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## ■ VISIONS OF PRAYER

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### INTRODUCTION

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Overheard at last week's *Oneg Shabbat*:

Congregant 1: That was a new *L'chah Dodi* that the cantor sang. I didn't like it.  
What about you?

Congregant 2: I thought it was a catchy tune. I really liked it.

Congregant 1: I like the new way the rabbi introduced the healing prayer—inviting us to call out the names of people whom we were thinking of.

Congregant 2: I don't know. It felt a little hokey to me—a little too touchy-feely for my tastes.

Congregant 1: Really? My cousin belongs to a congregation in which they even hold hands during the prayer.

Congregants 1 and 2 in the dialogue above are both educated, articulate adults who are frequent worship attendees. Yet when they spoke about their worship experience at this particular Shabbat service, the conversation focused on what they “liked” and “didn't like.” They didn't think about whether the new melody for *L'chah Dodi* expressed the meaning of the prayer text. They didn't explore why calling out the names of those who were ill held meaning for one of them and didn't hold meaning for the other. The truth is that we all talk about worship yet very few of us were ever taught a constructive vocabulary for this discussion—a vocabulary that would help those who plan and lead worship to better grasp the impact of their work and understand what is meaningful for the worshipers.

Another significant challenge to creating worship that meets the spiritual, social and communal needs of the congregation is the limited opportunity most of us have to pray with other communities. Encouraging your worship planners and leaders to pray with other congregations is similar to supporting their study in a continuing education seminar: Their creativity will be sparked by encountering new ideas. But it's not so easy. Not every Reform congregation is located in a community that has other synagogues.

So we created *Visions of Prayer*, a film and study guide, to help your congregation develop a common worship vocabulary and to bring you images of worship in three very different Reform congregations within our movement. These three congregations demonstrate a variety of approaches to worship. *Visions of Prayer* can be used as part of a Ritual Committee study course, with a synagogue Board of Trustees that is interested in experimenting with its congregational worship and as a resource for those seeking to develop new prayer-leadership skills.

### WHO'S WHO IN THE DVD

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The congregations featured in this DVD are Congregation B'nai Jeshurun Barnert Temple (CBJBT) in Franklin Lakes, NJ (Rabbi Elyse Frishman, then student Cantor Jill Abramson);

Central Reform Congregation (CRC) in St. Louis, MO (Rabbi Susan Talve); and Temple Israel (TI) in Boston, MA (Rabbi Ronne Friedman, Rabbi Elaine Zecher, Rabbi Jonah Pesner and Cantor Roy Einhorn).

## **WHAT THE DVD IS...AND ISN'T**

*Visions of Prayer* weaves together sections of an Erev Shabbat service in each of the featured congregations. The purpose of this approach is to demonstrate a variety and range of musical, liturgical and leadership styles across common parts of the service.

The DVD does *not*

- Show any service in its entirety
- Intend to prescribe one preferred or “correct” form of worship

The DVD *does*

- Offer a visual experience of interesting, creative, successful worship in three of our movement’s well-established congregations
- Provide viewers with an opportunity to consider some different ways of “doing worship” and to use this resource as a starting point for reflection on their own community’s worship

## **SETUP**

We suggest that you allot two to three hours total in order to make the best use of watching and discussing the DVD. You may choose to do this in one or two sessions. You will need a TV and DVD player. Plan on having a flip chart or blackboard and markers available for the discussion facilitator as well as paper, pens and copies of the Worship Elements Worksheet (page 72) for all the viewers.

## **FACILITATOR**

You will need a designated, prepared facilitator. He or she can be a member of the professional staff or a layperson. We suggest that the facilitator watch the DVD twice prior to the group session. The facilitator should be thoroughly familiar with the “flow” of the DVD, be able to help the viewers identify the congregation and worship leaders as the discussion proceeds and be generally knowledgeable about the DVD’s contents.

The facilitator should also be familiar with the *Iv’du B’simchah: Worship with Joy* text.

