by women. For Falk, the primary feature of the poems included is that other Jewish women write them. The secondary feature of the poetic works that she includes is that they are all meant to stand on their own as prayers. Inasmuch that Falk's project is to find new metaphors to talk about God, she centers poetry as a language to do so.

Falk's most radical decision is to replace daily psalms with modern poetry: no other studied prayer book completely removes a piece of liturgy and replaces it with modern poetry. Falk replaces the daily psalms with her own work and replaces the psalms of *Kabbalat Shabbat* with poems by Leah Goldberg, Zelda, and other Hebrew and Yiddish women poets. By reprinting the work of these poets, Falk affirms their status as significant writers. Furthermore, she elevates their work by using their poems to replace the liturgy. The method of replacing extant prayers with completely new poetry is emblematic of the *Book of Blessings*.

In a section entitled "The Earth and its Fullness," a new section of the Shabbat liturgy titled Psalms of Creation, Falk includes Malka Hafeitz Tussman's Yiddish poem, "*Last Apple*."

> Last Apple
> "I am the last apple

that falls from the tree
and no one picks up."

I kneel to the fragrance
of the last apple
and I pick it up.

In my hands – the tree,
in my hands – the leaf,
in my hands – the blossom,
and in my hands – the earth
that kisses the apple
that no one picks up.

Tussman's poem does not directly make mention of the feminine or women's bodies, yet represents a feminine experience. Inasmuch as part of the feminist project is making space for those who have been left behind by tradition, Tussman's words call our attention not only to the forgotten apples but also to those overlooked in our world and throughout history. By placing the first stanza in quotation marks, she gives voice to the "last apple," similar to the women who are just now being given voice in our tradition. The next stanza acknowledges that those who have been forgotten can still bless us. Though she does not describe the smell of the apple, by using the word "fragrance" rather than "smell" or "scent," she implies the beauty and power of the apple that had been otherwise forgotten. In the final stanza, Tussman widens the perspective and paints a broader picture of the world that created the last apple. Tussman's world includes a tree, a leaf, a blossom, and the entire earth – an entire ecosystem. In addition, the poem takes place out of time – the use of an apple tree calls to mind the Garden of Eden and the fruit of knowledge. How much have we overlooked? The power to change is "in our hands," repeated four times to emphasize our capacity to change not only "the last apple" but also the world that grows the last apple. Finally, Tussman affirms the inherent value of that

last apple by noting that the earth kisses the apple. In the present tense, this implies that this last apple has not been forgotten; rather it is beloved by the world that created it. It was humans, those beings with hands, who left it behind. It is up to us to search for the last apples, and to care for them, as well as to create a world in which there are fewer last apples and all are valued. This poem, though it describes the act of forgetting, also provides a *tikkun* to that forgetting by giving the experience expression. Tussman and in turn Falk uphold the sanctity of all humans, products of creation, as made holy by the world that created them (not the deity that created them).

This poem is takes the place of one of the songs of *Kabbalat Shabbat.* However, Falk is not content to simply replace one liturgy with another. As mentioned in another section, Falk is concerned with the impact of the prayer on the reader. Falk's English translations, along with her original Hebrew writing, focus on the poetic experience of the reader. She explains in the introduction to the *Book of Blessings*:

> [T]he heart of the book is the Hebrew blessing, itself presented in a variety of forms and always accompanied by English transliteration (for those who cannot read the Hebrew alphabet) and by an English version (which is not a literal translation but a counterpart, an English poem designed to re-create the effect of the original Hebrew. And yes, the heart of the heart of the book is what appears in Hebrew letters, those ancient forms that spell the civilization of the Jewish people, for no combination of English letters can ever fully render the history, the meanings, the connections borne by the twenty-two characters of the Hebrew *alef-beyt.* (xix)

While the person praying in Hebrew or English may have similar experiences of the content in the book, the person reading the English version does not participate in the ancient experience of praying in Hebrew, which is of primary importance for Falk. That said, though Falk believes that no beautiful English poetry can replace the experience of praying in the same language as our ancestors, she still believes that the English

translations are worth serious attention. Falk's English translations seek to mimic the feel of the Hebrew, in an effort to be inclusive to all who wish to use her book.

In sum, Falk centers the poetic experience, both in translation and in the centering poetry and poetic features in all of her liturgy. She focuses on the poetic impact of her writing in both Hebrew and English, while acknowledging that Hebrew is the primary language of Jewish prayer. In decentering the traditional masculine, patriarchal God, she places women clearly at the center of her book and in many ways, her theology.

V. Poetry that Celebrates the Feminine in *Siddur haKohanot*

Similar to the paradigm-shifting work of *The Book of Blessings, Siddur haKohanot* seeks to create a new paradigm for embodying the divine feminine and uses poetry to advance that goal. Much of the poetry of ShK uses feminine vocabulary for God and seeks to help the reader see and experience God in new ways. Members of the *Kohenet* community wrote all of the poetry in ShK. To that end, many of the poems of ShK are meant to be chanted or sung.

The content of the poems of ShK are the most radical of all the prayer books. Because the Priestess Institute is not merely about feminist Jewish life but also about embodying Divinity as well as recognizing the Divine power of nature, many of the included poems are about women's bodies. In the poem, "Here I come," opposite *Ahavat Olam,* Ilana Streit makes a defiant plea to be seen.

"Here I Come"

here i come, all of me: all of my love, passion, anger and desire, all of my wisdom, tenderness and hope. my blood, belly and breasts, my bones, bruises and blessings

here i come through the leaves rustling and glowing

here i come walking on my feet on my path endurance embodied

here i come, breathing towards you. here i come, steeped in song
carrying nothing except that which carries me

here i come: all of my impatience for myself and all the world, all of my longing and laughter soup and celebration, here

here i come all of me welcome me
love me in all of the ways that you know how to love
in all of the ways that you have ever been loved

here i come, all of me, hear me
embrace me, all of me: all song, all whirlwind, all roots (Page reference?)

