



Introduction to Mishkan HaNefesh 5776  
Am Shalom Congregation  
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SSL: The Hebrew word *Rosh* means “Head.” The Hebrew word *Shana* means “Year.” However, you may know Hebrew is made up of three letter roots, and the root of the word *Shana* literally means “change.” Tonight, and in the 10 days ahead, we focus on change: the changes we wish to make internally, as well as our ability to look at things and life in a new and fresh way. As you can tell, we are in for a big change (not just a new choir director). On your seat tonight and throughout Yom Kippur is our new High Holy Day prayer book, *Mishkan Hanefesh: The Sanctuary for your Soul*. We have been using *Gates of Repentance* since 1978 and we will use it again tomorrow morning to say goodbye to our old trusted friend. But since 1978 so much has changed. Our language has changed. Our music has changed. The way we pray has changed. For almost a decade the Reform Movement has been working on the launch of this new prayer book, and tonight we join with over 300 other Reform congregations who are using this book in this final form for the very first time. Prayer books are a snapshot of the Jewish community. None are exactly the same, because we, as a people, are an evolving religious community. No prayer book can ever be more than a sacred tool in the facilitation of a worship experience, even as no textbook guarantees a wonderful lesson.

ARM: A few words about our new prayer book or *Machzor*. For some the beautiful translations of the liturgy might be what speaks to you. Other people may find their way into meaning through the poems or the beautiful woodcut prints peppered throughout the book. For others, the music is going to be what makes their experience meaningful. For still others, it might be the material meant for personal reflection and mediation. While for some it might be the more intellectual or philosophical commentaries on



the bottom of each page. For many the greatest aid to accessibility might be the full Hebrew transliteration and gender neutral language throughout the book. And of course for some, it will still be the rabbi's sermon.

Traditional texts and translations appear on white pages, usually on the right side of a two-page spread. Grey pages (on the left side) offer alternative prayers. The blue pages are meant for study and reflection. These pages, interspersed throughout the prayer book, invite you to take detours, to go deeper—to spend time in thought, not in recitation.

PAM: *Mishkan Hanefesh* has done away with all stage directions. “Please rise,” “please be seated,” and “please read responsively,” are no longer written in the actual book. The prayer book no longer tells us what to do. That can be a little unsettling, but also liberating. It empowers us to think about our ritual more consciously. We need a liturgy that gives people permission to be honest about serious questions and doubts. This new prayer book does just that.

So in these days ahead we invite you to explore *Mishkan HaNefesh* on your own. Unlike prayer books from earlier eras of Jewish history, it is not assumed that everyone always will be on the same page at the same time, and that is OK. This *Machzor* was created with the underlying principle that worshippers might find their own way through it. You may find yourself interested in a particular commentary, intrigued by a particular study text, or drawn to a particular meditation. We encourage that. Prayer is a ladder on which we rise from the self we are, to the self we wish to be.

SSL: The time is now. Rosh Hashanah, “a new year,” or Rosh Hashanah, a time to “change our heads.” We welcome you to *Mishkan HaNefesh*, your new sanctuary of the soul. Enter, and use it well. Explore as we make this place, and this moment, holy. We come to tell, we come to hear, we come to learn, we come to grow. We come together with new prayer books in hand, ready to pray and ready to explore. So let us begin....