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MYSTICAL INFLUENCES IN JEWISH LITURGICAL RENEWAL

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The changes that have taken place in Roman Catholic worship since the Second Vatican Council—in text, language, music, and enactment—for the most part strike quite a familiar chord in the non-Orthodox branches of Judaism, here in the United States and abroad. Although not without precedent in the rabbinic, gaonic, and medieval periods, Jewish liturgical renewal shot ahead and received its theoretical underpinnings in a vigorous and systematic way close behind the French Revolution, very shortly after which whole Jewish communities were emancipated from the multifold disabilities and physical confinement of the urban ghettos in Western and Central Europe. The Hamburg Temple, founded in 1817, was the first Reform synagogue to implement structural and textual changes tangibly in the liturgy that were to act as a model for non-Orthodox Jewish houses of worship and prayer manuals on the Continent, in England, and in America.

The criteria for adjustments in Jewish worship for a century and a quarter after the founding of the *Tempelgemeinde* in the city of Hamburg were, *in nuce*, compatibility with major strands in contemporary European thought and harmonization with Western esthetic canons. Hence, many of the time-honored practices associated with Jewish public worship were allowed to fall by the wayside, like the use of cantillation during the reading from the scroll of the Torah, swaying during the recitation of the prayers, covering the head with the *tallit* (prayershawl) during certain points of the service, etc. In their place—markedly during the nineteenth century—in “modern” fashion, the choir with its Protestant-style hymnody to the accompaniment of the organ became a regular feature. The sermon was to be delivered weekly, principally for edificatory (*erbauungsvoll*) purposes—and not merely on a few stated occasions during the year—much in the style of the regnant Lutheran and Reformed churches. The role of the rabbi, too, was visibly altered, one might even say “clericalized.”

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Hitherto, the task of the rabbi was to teach classical texts, deliberate in matters pertaining to *halakhah* (Jewish religious law), and embody a life of piety. The norm in Reform, Liberal, or Conservative (not to be confused with Orthodox) synagogue¹ was for the rabbi to function chiefly as a Jewish counterpart to the priest or minister, performing some or all of the pastoral responsibilities as his opposite number in Christianity. Moreover, he² presently had a substantial part to play in the worship service itself, either alongside the cantor (or "representative of the congregation," who traditionally might even be a qualified layman) or in his place. It is not hard to detect the influences of the majority culture in the directions Jewish liturgical reform has taken. With all the external and internal modifications of non-Orthodox worship during a major part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth—whether far-reaching or gradualist, the outlines of the classical liturgy (Heb.: the *matbea' shel tefillah*; Ger.: *Stammgebete*), as formulated by the ancient rabbinic Sages, remained astonishingly intact: the *Shema'* and its attendant benedictions and the *'Amidah*.

Nineteenth-century Continental, British, and American liturgical renewal tended to be marked by certain rationalizing tendencies, in keeping with the temper of the times. This meant that the mystical component in the Jewish tradition was either downplayed or removed altogether. Previously, scarcely a rite was without features drawn from the *Kabbalah*, operating as a kind of overlay upon the classic rabbinic framework. Largely owing to abuses and aberrations that insinuated themselves into mystical belief and practice, the verdict was that kabbalistic teaching was little less than—in the words of the doyen historian at the time, Heinrich Graetz—"Schwaermerei." Since the appearance of the magisterial investigative, theological, and literary labors by the likes of Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, and Abraham Joshua Heschel from the 1920s on, the liturgical revisers have been reevaluating the merit of the rich kabbalistic legacy and reappropriating many an abandoned prayer in the newer prayerbooks, often with good results.