## **FINALLY**

The accompanying study guide provides you with a structured format for watching the DVD, identifying and analyzing the techniques demonstrated, and discussing your own ideas about worship. We have also included an essay by the clergy of Temple Israel of Boston (page 75) in which they describe the process that led them to create the worship that they now use. We urge

your congregation to use this DVD and all of the Worship materials to help you create worship that best meets your community's theological, philosophical and aesthetic needs.

We hope that *Visions of Prayer* moves, challenges and, especially, inspires you.

*B'hatzlachah.*

## **WORSHIP DVD STUDY GUIDE FOR FACILITATORS**

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### **PART I (BEFORE SHOWING THE DVD)**

1. Read together the Introduction that appears at the beginning of this study guide (page 67).
2. Write the following two questions on the flip chart or blackboard: When in your life have you found yourself inspired, enriched or nourished by worship? and Under what circumstances have your worship experiences left you disappointed, confused, uninspired or lonely? Have the participants take a few moments to answer each question on a sheet of paper. When they have finished, they should put this piece of paper aside.
3. Briefly discuss your own congregation's Erev Shabbat worship and the following elements of your service:
  - *Musical instruments:* Which ones are used, and how and when are they used?
  - *The position(s) and movement of the worship leaders:* Where and how do the worship leaders stand during the service? Are they on or off the bimah? Are their positions fixed or do the leaders move from place to place?
  - *The relationship between the worship leaders:* How do the worship leaders interact with each other?
  - *The interaction among the worship leader(s) and the worshipers:* How and when do the leaders interact with the congregation?
  - *The worship space:* What is the configuration of your worship space? What is the position of the worshipers in relation to the worship leaders? Are the seats fixed or flexible?
  - *Children:* Are children welcome at the service? Are they given special roles in the service?
  - *Variation in the way prayers are recited:* How are prayers recited and by whom? Are they sung or spoken? Recited aloud or silently? Privately or communally?
  - *The use of silence, private prayer and meditation:* Are there moments of silence and opportunities for private prayer and/or meditation? If so, how are they introduced? Where do they occur in the service? How long do they last?
  - *The Torah reading:* Do you read the Torah on Erev Shabbat? If so, who reads it? Where is it read? Is it chanted or spoken?
  - *Mi Shebeirach for Healing:* How are names elicited? Who recites the prayer? Is it spoken or sung?

- *Personal experiences*: How does your service acknowledge special events in the lives of the worshipers?
- *The music*: Which musical parts of the service are sung communally? By a cantor or soloist only? Is a variety of tempos utilized? Is the music of many different composers used?
- *The conclusion*: How does the service end? Is there a closing song? A benediction? If so, who recites it? Is it chanted or spoken? Are the *Motzi* and the *Kiddush* part of the conclusion of the service? Who recites them? What happens as the worshipers leave the sanctuary or worship space? Is there a receiving line? Do they wish each other *Shabbat shalom*?

## **PART II (FIRST VIEWING OF THE DVD)**

1. Show the DVD once without interruption or discussion.
2. Then ask the participants to write their answers to the following questions on a sheet of paper: What intrigued you about what you saw in the DVD? What disturbed you or made you feel uncomfortable? Have the participants put their sheet of paper aside without sharing it with others at this time.
3. Review the names of the individual congregations and prayer leaders so that the participants will be able to identify them accurately when the DVD is shown again.

## **PART III (SECOND VIEWING AND DISCUSSION OF TECHNIQUE)**

Distribute copies of the Worship Elements Worksheet to the participants. Suggest that they may want to use the worksheet as the group reviews the DVD for the second time.

Show the DVD again in sections, as noted below. Stop the DVD at the end of each section. Pose the questions pertaining to each section and facilitate the discussion before moving on to the next parts. Assign a “scribe” to take notes of the subsequent discussion.

