

Dedication of **משכן תפילה** *Mishkan T'filah*

*The Community Synagogue
Port Washington, New York*

Parashat "Vayigash" פרשת "ויגש"
December 14, 2007 6 Tevet 5768

Our rabbis taught that in the beginning God's Intimate Presence – the **שכינה** *Shekinah* – dwelt with human beings in the Garden of Eden. That Presence withdrew because of the wrongdoing of the early generations. Then, following the lead of Abraham and Sarah, righteous souls emerged that helped restore the bond between God and human beings. And when Moses came, a dwelling place was made for the **שכינה** *Shekinah* – the **משכן** *Mishkan*, the site where the prayers and offerings of the people could be made to God.

Tonight we assemble in anticipation and thanks. We join together to dedicate unto ourselves this gift of a new prayer book of the Reform movement.

Rabbis: The *siddur* is the poetic aspiration of our people's search for truth, justice and peace.

Congregation: *The prayer book assembles the people and provides a communal focus. It gives voice to the longing of the spirit.*

Cantor: The *siddur* is an expression of the yearning of the heart. It is an intimate conversation with The Invisible One.

Congregation: *The prayer book is a public declaration not just of what is, but of what ought to be.*

Rabbi: The *siddur* reminds us of our obligation to act.

Cantor: The *siddur* puts gives words to our hopes, our dreams, our sense of religious responsibility.

Congregation: *This prayer book is the means by which we make our offerings to God, to feel the protection of the Divine and inspire us to comfort others.*

Rabbi: This sacred text gives voice to a new generation of poets and thinkers, theologians and spiritual seekers. May our hearts be touched, our minds challenged, and our spirits be quieted as we enter its gates.

Cantor: May the young learn songs of inspiration; our elders sing out with a vision of a world they dream to be real.

Together: *As our rabbis taught, "Until the Mishkan was set up, there was enmity, jealousy, rivalry, wrangling and dissension in the world. But after the Mishkan was completed, there was love, affection, friendship, mercy and peace." May this be our prayer as we dedicate this siddur.*

A Prayer For A New Book

*I own that I am disposed to say grace upon twenty other occasions in the course of the day besides my dinner. I want a form for setting out upon a pleasant walk, for a moonlight ramble, for a friendly meeting, or a solved problem. Why have we none for books, those spiritual repasts—a grace before Milton—a grace before Shakespeare—a devotional exercise proper to be said before reading the Fairy Queen?
—from Grace Before Meat by Charles Lamb*

Why no prayer for a prayer book?

We pray upon seeing lightning, kings, scholars imbued with wisdom,
Strangely formed human beings,
Smelling fragrant barks and spices,
Eating first fruits of the season.

We pray before the *menorah* whose light illumines the divine.

We pray before the simple act of breaking bread.

(We pray not before giving *tzedakah* in order that the *mitzvah* not be delayed.)

But why no prayer for a prayer book?

We recite blessings before and after reading the Holy Writ and Prophets.

We thank God for the opportunity to study.

We pray as we enwrap ourselves in the cloth of the faithful.

Do people of the book, the descendants of priests

Appreciate not the dancing words of the *siddur*?

Abraham Joshua Heschel taught:

Words of prayer are hyphens between heaven and earth.

Hyphens between God and the worshipful.

Hyphens that steel our souls with the strength of the imperishable

Against vulnerability of the perishable.

As so we pray before the these prayer books

We pray that they carry our longings far away.

We pray that they elevate our hopes and dreams for those we love.

We pray a simple prayer that our words be not for naught.

הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנִשְׁחַבְּהָ, חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם.

Hashevaynu Adonai ayelecha, v'nashuva. Chadesh yamenu k'kedem
Return us unto You, O Adonai, and we shall be returned.

Renew our days as of old.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שְׁהַחֲיֵנוּ וְהַחֲיֵנוּ וְהַחֲיֵנוּ לְדָמְךָ הַזֶּה.

Baruch ata Adonai, Elohaynu melech Haolam, sh'he-chi-anu, v'ki-yi-mahn-nu v'hi-gi-anu, la-z'mah ha-zeh.

We thank you, Adonai, our God, for sustaining us, for keeping us alive, and for
bringing us to this moment of joyful celebration. Amen!

The midrash quoted is Pesikta deRav Kahana, comparing the building of the Mishkan with Hanukkah. This ceremony was written by Rabbi Irwin Zeplovitz, with elements suggested by Rabbis Karyn Kedar and Stephen Pearce.