Streit does not shy away from sexuality, or the reality of a woman's body: in the first two lines she describes herself as a combination of blood, belly, breasts, love, and passion. She combines images of her physical body with emotion, creating a full picture. Furthermore, She draws the reader's attention to those body parts that make her feminine: the belly in which a child can grew, the breasts that only females have. The reader does not only confront the female body in its physicality, but also the sounds that she makes, "rustling" and in a later stanza, "laughter" and "song." Streit demands that the reader welcomes her in her entirety. She repeats "all of" eight times, and includes demands not only to be seen and heard, but welcomed and loved as well. The tone of this poem is energetic and commanding. Streit is unafraid to take up space and she demands to be recognized. The inclusion of this poem opposite the traditional blessing for love is a radical embrace of women in their fullness. Furthermore, the traditional blessing *Ahavat Olam* describes God's love for Israel as exemplified in the giving of Torah and *mitzvoth,* laws and commandments. "Here I come" and its command for women to be loved is all the more radical when juxtaposed with the appreciation of Jewish law in *Ahavat Olam*.

ShK does not shy away from the messiness of women's bodies or the reality of having a body; by acknowledging bodies and celebrating them, she elevates them to the holy. It is not entirely clear in the poem, whom the speaker is addressing. Her community members? The divine feminine? The ambiguity of the poem allows for both possibilities. Indeed, the inclusion of this poem is a powerful demonstration of the *Kohenet* community's commitment to the sanctification of the feminine in human and theological terms.

Notably, Shere and Hammer do not focus solely on femininity. In the poetic selections, they explore themes that balance the masculine and feminine. For example, their translation of *L'cha Dodi* is one example of how they approach a liturgical poem that includes heteronormative metaphor. Hammer explains:

> One of the things was that we did not want to give the impression that the masculine was bad or that we were uninterested. And we have plenty people for whom masculine elders were important pieces of their lives...We did want to get rid of some of the relentless heterosexuality of [*L'cha Dodi*]… We didn't also want to erase the meaning of the song. There's a certain feminine/masculine dynamic that if you remove it, it changes its meaning… The masculine/feminine is kind of fundamental to the poem. (Hammer, 10/17/18).

In other words, Hammer and Shere did not seek to totally erase masculine vocabulary for God, nor did they wish to send the message that there is no place for masculinity whatsoever in their spiritual framework. Rather they wished to sufficiently supplement it with new images and new language for talking about the Divine. They hoped to honor peoples' diverse experiences with family of all genders, but given the overall masculine grammar of the prayer book, the space to make change was often in adding in feminine language and imagery.

With regard to attribution, it was important to both Shere and Hammer that the work of their community members be noted within the text of the *siddur.* In an interview, Hammer noted that she did briefly pause about citing herself and Shere so often, but in the end, the desire for community members to have their work designated was more important. As the community includes only women-identified persons, ShK has the greatest percentage of feminist authorship of any of the *siddurim* examined in this project.

In *Siddur haKohanot,* the authors clearly focus on their community and its needs for the divine feminine. A small growing community may need to see their names and work in print in order to feel affirmed and to have a desire to continue. The poetry included in ShK boldly and sensitively honors the women of the Kohenet movement and their roots.

Conclusion

Overall, each of the *siddurim* takes the risks that it can in terms of feminist authorship and content. The Reform movement *siddurim* mix new prayers with classical poetic sources, while the prayer books for audiences that are more narrowly defined take more risks in poetic content. The poetry of SSZ is integrated into the prayer book, and while attribution is not given within the text, the poems themselves speak to queer and feminist values and experiences. In contrast, the poetry of BoB replaces the liturgy entirely, creating a completely new model of prayer. This new model of prayer celebrates the feminine, but also the mundane. This differs from the poetry of ShK, supplementing

the liturgy while reinforcing paradigm shift that worship is about embodiment of the divine feminine.

While this chapter examined some of the poetic readings and poetic prayers of each of the prayer books, this section of the thesis is particularly rich for further development. Because the line between poetry and prayer is often so thin, one could easily have examined the poetic features of the prayer translations in each of the books or systematically examined the poetic readings of each. There is a possibility for comparison of classical and modern Jewish poetry. Another angle of analysis could simply have focused on authorship or feminine content of each prayer book. Furthermore, poetry is an oral medium and is meant to be read aloud. Thus, research into those places where these prayer books are put into use would help one understand the poetry's impact: a poem that is never read aloud has not been shared in full. Exploring how the prayer leaders handle the prayers in each *siddur* is an area ripe for further exploration.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Physical Form

"Don't judge a book by its cover." This age-old command[2] not to make assumptions about a book based on its exterior may make us laugh, but perhaps we should take it seriously. According to David Stern, Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin "introduced a new approach to book *culture"* beginning in 1976 that made use of analysis of the form of a book as a way of understanding the book's content and history (4). In other words, a book's exterior and internal layout can help us understand the contents and intentions of the book and its cultural context. Stern further explains that the study of a form of a book can help us:

> "[to] use the intersection between textuality and materiality- the two sides of any book – as a window into the book's meaning in Jewish culture. And most important of all, it views the book as a whole artifact. It makes sense of all its elements – material and textual – and reads the book simultaneously as a textual constellation and as a material artifact so as to appreciate the value, the significance, that these books have possessed for the Jews who produced, owned, and held them in their hands" (5).

For the purpose of this thesis, examining the form of a book tells us not only about its theology but also about who is using it and for what purpose. I've thus undertaken to examine the form of the various *siddurim* in question[3] – from their covers to their interior design— in order to draw conclusions about what messages the prayer book creators were sending to their potential readers/users. While all of the prayer books examined here make a strong break with tradition, the non-movement affiliated *siddurim* were bolder and more radical in their choices, both in terms of their cover and interior layouts.

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[2] This idea appears in *Pirkei Avot* 4:20, which notes that neither a person nor a vessel can be judged based on its exterior.

[3] Images of all prayer book examined can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

I. Exterior Messaging

The creators of *siddurim* make conscious decisions that include the weight and look of the book, hard or softcover, and color and each of these decisions, including those related to outer design make a statement about the intention for the function of the book. Indeed, the first message to the user is transmitted through the shape, size, and outside feel of the book. Does the book belong next to other traditional, sacred books that are bound in leather, or hard cover, and embossed in gold? Does it resemble those books, or look very different? What colors have been used? Who, implicitly has been invited to use it?