### **Section 1: *L'chah Dodi* (beginning of the DVD through 1:37)**

- What kinds of moods were evoked by the different versions of *L'chah Dodi* at the beginning of the services?
- In what way do you think that the use of instruments (guitar, percussion) affected the worship experiences?
- How did the different sanctuary spaces impact the worship experiences held in them?
- How did the positioning of the worship leaders on or off the bimah affect the prayer experiences?
- Try to recall where the leaders of each service positioned themselves in their respective sanctuaries. Did they move around, or were their positions fixed? What messages were communicated by where the leaders chose to stand and how they moved within the worship spaces?
- How did you react to the presence of children at Temple Israel (TI) and Central Reform Congregation (CRC)?
- What was your reaction to the signer used at TI?

- How do you feel about the various ways in which the clergy in the DVD were dressed?
- What other impressions do you have about this segment of the service?

### **Section II: Candlelighting through *Mi Chamochab* (1:38–5:12)**

- What was the effect of darkening the room for the candlelighting (CRC)? Of congregants lighting candles on a raised circle (CRC)? Of congregants lighting candles off the bimah (Congregation B'nai Jeshurun Barnert Temple)?
- At CRC, the prayer leaders guide the congregation through a “*Sh'ma* mantra,” a slow, drawn-out meditation of the *Sh'ma* text. How does this technique shape the recitation of the *Sh'ma*?
- What do you think the TI prayer leaders are trying to achieve by handing out instruments before reciting the *Mi Chamochab*?
- How does the inclusion of dancing (both spontaneous and planned) impact the worship experience?
- What other impressions do you have about this segment of the service?

### **Section III: *V'shamru* through the Torah reading (5:13–9:24)**

- At CRC, the worshipers recite the *Amidah* privately and silently. At CBJBT, the congregation chants it together. How does each approach affect the pacing of the service? Should there be a place for personal, private prayer during communal worship?
- Many Reform congregations are reassessing their use of an organ. The student cantor at CBJBT sings *R'tzei* during the *Amidah* accompanied by the organ. How does the use of the organ affect this solo piece?
- At CBJBT, the congregants hold the Torah open at the front of the bimah so that those present can see the scroll while it is being read. How do you think this practice affects the worshipers' experience of the Torah service? Is there a difference between having the Torah verses read and having them chanted?
- What other impressions do you have about this segment of the service?

### **Section IV: Healing Prayer/*Mi Shebeirach* through the conclusion (9:25 to the end)**

- At CBJBT, the rabbi descends from the bimah, walks through the congregation and invites the recitation of names from the congregation for the *Mi Shebeirach*. What effect does this choreography have on this worship movement?
- How does the musical “pad” (the continuous musical background provided by the keyboard) influence this part of the CBJBT service?
- CBJBT worshipers hold hands while singing the *Mi Shebeirach*. What effect does the holding of hands create?
- At TI, worshipers sing the *Mi Shebeirach* accompanied by a guitar and flute. What effect is created by the use of two instruments playing this familiar melody?
- The Priestly Benediction is recited communally at CRC, with the congregants encouraged to hold their hands over the heads of those around them so that all of the worshipers bless each

# WORSHIP ELEMENTS WORKSHEET

	Musical Instruments	Position(s) Movements of Worship Leaders	Interaction: Worship Leaders and Worshipers	Worship Space	Children	Personal Experiences	Music
Candlelighting							
<i>L'chah Dodi</i>							
<i>Sh'ma</i>							
<i>Mi Chamochah</i>							



<b>Amidah</b>	<b>Private Prayer/ Meditation</b>	<b>Torah Reading</b>	<b>Healing Prayer</b>	<b>Closing Song</b>

other. Does the impact of this prayer vary depending on whether the blessing is recited communally or by the prayer leader?

- What is the effect of TI's bringing the challah for the *Motzi* into the sanctuary?
- What are your thoughts about the function of the closing song (*Od Yavo Shalom Aleinu* at TI and CRC, *L'chi Lach* at CBJBT) of the service? What sort of mood do you feel should prevail at the service's conclusion? How can the choice of music be utilized to enhance the desired mood?
- What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of forming a receiving line (CBJBT) at the end of the worship service?
- What other impressions do you have about this segment of the service?