¹ In a nutshell, two of the branches of modern Judaism arose in Germany during the nineteenth century. The earliest of these is Reform Judaism, which during the course of several rabbinic conferences both in Europe and in America instituted changes respecting the *halakhah*, the Sabbath, the status of women, and, of course, the liturgy. Conservative Judaism is basically an offshoot of Reform which, contrary to the central drift of Reform at the time, insisted on the retention of the Hebrew language, loyalty to Zion, and the importance of folk-consciousness, all the while acceding to some of the changes advocated by Reform. Reconstructionism, the youngest of the non-Orthodox branches, sprang up in the United States during the twenties. Doctrinally, it emphasizes religious naturalism and frowns upon the notion of the Chosen People as smacking of chauvinism. Liturgically, however, it occupies a position somewhat more traditional, closer to that of the Conservative movement.

² Nowadays "she" can apply here as well. Only Orthodox Judaism continues to refrain from ordaining women rabbis.

Apart from the Psalms, known for their frequently heartfelt and intimate quality in relation to God, Jewish creativity in mystical prayer manifested itself early, particularly during the proto-rabbinic period. The Talmud and the Midrash meagerly and tantalizingly allude to *Ma'aseh Bereshit* ("the Work of Creation" based on Genesis 1), which deals primarily with cosmology, and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* ("the Account of the Chariot" deriving from Ezekiel 1), which is largely theosophical, lest these be lamentably misconstrued and/or vulgarized. Within the same time-frame, into the gaonic period, *Heikhalot* literature makes its appearance. There we are told how the adept would enter several "palaces" by means of meditation and ecstasy until he experienced a vision of the Throne of Glory. A goodly portion of the lofty, rapturous *Heikhalot* hymns³ eventually found their way into the Ashkenazic (originally Central and Eastern European) High Holy Day prayerbook. The next significant phase is the pietistic-mystical phenomenon of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century German Hasidism (*Hasidey Ashkhenaz*),⁴ under the leadership of Rabbi Judah ben Samuel the Pious (*he-Hasid*) of Regensburg and his disciple Rabbi Eleazar ben Judah of Worms. From this circle came the devotional, ethical and ascetic work, *Sefer Hasidim*, which includes elements of letter and number mysticism and folk superstition. Medieval German Jewish Pietism was also responsible for the highly numinous "Songs of Unity" (*Shirey ha-Yihud*, which, because of their highly allusive style and arcane language, only rarely get to be translated) for each day of the week, to be recited upon the completion of the statutory prayers. The most famous and best known of all these "Songs of Unity" is "*An'im Zemirot*," which also has its own designation, "Hymn of Glory" (*Shir ha-Kavod*) and which, in varying length, has come to new life in many a contemporary prayerbook.

This creative impulse in prayerful composition was to climax in sixteenth-century Safed, when a community of exiles from the Iberian Peninsula took shape, emphasizing the ascetic, consecrated, devotional life surrounded by the *mitsvot* (commandments) of the Torah. One of its prime movers and leading lights was the sainted Rabbi Isaac Luria (the "*Ari*," an acronym based on his name and title in Hebrew) and his key disciple Rabbi Hayyim Vital. The Ari's utterances—touching on his cosmology, theosophy, and understanding of the *mitsvot*—and his extraordinary deeds are hagiographically embellished and recorded in the works of his adherents. What do emanate directly from his pen are his Sabbath table hymns (*zemirot*), which enchant and are replete with esoteric kabbalistic references. They continue to be

³ Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960).

⁴ Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), pp. 80-118.

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sung today by the Hasidim at each of three Sabbath meals. The meditational aids for concentration (*kavvanot*; singular: *kavvanah*)⁵ during the recitation of given prayers and the performance of certain ceremonies are frequently ascribed to Luria. The mystics of Safed instituted, too, the practice of conducting vigils on the night preceding certain holy days, e.g., Shavu'ot (Pentecost) which commemorates the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. More widely known among world Jewry are hymns by others of the Lurianic school, such as Solomon Alkabetz, who is the author of the strongly implicative and eschatological hymn at the commencement of Shabbat, the alluring and universally cherished "*Lekhah Dodi*" ("Come, my beloved, to meet the bride [i.e., the Sabbath]") and Israel Najara, composer of the Sabbath table hymn, "*Yah Ribbon*," set to many different captivating melodies. Below we reproduce the entirety of "*Lekhah Dodi*", in Chaim Raphael's translation,⁶ and the first three verses of "*Yah Ribbon*", in Philip Birnbaum's rendition⁷:

Lekha Dodi

Come, my beloved, to meet the bride:
come to greet the Sabbath.