A major difference between classical/ traditional prayer books and those prayer books studied in this thesis is that none of the studied books at all look like their traditional Orthodox counterparts. None of the prayer books studied have exteriors that completely mimic older prayer books, such as Artscroll publications, which are often leather-bound with gold lettering. While MT and SSZ feature gold lettering on the cover, sending the message that the work within is valuable, the purple (SSZ) and blue (MT) cloth covers send a message that the works are original or new. Stern points out that the first printers of the Hebrew Bibles attempted to make their works look like scrolls, which were recognizable as Bibles:

> "For one thing, early Hebrew printed Bibles – like most early printed books – did not seek to look new. To the contrary: early printers tried to make their books appear as much like manuscripts as possible – precisely because these were the books that readers recognized – and they borrowed the features of manuscripts to give shape to their printed books" (153).

MT and SSZ walk an interesting line of familiarity: viewed from the spine, they look like they could belong to an American canon, but for the Hebrew lettering, which places them among Jewish sacred texts. When picked up it becomes clear that their size places them outside the American canon: the dimensions are much larger than most books of American literature. Their similar appearance to secular books may be purposeful: for many Reform Jews, who are not fluent in Hebrew, who may share a household with a non-Jewish family member, if a prayer book looks like another familiar book, it may be more inviting. The cloth itself may be more inviting than the leather of a Hebrew Bible, and the cloth cover elevates MT from a simple hardcover novel or biography that one might purchase at Barnes and Noble. In addition, many secular volumes of literature, such as volumes of Shakespeare or other classics, are sold in collector's set and are leather-bound with gold lettering, indicating a clear mixing of the secular and the holy. The Hebrew of the titles keeps both MT and SSZ in the clear bounds of the holy while maintaining the appearance of accessibility and secular currency.

From the exterior, SSZ looks similar to MT. Both are cloth-bound with gold lettering. While the dimensions are slightly different – SSZ is slightly thicker – their weight is about the same. A member of a Reform community who uses MT and who visits Congregation *Sha'ar Zahav* would likely find the feeling of SSZ , both tactile and emotional, to be similar to MT. This similarity can streamline the experience for Jews who travel or visit multiple synagogues. Each of these types of books toes the line between an inviting and a revered or special appearance.

Because they are both hardcover and heavy-- literally and figuratively giving weight to what's inside-- both *Mishkan T'filah* and *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* make the statement that they belong with other *siddurim* and are just as sacred and holy. These covers also connote the institutional formality of synagogue. That said, *Mishkan T'filah* exists in multiple versions, including softcover or travel/camp editions, and more limited, less hefty compilations that include only the *Shabbat* liturgy, editions that are lighter and easier to hold or travel with. In contrast, the *Book of Blessings* is available now in both hard and soft-cover versions. Still the book is far too large to pack in a suitcase or even a backpack, indicating that the BoB is not meant for daily use outside the home. Though the book is hefty, bespeaking significant contents, its cover design does not feature any gold or metallic lettering. Its lack of identifiable exterior sacred symbols or images may be a purposeful invitation for those who feel excluded or distanced from those traditional symbols. Similarly, the English title, *Book of Blessings*, may be another invitation to those who feel uncomfortable with Hebrew.

The cloth-bound books imply synagogue use. By contrast, neither BoB nor ShK are necessarily intended for use in synagogues. According to their website, Hebrew Priestesses often pray out of doors, sitting or dancing in circles. Perhaps ShK is not bound in cloth because it is meant to be easily transportable.

While BoB, MT, SSZ, and ShK are all meant to be used in synagogue or group prayer settings, Falk leaves the question of who will use her book and where open to the reader:

> "Because this book is, more than anything else, a prayer book, the best way to put it to use will be determined, in the end, by you. My intention in creating *The Book of Blessings* was to provide a resource for the forging of fully inclusive and embracing communities" (xxi).

In other words, the book is meant to facilitate the formation of communities that do not yet fully exist. Each community might individually decide if it is a tool for daily or weekly use, or a reference for the creation of their own tools. As a reference book, it works very well as it can come off a shelf and into one's hands, or one can read it simply while seated at a table or a desk as a resource for creating a new ritual or piece of liturgy for a holiday or event. It is hard to imagine using the large hardcover version of BoB, while seated in a pew for the duration of a service, however, given its weight and size. At the same time, the softcover version is likely too flimsy to withstand repeated synagogue use.

ShK's exterior is the most radical of all. In comparison to the other *siddurim* discussed, it is a much slimmer softcover volume, though the pages themselves are larger than most prayer book pages, measuring a full 8.5x11 inches. Co-creator Taya Shere noted that the exterior design, which includes the illustration of a bare-chested woman that was drawn by a member of the Hebrew Priestess community, does feel a bit too radical for her to leave and use in particularly conservative prayer spaces (Interview, 10/2/2018). This is a major departure from the synagogue formality indicated in the covers of MT and SSZ, and a logical move as the Hebrew Priestesses, who receive their authority from an organization called the *Kohenet* Institute rather than a decades-old union of synagogues, is still considerably outside the mainstream Jewish establishment. Being further outside accepted conventions means that they have greater freedom to take risks.

II. Interior Layout

It's not only the exterior materials and design that sends a message about a *siddur*, but the interior design of a prayer book as well. In the context of discussing the ways in which Jewish and Christian books differentiated themselves, David Stern observes that "layout… literally become[s] an identity" (179). One may similarly assert that interior layout in *siddurim* conveys messages about the identities of its intended user, including the Hebrew knowledge of the person praying, as well as their prayer experience and comprehension needs. Indeed, a *siddur's* interior establishes the identity of the people praying.

In keeping with the different identities of the users of the prayer books studied here, the typographical layout of the prayer books studied differs widely from more traditional *siddurim*. Traditional *siddurim*, such as Artscroll, consist mainly of large text blocks. The eye goes from line to line, in Hebrew or English. In contrast, all of the liberal prayer books examined here, with the exception of ShK, feature prominent white space. In reading these texts the eye does not rush from one line to the next, and less actual text or liturgy is included than in a traditional prayer book.[4] The existence of more white space on the page may also be a response to technological innovation. When the printing press was first created, books were expensive to produce, not only due to the parchment required and the lettering and the ink, but also the time involved to produce and typeset. Though book production today is by no means cheap, it is significantly more accessible and cheaper than it once was. Thus, decisions are made for each *siddur* about how much text to be included on the page, whether or not images should be included, and if and how

[4] Because one is not fulfilling a three-times-daily obligation to say a defined and lengthy set of words, one has more time in reading to take in the actual words of the prayers.

color may be integrated into the prayer book, from which it is possible to extrapolate information about the community using each *siddur*. Is the liturgy itself the focus? Is it easy to follow? Is art included? Each of these points to community makeup, because it responds to a community need. A praying community that teaches prayer fluency does not need to label each page or prayer, because individual members can easily find their way to the prayer being recited. In addition, traditional communities do not skip pages of the liturgy, as many Reform prayer services do. The use of labels and explanations points to both education as well as prayer convention.

