Preparing for the New *Machzor* and the High Holy Days: An Integrated Approach

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In order to begin to speak about the new *machzor*, I first turn to the subject of medicine. Many years ago, I learned from my physician husband about a particular concept that I believe informs an approach to liturgy—especially *Mishkan T’filah* and the new *machzor*. It was and continues to be referred to as “integrative medicine.”

The idea arose from the consistent and widespread use of medical approaches not widely practiced in established medical institutions like hospitals and doctors’ offices. Common examples include acupuncture, herbal remedies, massage, and mindfulness-based meditation, to name a few. Their practice was widespread but they were deemed alternative or complementary as they were not part of the mainstream. Following a scientific survey documenting the widespread use of these practices and continued studies of their safety and efficacies, the medical establishment slowly began to explore how best to incorporate them into medical settings like academic health centers and medical schools. Over the course of two decades, these modalities turned from having an exclusively complementary role in the practice of medicine to being more commonly integrated and part of routine treatment protocols. Side by side with traditional medical modalities like prescription drugs, surgery, radiation therapies, and other modern methods, the juxtaposition of these treatments created a potential synergistic relationship aimed at preventing, treating, and managing diseases. Each treatment method could stand on its own, but combined they could have a more powerful influence on the health

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and well-being of an individual. The goal wasn’t necessarily to create a hybrid treatment but rather to apply these multiple medical modalities in a coordinated fashion in conjunction with each other so that a stronger result could potentially ensue.

Understanding the concept of integrative medicine has led me to see parallels in the way we utilize a similar protocol through *Mishkan T'filah* and the new *machzor*—though our intention is to affect the soul more than the body. As a member of the Editorial Committee for the New Prayer Book, now called *Mishkan T'filah*, I remember the conversation we had on how to arrange a page of liturgy so that it contained multiple modalities of expression with traditional and other creative approaches. In the beginning of putting together the prayer book, Elyse Frishman, the editor, worked diligently to ensure each page could reflect more than its traditional counterpart. She presented what has become an integral part of the Reform liturgical experience: two pages facing each other based on the theme of the prayer. In that moment she opened up the possibility to enter different voices, perspectives, and understanding into prayer. It was transformative. Poetry, psalms, creative interpretations, spiritual commentary, and source explanations could complement the traditional prayer, the faithful translation, and transliteration.

Through organizing and reorganizing the two-page spread, a design emerged, but something else happened as well. Most of the historical, traditional prayers we use refer to God as omnipotent, omnipresent, and most often, in a hierarchical framework. With the advent of the two-page spread, we could also include varied expressions of the Divine. In the same way that integrative medicine seeks to combine different therapeutic approaches, both “conventional” and “complementary,” to treat an individual, we began to see how an individual could experience the sacred through the exposure and employment of different approaches to God. Unlike *Gates of Prayer*, which has different services each expressing a different theological view of God, *Mishkan T'filah*, as designed by Elyse Frishman with the Editorial Committee, could create a synergistic understanding of God. I call this an integrated theology. As such, an integrated theology juxtaposes and places different theological ideas in close proximity allowing them to stand alone but also to combine for a stronger concept of God. Take most pages of *Mishkan*
T’filah and it is possible to find different voices rising from the page together.

The editors of the new machzor have taken the concept of an integrated theology but have applied it to the unique complexities of a High Holy Day prayer book. The new machzor, like Mishkan T’filah, will provide us new and innovative approaches and will certainly reflect the thoughtful work of these editors.

As we began to think about the introduction of the new machzor, we wanted to utilize this CCAR Journal symposium as a resource with which to consider new ideas and concepts, some of which will be reflected in our new High Holy Day prayer book. All of the articles, however, provide thoughtful consideration for this important season of the year. Whether we lead the prayers, offer words of Torah, interpret the liturgy through music, organize and administer all details, or find ourselves sitting among the community, this time of year calls upon us to prepare. Each year, the machzor invites us to plummet the depths of our souls, to be lost in the search, and then to find our way back.

It is an honor to introduce this symposium issue of the CCAR Journal focusing on the machzor and its myriad components. Though we may only use it during a brief time during the Jewish calendar year, its influence reaches much further beyond time and space. The articles that follow integrate many of the ideas that the machzor presents.

This issue is divided into three sections. The first one is made up of articles by the Editorial Core Team, whose efforts have helped to shape the new machzor in profound ways. Edwin Goldberg shares the machzor Vision Statement created by the editors as a vision to guide the process and provides commentary of it. Shelley Marder offers a beautiful understanding to the role of poetry not only in the new machzor but also its important place in liturgy as a whole. Leon Morris considers how to mine our traditional resources as a dynamic and vibrant process in creating innovative and meaningful worship. Although Janet Marder has not submitted her own essay, her influence is contained throughout.

We are grateful to have the voices of a professor of liturgy from each of the four HUC-JIR campuses, which make up the second section of the symposium. Whether through a personal experience with her Israeli students as Dalia Marx describes or Richard Sarason’s wonderful concept of “music inside the text” or Richard
Levy’s analysis of the three major machzorim utilized by our movement or Larry Hoffman’s foundational explication of the power of liturgy done well, each of these professors continue to guide us with their wisdom in order to increase and to deepen our own understanding and thinking.

The third and final section’s collection of articles by colleagues in diverse Jewish settings further complements our preparation. We begin on a conceptual level taking a broader and more general perspective and then move closer in to specific sections and prayers. Cantor Evan Kent, whose contributions have been invaluable to the Editorial Core Team, introduces the concept of synesthesia and analyzes the importance of the senses to the liturgical experience. Elyse Frishman beautifully synthesizes the role of the machzor as a tool to the greater endeavor of High Holy Day worship. Lawrence Englander explains his concept using concentric circles to describe how relationships on multiple levels inform our understanding of the machzor. Leon Morris offers an example of creative retrieval and uses the “inescapable link between sacrifice and prayer” as an example. Margaret Moers Wenig and Donald Rossoff help us make the transition into specific sections of the machzor with a focus on the Yizkor service. Wenig delves into the inherent significance of the experience and Rossoff analyzes its structure and its impact, presenting additional possibilities to be included. Donald Cashman demonstrates how Kol Nidrei can be offered through the involvement and direct participation of the congregation. Lindsay Bat Joseph weaves a personal story around Un’taneh Tokef and Amy Scheinerman examines this same prayer through the lens of process theology.

This section and the symposium’s concluding three articles ground us with the influence of other important texts. Judith Abrams exposes the Y’rushalmi’s mystical influence on the machzor. Aaron Panken shares his scholarship of the Second Temple Period and how texts from that time inform our understanding of the machzor. And finally, Elsie Stern focuses her attention on the Deuteronomy sources that make up the Yom Kippur Morning Torah Service as an intriguing perspective from Moab.

This year in particular, as 5773 turns to 5774, we want to help position ourselves to enter into the Days of Awe with intention and introspection. As we prepare to receive a new machzor in the near future, we wanted to provide a forum to consider the many themes
and ideas provided by the worship experience itself, the liturgy, and the vast array of ideas and themes that stem from it to create an integrated and well-informed platform.

One more note: Many of us, as members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, benefit in known and unknown ways from the work of the professionals at the CCAR. I want to express our profound gratitude to Hara Person, who works diligently on our behalf to develop, foster, and steward the many publications. Her contributions, in particular, to secure the strength and quality of the new machzor has enabled the kind of creative and innovative work being offered to produce this important piece of liturgy for our movement. We thank her immensely.

Notes