"Keep" and "Remember"—a single command, which God—in unity—caused
us to hear.

The Lord is One and His name is One, to His renown, His glory and His
praise.

Come, let us go to meet the Sabbath, for it is a fountain of blessing;
From the beginning, from of old, it was ordained; last in act, first in thought.

The royal shrine, regal city, rise and come forth from destruction.
Too long have you dwelt in the vale of tears: now God will show His pity on
you.

Awake, arise from the dust; array yourself, O my people, in splendor;
At hand is Bethlehem's David, Jesse's son, bringing deliverance into my life.

Awake, awake, for your light has come. Arise, shine!
Awake, awake, give forth in song; the glory of the Lord is revealed to you.

Be not ashamed, be not confused; no longer humbled, no longer sighing;
The poor of my people trust in Thee; and the city shall be builded on her own
mound.

⁵ Hyman G. Enelow, "Kawwana: The Struggle for Inwardness in Judaism," in *Selected Works of Hyman G. Enelow*, ed. Felix Levy (privately printed, 1935).

⁶ Chaim Raphael, *Qabbalat Shabbat: The Sabbath Eve Service* (New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1985).

⁷ Philip Birnbaum, *Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem: The Daily Prayer Book* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1969).

They who spoiled you shall be spoiled, your devourers shall go far away;
Then God shall rejoice over thee, as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.

You will break free, right and left; you will reverence the Lord;
Through the offspring of Perez, we also shall rejoice and be glad.

Come in peace, crown of her husband, in gladness and joy.
Amid the faithful of the treasured people, come O bride, come O bride.

Yah Ribbon

Lord, eternal Master of worlds,
Thou art the Supreme King of kings.
Thy mighty acts and wondrous deeds
It is my pleasure to declare.

Lord, eternal Master...

Morning and evening I praise thee,
Holy God, who didst form all life:
Sacred spirits, human beings,
Beasts of the field, birds of the sky.

Lord, eternal Master...

Great and mighty are thy deeds,
Humbling the proud, raising the meek;
Were man to live a thousand years,
Yet he could not recount thy might.

Lord, eternal Master...

The Hasidic movement which arose in the eighteenth century, being essentially a populist and proletarian development and partial recasting of the mystical tradition, toned down the esotericism and elitism of the Lurianic Kabbalah and at the same time rendered its teachings accessible to the broad masses of Jews in Poland, Lithuania, Russia, and the Ukraine. With all its adaptations and transmutations, Hasidism was at bottom a remarkably faithful continuator of the Kabbalah as understood by the Ari and transmitted by his disciples. As an example, since their beginnings the Hasidim have been in the habit of using for their worship the rite established by the Lurianic school called the *Nusah Ari* or *Nusah Sepharad*, with its unique amalgam of the Ashkenazic and Sephardic (*viz.*, Spanish, Portuguese and Mediterranean) rites and *kavvanot*. What marks out Hasidic worship from its kabbalistic forerunners are: 1) many discussions in the literature with respect to proper attitudes during prayer; 2) the everyday application of the prayers' deeper import; 3) creation of countless melodies, often of the joyous kind, to accompany individual prayers; 4) the cultivation of interiority during prayer; and 5) the fashioning of personal, private prayers (often in Yiddish rather than in Hebrew) by different *zaddiqim* (singular: *zaddiq*, sometimes spelled *zaddik*) or *rebbe*s (= spiritual leaders of separate Hasidic groups or

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communities). The following two items are individual prayers⁸ by two different *zaddiqim*, Nahman of Bratslav and Eliezer of Lizhensk. The longer section afterwards, taken from Louis Jacobs' *Hasidic Thought*,⁹ is an example of counsel regarding the proper conduct of prayer.