II A: The Two-Page Spread of *Mishkan T'filah*

The primary layout of MT is a one prayer per two-page spread. The right side of the page consists of the Hebrew prayer itself, side by side with transliteration, and English translation appears below. On the left side of the page are alternate readings, sometimes in the form of a poem, and sometimes in the form of new reinterpretation of the prayer itself. On the bottom of the page is one to two-sentence explanations either of the prayer or the related theological issue. Including new interpretations as well as educational background is one of the ways in which the creators of the prayer book represent multiple voices and viewpoints. By including multiple interpretations of each prayer, some of which question God's role in the world or point to our human role in creating or repairing the world, the God-skeptic is, to a certain extent, invited in. This assumes that the congregation includes believers as well as skeptics. According to the editor, Rabbi Frishman, *Mishkan T'filah* is meant to be used in synagogue services and read straight through, and the multiple choices on each page spread are meant to be

welcoming to all service attendees. However, in many Reform services, the book is not read straight through and certain prayers are omitted. Nonetheless, the white space and rubrics on the side of each page are meant to be inviting to people with mixed amounts of prayer experience, who can more easily follow along (and feel free to add in their own thoughts into the white space). This format targets both Jews and their non-Jewish partners, Jews with a strong Jewish education and those with a lackluster Jewish education: each of those individuals can literally all be on the same page.

II B: A Layout for Multiple Views in *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*

SSZ makes use of a similar layout. Some two-page spreads include Hebrew and English on the right-side page while the left-side page includes English readings. Sometimes the right side of the page includes the traditional Hebrew while the left has feminine grammar. Sometimes a two-page spread includes two distinct prayers, but never more than two distinct prayers on one two-page spread. Sometimes readings and interpretations of a prayer may be found on a third page, and SSZ does not limit itself to a two-page spread. SSZ, similar to MT, produces a prayer experience that enables the reader to insert their own thoughts onto the page. Neither book fills the page completely, allowing the reader's eye to shift and choose the prayer or reading that resonates with them. Both American Reform *siddurim* thus are welcoming and allow for individual choice.

II C: White Space but Fewer Alternate Options in the New Israeli Reform *Siddur*

The New Israeli Reform *Siddur* (NIRS) makes a similar use of space but includes significantly less alternate readings. They still enable the reader to insert their own thoughts onto the page or into the prayer experience. While there is no need for translation, it also includes a significant amount of white space on the page. In a way, this keeps the focus on the texts themselves. It becomes clear to the person praying what is prayer, what is central, and what is commentary. There are fewer alternative options in the NIRS than in MT or SSZ, but other perspectives are included and given space. The layout of each of these three prayer books conveys a measure of flexibility within the prayer experience, with greater autonomy implied in the American Reform prayer books than in the Israeli *Siddur*.

The two movement *siddurim*, MT and NIRS include no visual art, focusing instead on the liturgy itself. Both of these *siddurim* must balance a relationship between those with Reform ideals of inclusivity, as well as those who feel tied to tradition. In America, this may mean community members who grew up without including the *imahot* in the *Amidah*, while in Israel this might include community members who are constantly balancing their Israeli and religious identities in a country where the conservative *rabbanut* has a great deal of power.

While neither MT nor NIRS include images, they do employ color in the interior layout. The use of color in each serves to focus or draw the reader's eye to that which is important. In MT, the Sh'ma is presented in large font, taking up an entire two-page spread, and is in light blue, rather than the usual black.[5] The choice to put this prayer on one two-page spread and in a different color, rather than place it next to the *V'ahavta* or

[5] Exploration of the light-blue color choice could be expanded.

Ahavah Rabbah creates a strong statement about the centrality of the Jewish creed, both for individuals and as a message about the important pieces of the service. If you remember nothing from the book, you might still recall that the six words of the *Sh'ma* were presented in a different color and were worthy of two whole pages.

The NIRS does nothing of that sort; no few words are allocated such a large amount of space. Perhaps this stems from the notion that one ought not to waste space in a *siddur* that is specifically meant for daily or constant use, at home, during army service, and while abroad. Such a traveling *siddur* must be light enough for travel. The NIRS must thus be somewhat smaller and conservative with its use of space.

Siddurim do not only make statements about identity and use through spatial alignment, but also convey messages through font choice and color as well. The MT, NIRS, and SSZ all use different fonts and sizes for stage directions and different readings. In NIRS poems appear in a different font than texts from the Torah, which in turn appear in a different font than liturgical materials. The NIRS communicates messages about the origins of each type of text through the use of different colors and fonts. *Shir haShirim* appears in a different font than the *Barchu*, a nod to its Biblical origin rather than its liturgical origin. In this way, through the use of NIRS, the educated Jew or the attentive Jew may be able to learn something not only about the goals of Jewish prayer but also about its history and its origins. In a context where the conservative *rabbanut* has a great deal of control over Jewish identity (who can marry, who is considered a Jew, etc.), this education is critical.

II D: Color and Femininity in *Siddur haKohanot*

With specific regard to color, ShK uses color differently than either of the movement-affiliated prayer books. The vast majority of Hebrew text appears in black ink, except for two acrostics (page 202, 124) in which the first letter of each line appears in red, and one reading on weaving, (87) in which the oft repeated letter shin appears in red. Red is also used for transliteration and reading titles, while translation appears in black.[6] This helps the eye move through the page and creates a connection between the Hebrew, its meaning, and its pronunciation. ShK typically offers several interpretive options for a prayer on a two-page spread, that sometimes continue onto a third page. The prayer leader thus needs to make the decisions about what the community will do in that particular service, and the persons praying must follow. One could choose to read all that is on the page, but with less white space and more to read, a community member could find himself or herself lost. Guidance by the prayer leader is critical.