#### **PART IV (CONCLUSION)**

Invite the participants to consider the following questions:

1. What did you learn from the DVD?
2. What did you learn from your group's discussion of the DVD?
3. How much variation was there among the responses of the members of your group to the DVD? What accounted for the differences in responses?
4. How might your congregation proceed from here? How could you use what you saw in the DVD—**the music, the movement, greeting and saying good-bye, using musical instruments, the use of silence/private prayer moments, the role of the prayer leader(s) and different uses of worship spaces**—to create worship that engages the mind and nourishes the soul for yourself and your community?

Finally, we suggest that the facilitator review the *Iv'du B'simchah: Worship with Joy* text with the participants. The group may wish to consider using some of the text as part of an ongoing process of worship study and experimentation.

## WELCOME TO TEMPLE ISRAEL!

### HOW AND WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

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By Cantor Roy Einhorn, Rabbi Ronne Friedman, Rabbi Jonah Pesner and Rabbi Elaine Zecher

You have experienced or shortly will experience parts of our *Kabbalat Shabbat* worship in the DVD. We want to share some additional information that we hope will be helpful to you.

#### SOME HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Our 1,500-family-unit synagogue was established almost 150 years ago. Our sanctuary seats 1,000 worshippers, and our *ifillot* have reflected a classical Reform tradition. Over twenty years ago, we began to offer the *Kabbalat Shabbat* model during specific times of the year, primarily in the summer. It was not viewed as the primary service of the congregation then, nor was it offered in the sanctuary but rather in an area outside the sanctuary called the atrium. There, congregants sat in chairs, with one half of the room facing the other. Over the course of a number of years, it became apparent that many of our members preferred the *Kabbalat Shabbat* model. For a while, both services were offered. In 1996, we let the later “traditional” Shabbat service go. The number of worshippers at the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service told the story: It had become the primary service of the congregation.

However, as with any change, the process was not a completely smooth or problem-free one. Although more people were attending Shabbat worship than ever before, those who preferred the “traditional” Shabbat service (in the classical model) were, in some cases, feeling that their spiritual needs were not being met. Some of them had tried the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service but had found it “undignified,” “too noisy,” and otherwise unfulfilling. They missed the choir, whose presence had evoked for them a feeling of nostalgia. During this period, attendance at the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service had swelled to such a point that the crowded conditions in the atrium had created a fire hazard. As a result, we reluctantly moved back into the fixed seating, but comfortable chairs, of the sanctuary.

When Rabbi Ronne Friedman became the senior rabbi of Temple Israel in 1999, he was determined to respond to those who felt disenfranchised by the changes of the previous few years. Our Temple Committee (what is known in other congregations as the Ritual Committee) invited new people to join the process of worship discussion and decision making. The committee decided that six times a year, we would offer a more classical Reform service in the older style of Temple Israel—with the participation of a choir, a formal sermon, and more clearly defined leader and congregational roles. We have found this to be a good solution. We very much wanted to demonstrate that the clergy recognize and care about the spiritual needs of all of the synagogue’s members and that we will try to respond to them to the best of our ability. As part of this process, a subcommittee was created that makes phone calls to invite people to attend services and arranges transportation for those who need it. The clergy insisted from the start that this should be a congregational process. A lay committee met, debated the issues, made recommendations, and passed them on to the clergy, with whom the final decisions rested.

## SOME OF THE THEORY BEHIND THE SERVICE

### Shabbat Joy

We take the command to rejoice in the celebration of Shabbat seriously. Congregational singing, the use of musical instruments, and the lively atmosphere contribute to the joyous observance of Shabbat. Fifteen minutes before the service starts, we begin to express that delight by singing and greeting those who enter the sanctuary. The rabbis move through the congregation saying *Shabbat shalom* and singing along with the cantor.

### Shabbat Peace

The high energy and presence of joy in the sanctuary are balanced by the contemplative and meditative needs of the worshiper. Music and certain designated moments, such as the prayer for peace followed by private meditation, allow for a quieter and more introspective experience.

