

A Vision Statement for a New Reform Machzor

Teshuvah is the chief goal of the *Yamim Nora'im*, and a *machzor* is our indispensable manual and guide. We aim to create a *machzor* that will serve Reform Jews as they seek repentance, new direction, and a sense of return to God and the Jewish people.

We envision a 21st century *machzor* that...

- provides meaningful liturgy to those who pray regularly, and welcomes those who are new to Jewish spirituality and practice;
- inspires Reform Jews to participate in the multifaceted experience of the *Yamim Nora'im*— from feelings of awe to moments of solace, from the solitude of contemplation to the solidarity of song and worship;
- draws from the deep wellsprings of Jewish liturgy, history, thought, music, interpretation and creativity;
- guides worshipers, in accessible ways, through the journey of *teshuvah* and *cheshbon hanefesh*;
- values continuity and incorporates the outlook of the 21st century Reform Jewish community of North America;
- bridges the personal and the communal, the ritual and the ethical dimensions of the *Yamim Nora'im*.

We embrace the rich liturgical voices of the Jewish past and the aspirations of our people today. Among those aspirations is the wish for a *machzor* whose words, tone and theological range are uplifting, inviting and challenging. We seek metaphors and images of God that will speak to our time, as the prayers of *Union Prayer Book II* and *Gates of Repentance* spoke with depth and authenticity to theirs. We seek an integration of tradition and innovation, prayer and music, speech and silence, the struggle with God and the struggle with being human.

Most important to our work are the people for whom this book is intended: the members of a dynamic, ever-changing and diverse Reform Movement who gather in community to experience awe and forgiveness and hope. Some call

themselves classical Reform; some seek to recover and reinterpret the broader Jewish heritage. Some resonate with traditional views of God; others find it hard to believe in God at all. One can hardly overstate the challenge before us, as we strive for a liturgical message that illuminates and inspires.

We are open to exploring the use of early *piyyutim* and modern poetry, visual art used as text, commentary that is intellectually engaging and spiritually provocative, music that we already cherish as well as musical innovation. We will attempt to frame with sensitivity texts which are painful or disturbing. Translations and original materials must be beautiful and evocative, conveying to worshipers an appreciation of our inherited liturgical tradition, as well as Judaism's relevance to their lives. We seek a balance between the creative retrieval of classical texts and the present-day sensibilities of Reform Jews.

Mishkan T'fila is our base text, and a great deal will flow from the structure it provides. At the same time, the historical *machzor* is central to our efforts, as it has been to Reform liturgists of the past. Our work will be informed by the various *minhagim* developed by Jews over many centuries in response to their circumstances and their faith.

What do we mean by "base text"? *Mishkan T'filah* provides us with fundamental principles and a carefully crafted framework and design. The specific requirements of a *machzor* may lead us to expand on MT's paradigm, but our plan is to create a book that is a fitting companion to MT.

MT's right side/left side format encourages diversity, choice and the inclusion of many "voices"; the use of counter-text; and a stimulating balance of *keva* and *kavannah*. It allows for midrashic creativity and the presentation of different ideas about God, in order to reflect contemporary realities of Reform Judaism and the Jewish world. The dialogue—or confrontation—between the two facing pages also seems particularly suited to the themes of *selichot*, *teshuvah* and *cheshbon hanefesh*, which are fundamentally relational and dynamic in nature.

We will take seriously the diverse opinions about gender language for God. Ours will be more than a superficial "He said, She said" approach; gender is far more profound and complex than substituting one noun or pronoun for another. We look forward to an exploration of gender that leads Reform Jews to encounter and experience God in interesting, meaningful ways.

The Editorial Core Team will oversee a process involving diverse working groups of rabbis (assigned to such tasks as translation, commentary and poetry); consultation with cantors and educators to assure that music and learning are integral to the book; consultation with academic experts in related fields; and responders who will evaluate our work and offer critique. Self-evaluation will be ongoing. We are committed to creating an efficient review and piloting process that will result in the timely production of the book.

We believe the Reform nature of this *machzor* will be most evident in its respectful yet fresh approach to tradition; in its unwavering commitment to the equality of men and women; in its attention to the present-day concerns, fears and hopes of the people who will pray from its pages; in its faithfulness to the ethical dimension of Judaism; in its embrace of the universal and the particular; and, perhaps, most of all, in its effort to deal with the tension between the historical theology of the High Holy Days (God's sovereignty and judgment) and more contemporary beliefs, such as the "theology of human adequacy."

We are mindful that the High Holy Days are a time of change and challenge for each person; yet also, profoundly, a time of memory—a time when a familiar smell, sound or *ta'am* can make all the difference for many of us; and a time when families and communities take stock and grow closer. We take seriously the feelings associated with holiness, as we envision a *machzor* that encourages and activates these significant levels of experience.