ShK also uses color for illustrations; indeed, it is the most illustrated of the *siddurim* examined, though SSZ also includes some images and illustrations. The presence of these illustrations reflect an awareness that prayer can assume multiple forms, or that images can serve as powerful tools. Though there are no images printed in BoB, Falk notes that for her, creating poetry, prayer, and paintings are all part of the same endeavor (xxiii-xxvii). Furthermore, most traditional images of Jewish prayer depict men with a tallit over their head, and the image of a woman with an infant on her chest in *Siddur haKohanot* (90) stands in strong contrast to them. If we use messages that we receive in prayer to understand and create social structure and hierarchy in the world,

[6] The connotation of the choice to use red, and its connection to femininity is ripe for further exploration.

then these images take on a heightened importance and role, one that is critical for the creation of a world that honors and uplifts men as well as women.

II E: White Space and Structure in *The Book of Blessings*

As previously noted, BoB does not employ pictorial images or different colored font. It is characterized instead by increased physical and symbolic heft. However, the pages of the *Book of Blessings* are the thickest of each of the prayer books, which adds weight, both physical and symbolic. Though the exterior of the book looks the most like a secular book, the page weight conveys its significance. One might argue further that Falk expands the concept of what a Jewish holy book looks like: that a feminist concept of holiness may require an aesthetic break with tradition. The layout of BoB is somewhat similar to the layouts of MT and SSZ, including one prayer or offering per two-page spread. The Hebrew or Yiddish and translation appear on the right-hand page and the English is always on the left. In this way, BoB feels similar to MT: there is an orderly, consistent format from which there is no deviation. The person praying from BoB seems to be invited to consider each prayer on its own, almost as each prayer or poem is an opportunity for meditation or consideration. A grey strip on the outside of each page reminds the person praying of the existence of a service, a greater whole made up of each individual prayer. Like MT, it also offers a great deal of white space, and commentary appears before each section. In her introduction, Falk notes that she recommends the commentaries be read through together at once, in preparation and in order to understand the book. The inclusion of "user instructions" is in theory an invitation in, but also

assumes a certain amount of time available for prayer, even for prayer preparation and instruction. It also acknowledges the vast break from tradition that this book constitutes.

II F: Comparison of *The Book of Blessings* and *Siddur haKohanot*

Just as the *BoB* provides a new model for a holy book, *Siddur haKohanot* expands images of the holy. In particular, ShK has the most colorful interior. While most pages include black or red text on a white background, there are two pages on which the majority of the page is red or black (illustrated in Appendix D of this chapter), with the text on a white background in the center. This calls attention to each of these pages, both of which are about the practice of "weaving the circle," a spiritual framing for the work of the *Kohenet* Institute. (Hammer and Shere, 179) and is radically different from any pages of any other prayer book studied. In addition, *Siddur haKohanot* also features full-colored images, most of which were drawn by *Kohanot* and later included in the *siddur*. The inclusion of these images serves both as a "way in" to prayer for people who learn or think visually, and could be considered additional education regarding the practice of prayer. In addition, the images honor members of the *Kohenet* community who created the artwork.

Siddur haKohanot seems to be a project of radical inclusion, at least to members of a certain previously unacknowledged community, whereas the other *siddurim* are more aesthetically traditional and in this respect, less inclusive. However, the radical inclusiveness of ShK requires a self-selecting group. One has to have heard of the *Kohenet* Institute, or the Hebrew priestesses, and have sought them out, in order to participate in the project of radical inclusion.

Conclusions

Through form and layout, each of these prayer books makes efforts to include conventional users as well as those who may be unfamiliar with prayer or with a Jewish prayer book. Some make prayer accessible through new uses of cover or cloth. MT and SSZ communicate the concept that their book is for holy use with the use of gold lettering and cloth. BoB and ShK communicate that their books are informal through a lack of gold lettering as well as paperback options. A person who comes across BoB in a secular bookstore, albeit in the religion section, may find themselves invited into Jewish conversation in a new way, perhaps more readily than they might be invited into the ethos of *Siddur haKohanot*. Indeed, one might go so far as to say that radical inclusion entails making those who feel comfortable in traditional Jewish prayer comfortable using these prayer books too. The use of MT, SSZ, and NIRS in movement-sanctioned communities means that a larger number of people will come into contact with them: thus, their inclusion of multiple prayer perspectives throughout the book may mean that inclusion of traditional content notwithstanding, they may be the most inclusive overall.

Appendix – Book Images

Appendix A: Spine View

A 1: Spine of *Artscroll*

A 2: Spines of Progressive *siddurim*

From left to right: *Siddur haKohanot, The Book of blessings, Siddur Sha'ar Zahav, Mishkan T'filah)*

Appendix B: Size and Width

B 1: *Artscroll*: 8.75” x 5.75”

B 2: *Mishkan T’filah*, 10” x 7.5”

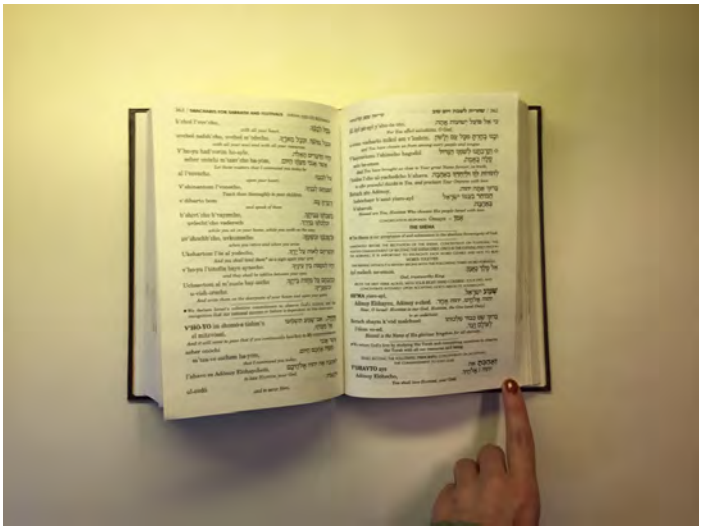
B 3: Siddur haKohanot 10”x 7.5”

