

From the Rabbi's Desk – October 2007

Perhaps you saw last month's article in *The New York Times* about the new Reform prayer book. The new *siddur* (prayer book) is only the third for the American Reform movement.

As my liturgy professor taught me more than thirty years ago, there is no Jewish text that more accurately mirrors the beliefs, the culture, and the ethos of the Jewish people than its prayer book. Prayer books for all branches of Judaism have never been static. While the basic prayers like the *shema* or the *kaddish*, do not change that much, others do. In the early 1900s, there were obviously no prayers for the modern State of Israel, which was not founded until 1948. Now, there are prayers for Israel's well being, a liturgy for Israel Independence Day, as well as memorial prayers for those who perished in the Holocaust.

In countries where Jews have a comfortable relationship with the government, there are prayers for the country's leaders. One tends not to find such supplications at times and in places where Jews were treated with hostility.

The new prayer book, *Mishkan T'filah*, literally "In the Presence of Prayer," represents the realities of the modern American Jewish community. It includes more Hebrew prayers, a function of the Reform movement's return to tradition. There are various readings and poems with a more humanistic tone, reflecting the greater diversity of the Jewish community in America. Whether the service is a *bar mitzvah* with many non-Jewish guests, or a regular Shabbat service that often includes family members who were not born Jewish, the prayer book seeks to make all who are in attendance comfortable. In addition, the language of the *siddur*, in both Hebrew and English, is gender sensitive and inclusive, reflecting a trend in many traditions.

Over the last couple of years, we have begun to integrate a prototype of the new prayer book in some of our services. Within a few months we are due to receive the new *siddur*, and we look forward to using it in our weekly Shabbat services. Like anything new, it will at first feel a bit awkward, but I am confident that in time, it will not only feel familiar, but it will ultimately enhance our worship experience

.....*Rabbi Robert S. Goldstein*