

Dedication of *Mishkan T'filah*
Temple Beth El, Tacoma, WA
December 21, 2007/13 Tevet 5768

“All beginnings are difficult,” says the Talmud.

I don't know that the author was thinking about beginning to use a new *siddur*, but the concern is certainly appropriate. Change is challenging, and a change from something that we have grown used to can be quite unsettling.

Although I grew up in a Reform congregation using the *Union Prayer Book*, I have used *Gates of Prayer* throughout my more than 25 years in the rabbinate. To say that I am comfortable with it is an understatement.

But times change, and as I said last week, *Gates of Prayer* was very much a prayer book of its time: the 1960s and 1970s which were characterized by theological confusion and an almost anything goes attitude. Reform Judaism has come to recognize that if we try to be all things to all people we end up standing for nothing.

We are well into a new century and Reform Judaism has grown and developed, rediscovering lost traditions while becoming more open to spirituality and mysticism.

At one time, Reform worship was much like a performance, conducted by the rabbi, cantor and choir, with the congregation as a passive audience. Now, Reform Jews want to participate in worship, want to be engaged in the prayer experience. *Mishkan T'filah* was designed with this goal in mind: from the choice of fonts of the Hebrew and English texts, to the inclusion of transliteration on the page, to the elimination of italic typeface.

The birthing process of *Mishkan T'filah* has been long—much longer than planned—and challenging. It has produced what is an aesthetically pleasing, uplifting, *siddur*.

Please take a copy of *Mishkan T'filah* into your hands and rise as we read together the dedicatory prayer and conclude with the *Shecheyanu*, a blessing that affirms that this is truly a new beginning.

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Words on a page,
That open our hearts and minds,
That challenge us to think,
That link us to our ancestors
And to each other.

Ancient prayers
Borne out of longing,
Preserved in times of darkness
Bringing comfort and courage
A sense of history and destiny.

New prayers
Written by men and women
Trying to make sense of
Our tradition and the modern world.

The old and the new
Together on one page
Reminding us that
Only by embracing our past
In the light of the present
Can we prepare for the future.

Entering the *Mishkan* for the first time
We pray that its words challenge and inspire us
Bringing us closer to our tradition
to one another
And to God.