B 4: *Siddur Sha’ar Zahav,* 10” x 6.5”

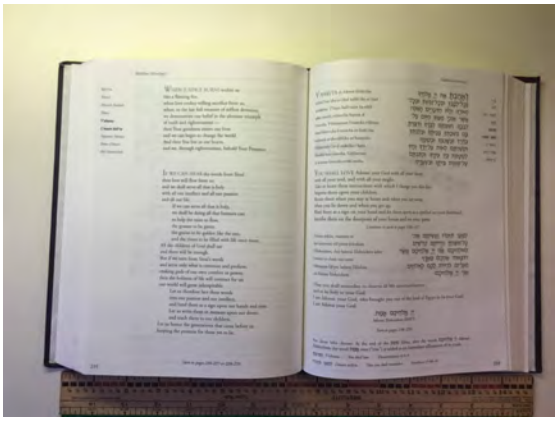
B 5: *Book of Blessings*, 9” x 7.5”

Appendix C: Sh'ma pages, for layout

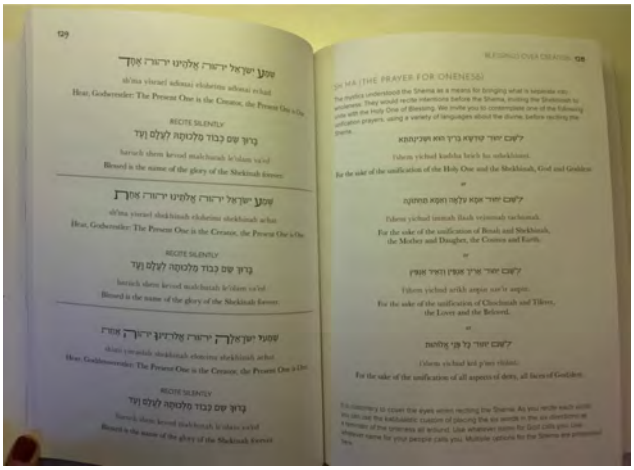
C 1: *Artscroll*



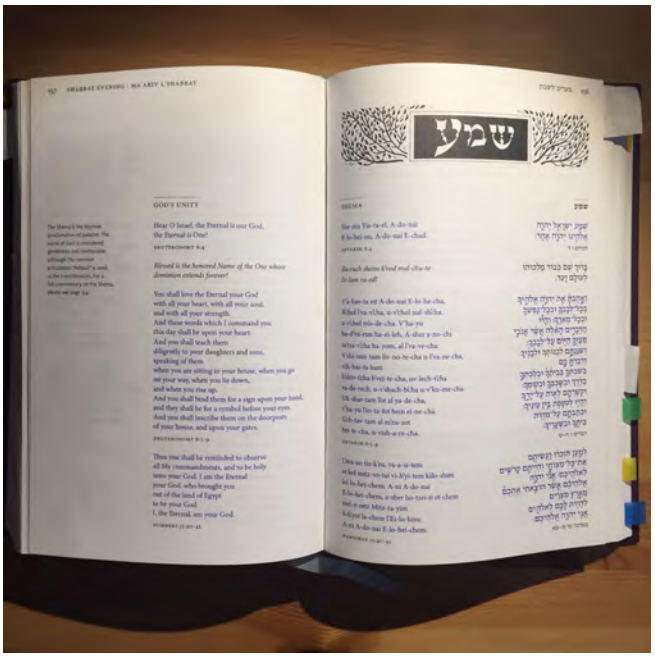
C 2: *Mishkan T'filah*



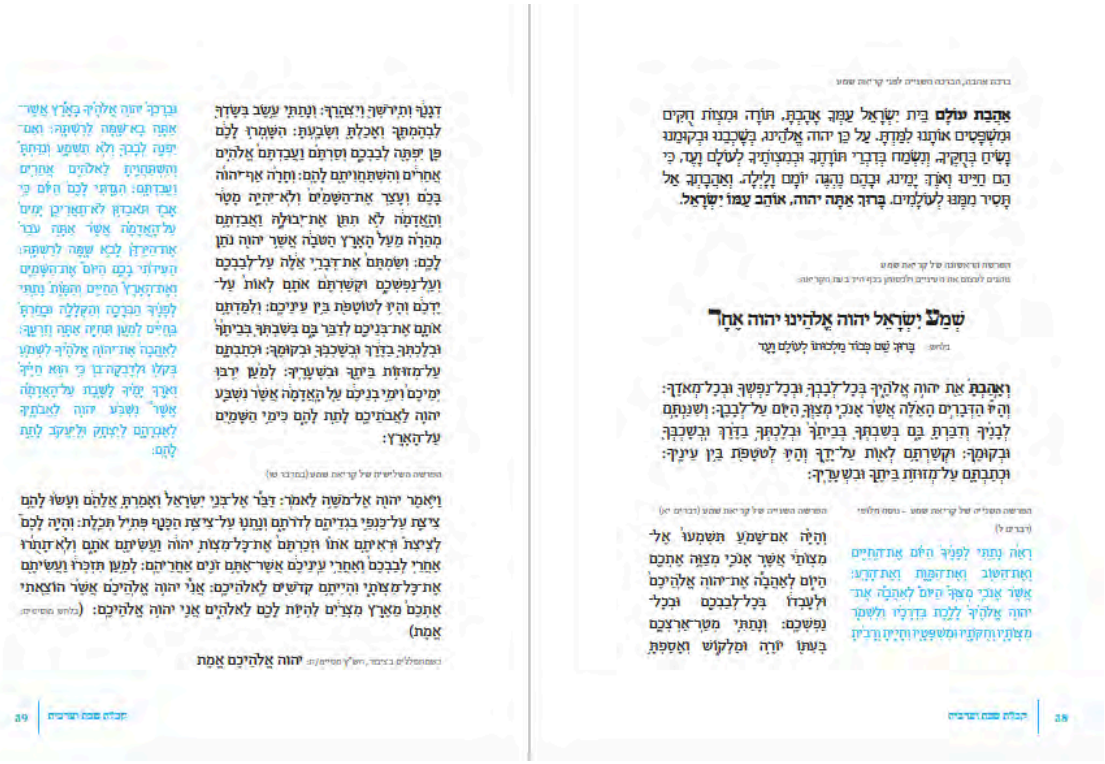
C 3: *Siddur haKohanot*



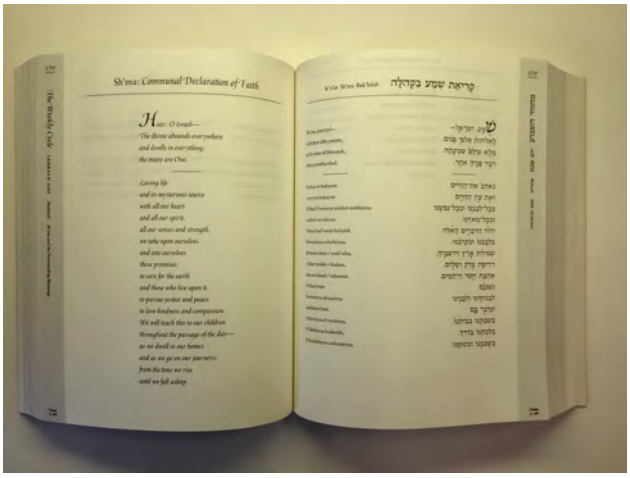
C 4: *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*



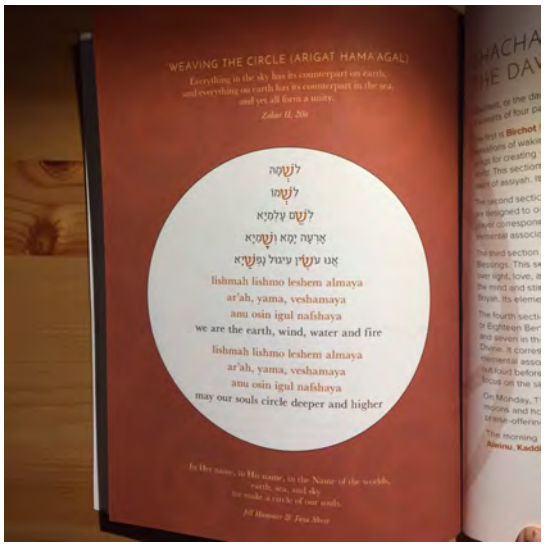
C 5: New Israeli Reform Siddur

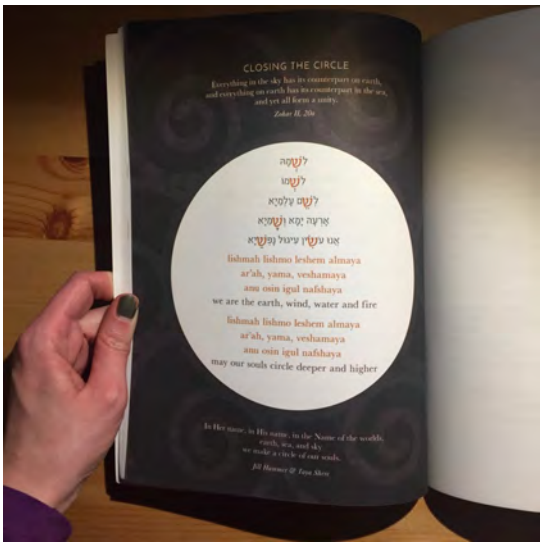