### Community

As you see in the DVD, the entire clergy staff stands in front of the congregation during *Kabbalat Shabbat*. We want our presence of leading services together to serve as a model for community worship. We enjoy singing and praying together and wish to share that experience with the congregation. Thus the service “leaders” are no longer the dominant personalities in our worship service. However, there is a vision that emanates from the leaders that brings the congregation into the circle of the worship experience.

## WHAT THE DVD DIDN'T SHOW YOU BUT WE WANT TO TELL YOU

- The clergy feel very strongly about modeling our own friendship and sense of community. We start this process thirty minutes before the beginning of the service when we sit alone together in a circle on the bimah and prepare for Shabbat by singing. Sometimes we learn new music; other times we enjoy the peaceful moments that song elicits.
- All of our life-cycle blessings, like baby namings and wedding blessings, take place in the synagogue near where the clergy stand. This way, the worshipers can see the faces of the celebrants and feel connected physically to the event that is taking place.
- We love to throw candy at the wedding couple following their blessing!
- Each week, we offer a *d'var Torah* that lasts between seven and ten minutes. All the members of the clergy take turns giving the *d'var Torah*.
- We try very hard not to make announcements about upcoming events and programs during services because we find that they distract from the worship experience. Every congregant receives a handout describing in depth what we would otherwise announce. The president or a representative of the Board does come forward to greet those gathered but speaks primarily about celebrating Shabbat and welcoming one another.
- Because of the size of the sanctuary, we have movable dividers that are placed halfway between the front and back of the sanctuary. We move them only after the front section has filled up.
- The youth choir comes to *Kabbalat Shabbat* once a month. They sit in the front rows and turn to face the congregation to sing rather than perform from the bimah.

- We purposely do not give instructions regarding when the congregation should stand or sit. Those who attend services regularly initiate these movements.
- There is no “responsive” reading. Everyone sings and reads everything.
- Baby-sitting is offered every other week, even though many children are present weekly.
- On some Shabbatot, a member of the congregation who plays the violin joins with the flutist to accompany the service.
- At the end of the service, we invite newcomers to stand. Everyone else then rises to welcome them and sing the last song to them.
- Once a month, we present a speaker who teaches or lectures following a Shabbat dinner after *Kabbalat Shabbat*.

## **SOME OF OUR CURRENT CHALLENGES**

Our worship is an ever-evolving process, and we, too, are continuously dealing with the following challenges.

### **Decorum and Level of Energy**

Some of our worshipers have asked, “Where is the decorum now?” We answer, “We have decorum; it’s a decorum of joy.” However, we recognize that when some of our congregants are experiencing painful situations—for example, dealing with illness or coping with the loss of a loved one—the exuberance of the service may be dissonant for them. We have tried to respond by ensuring that there are contemplative moments throughout the service. Another concern revolves around the many sounds of children. In response, we have asked some of our parents to model appropriate behavior in the sanctuary, for example, taking their children out at certain moments, like during the *d’var Torah* and the recitation of *Kaddish*. We have publicly designated some parts of the service, like candlelighting, as quiet and somber moments. We also offer baby-sitting every other week.

### **Space and Music**

Our worshipers want to sing and like to sing. But there are parts of the service that are appropriate for solo pieces and for the artistry that only a cantor can provide. Our challenge has been to find music in which the cantorial role is present but does not dominate. We have accomplished this in some instances by selecting pieces of music in which the cantor sings the verses and the congregation sings the choruses. Sometimes when it is his turn to offer the *d’var Torah*, our cantor will present cantorial music instead. When our *Kabbalat Shabbat* worship met in the atrium, that space created a wonderful sense of immanence, community, and closeness. Now in our very large sanctuary, we have found that it’s been a huge challenge to create community and also to hear people singing. We are addressing this issue through the judicious use of lapel microphones, speakers, and so forth.

### **Finally...**

We are thrilled to be able to share our *Kabbalat Shabbat* service with you. If you ever have the opportunity to experience it in person and not on DVD, we look forward to welcoming you to our community.