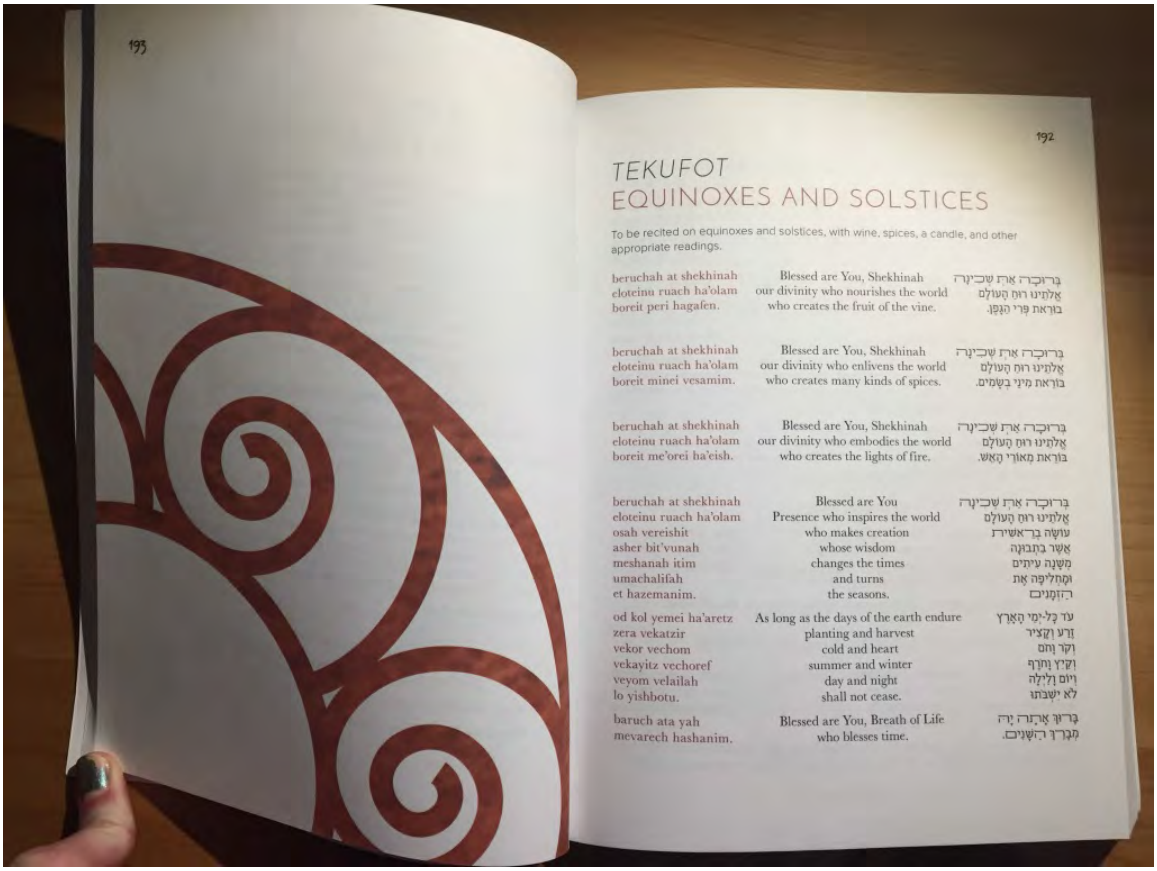
C 6: *The Book of Blessings*



Appendix D: Use of Color in *Siddur haKohanot*







Conclusions & Opportunities for Future Research

Throughout this process of examining these *siddurim,* I have been at times both excited by and overwhelmed by my task. Each of the *siddurim* examined is incredibly rich an entire thesis could be written on it alone. I was blessed to study five *siddurim* that express my values in different ways, and the opportunity to study each of these books in depth has also deepened my own considerations when it comes to prayer and community.

I. *Mishkan T'filah*

Mishkan T'filah is my home. The *siddur* that I use for most daily and Shabbat prayer, it is familiar and it is through the alternate readings and transliteration of MT that I found myself in Reform Judaism and eventually at HUC-JIR. While there is no overtly feminist language, I came to understand more deeply that its solid commitment to gender neutrality was not only an important ideological shift when it was published in 2007 but also a values statement that resonates for many Reform Jews today. We cannot push too quickly toward the future without honoring the past. Furthermore, through my study of and personal experimentation with feminine prayer language, in many ways I have grown to appreciate MT more deeply for its commitment to gender neutrality. I have explored its commitment to access and inclusion for all people curious about prayer: from the translation, transliteration, to a layout that clearly focuses on the inherited liturgy yet provides multiple points of access through poetry and alternative readings. As a rabbi, I will have many opportunities to help people experience the richness of MT and I look forward to helping congregants and students find their questions and yearnings within

these pages. Further study might compare MT to *Mishkan haNefesh,* the Reform movement's new *machzor.* How did feminism impact *Mishkan haNefesh*? Where did *Mishkan haNefesh* break from *Mishkan T'filah* ideologically?

2. *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*

If *Mishkan T'filah* is my "home," *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav* is where I go to feel free. While MT has to contend with a geographically and ideologically diverse community, SSZ can shout its gender and sexuality inclusive ethos from the rooftops. In many ways, the liturgy and prayer options of SSZ speak most clearly to my ideals, yet I am unable to experience the fullness of praying its liturgy in community as of yet. The poetry is beautifully integrated throughout and while I'd love a two-page spread per prayer, similar to that which is found in MT, the alternate texts and poetry of SSZ are worth the extra pages and heft. Further exploration and study would involve speaking to more members of the community who were involved with the creation of the *siddur*, to gain more insight on the process of study and writing workshops. In their words, how did this change their community? What did they gain? What if anything, did they lose? In addition, the *Amidah* includes seven different sections, from the traditional liturgy to a meditation for skeptics. How does the congregation pray these liturgies? How did all of them come to be included?

3. *The Book of Blessings*

I wanted to fall in love with *The Book of Blessings* as a prayer book but I found myself more grateful for it as a compilation of poetry than as a prayer book. While I find

many of Falk's prayers evocative and even have her version of a blessing for handwashing taped next to my bathroom mirror, as a *siddur* for daily use, I long for the familiar words and blessing formulations of my tradition. While I occasionally enjoy expressing my gratitude toward the Source of Life, overall I want to bless God, *Eloheinu malkat ha'olam*. Though my God is not domineering and all-powerful, my God is still separate from myself. Praying in Hebrew is not enough to keep me connected to God and my tradition and my history; I need at least some pieces of the old language. Falk writes at length about the interaction between her art and her writing, as well as the need for more people to be involved in the creation of new feminist liturgies. Further study would explore this process: has she come to new metaphors for God? Has she continued the process or dialogue? How has her return to her art shaped her prayer, or her writing process?

4. The New Israeli Reform *Siddur*

I am eager to get to know the New Israeli Reform *Siddur* and am excited to discover the impact it can have in Israeli society. It's thoughtful juxtaposition of poetry and prayer, of sources old and new, is a source of inspiration for what prayer can be. Furthermore, in a time when right-wing religion is gaining power across the world, including in Israel, the time is ripe for such a *siddur.* I am looking forward to my next trip when I can experience its use in person. Further study would explore its reception in Israel, and its use. Do people take it when they travel, as the editors hope? Do Mizrachi and Sephardi Jews feel like the prayer book is theirs? Do those used to praying at *Beit T'filah Yisraeli,* another progressive community who centralizes their Israeli identity, find

the *siddur* meaningful? In ten to fifteen years, how will the *siddur* have shaped Israeli Reform Judaism, and Israeli society?

5. *Siddur haKohanot*

Finally, I found the feminine God language of *Siddur haKohanot* completely exciting. They celebrate women and the divine feminine at every turn, from translation to transliteration to the art which decorates both the interior and exterior. Yet I found that an entire prayer book along these lines was too much for me, personally. Perhaps as a student at the rabbinical school of the Reform movement, I do feel somewhat attached to my patriarchal movement and religion and to its institutional norms. One exciting aspect of the liturgy of ShK that is ripe for further study is the transliteration, translation and transformations, particularly that of God language. The siddur makes ample use of Elah, Eloteinu, Shechinah, and other words that were not covered in this study which focused on the translations rather than transliteration. As the community is only ten years old, further study in another ten and fifteen years will be necessary to assess the book's impact. How will the community have grown and shifted and how will that have changed the use of the *siddur* if at all? How will the blessings and feminine language get used in mainstream prayer spaces if at all?

It would be untrue to say that any one of these *siddurim* portrayed their values more strongly than another. Each of them conveyed their identity through design, layout, translation, transliteration, and liturgical and poetic choices. Each of them honored the feminists who came before us all and paved the way, championing the need for new

liturgy and new forms of prayer. Each *siddur* plays a role in the Jewish feminist landscape: we need a *siddurim* for the radical feminists and the mainstream feminists. By coexisting, each advances the dialogue and provides new images and new possibilities of expressing ourselves to the divine. Prayer is also called *avodah shebalev:* the service of the heart. Each of these books enables progressive Jews to pray the words of their heart, and know that they are not alone in their prayerful longings.

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