Be it thy will
to annul wars and the shedding of blood from the universe,
and to extend a peace, great and wondrous, in the universe.
"Nor again shall one people raise the sword against another
and they shall learn war no more."

But let all the residents of earth recognize and know the innermost truth:
that we are not come into this world for quarrel and division,
nor for hate and jealousy, contrariness and bloodshed;
but we are come into this world
thee to recognize and know,
be thou blessed forever.

And let thy glory fill all our wits and minds, knowledge and hearts;
and may I be a chariot for the presence of thy divinity.
May I not again depart from the Sanctity as much as a hairsbreadth.
May I not think one extraneous thought.
But may I ever cling to thee and to thy sacred Torah,
until I be worthy to introduce others into the knowledge of the truth of thy
divinity.

"To announce to the sons of man thy power,
and the honor of the glory of thy kingdom."

(Nahman of Bratslav)

Guard us
from vicious leanings and from haughty ways,
from anger and from temper,
from melancholy, talebearing,
and from all the other evil qualities.

Nor let envy of any man rise in our heart,
not envy of us in the heart of others.

On the contrary:
put it in our hearts that we may see our comrades' virtue,
and not their failing.

(Eliezer of Lizhensk)

⁸ Nahum N. Glatzer, ed., *Language of Faith* (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), pp. 314-317.

⁹ Louis Jacobs, "How Should Man Worship God?" ch. 19 in *Hasidic Thought* (New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1976), pp. 149-154.

In the matter of fasting, there is no doubt that for our sins we are obliged to engage in numerous fasts as it is stated in all the moralistic works and especially in the work *Reshit Hokhmah, Beginning of Wisdom*, for who is innocent of youthful sins? But the truth is that people only carry out the *mitzvot* as commands learned by rote. They judge everything by appearance, not as it is in truth when the heart discerns. They do everything like a lifeless lump of clay without any understanding. They imagine that they pray and study the Torah. But in reality the Shulhan Arukh in section 98 and elsewhere explains how prayer should really be offered properly. And with regard to the study of the Torah there are many rules by which the Torah is acquired. . . . So that, in reality, they do not really pray at all, they only repeat words learned by rote at the commands of their teachers. And so it is with regard to their fasting. They do not scrutinize their deeds at all, and even on the day they fast they "exact all their labors." As Scripture says: "Behold, ye fast for strife and contention" (Isaiah 58: 3, 4), for on a fast day they become irritable and then are guilty of many sins such as bad temper, slander, etc. Yet they still imagine that they fast and they take pride in it and believe that all their sins have been forgiven. But the truth is otherwise, for the main thing in fasting is for the heart to be broken, for man's heart becomes puffed up through eating and drink, and it is humbled through fasting. The word *ani* ("poor") is made up of letters which are found in the word *taanit* (a "fast") as the *Reshit Hokhmah* states. And then the heart can experience great remorse for sin and this is the main aim of repentance, as the *Gates of Repentance* by Rabbenu Jonah states. Without it a fast is worth nothing. Even if a man guards himself from sin during the whole day of the fast and studies all day, yet it is nothing without repentance, which involves careful scrutiny of one's deeds and great remorse. How much less it is worth if on the day of the fast, God forbid, he commits a sin, however slight.

But since the Holy One, blessed be He, is so merciful and since there is no limit to His power and since He demands from man only that which man can do, it is possible that the Holy One, blessed be He, does accept the fasting of some of these men who fast in an unsophisticated way, even though they are insufficiently intelligent to carry out the fast as it should be carried out so as to be acceptable to God. As for men like us, however, who do know the truth, if we do not fast in a manner acceptable to God there is no doubt that He will not accept such a fast and it is as if the dogs had devoured it. Such a fast goes to waste, God forbid, to the *kelipot*, called "waste." And this is a total loss in many ways. The body loses since people in this generation are so weak, and the soul loses, for the faster loses his humility since he imagines that by fasting he has repaid his debt. In reality he has added to his transgression and prides himself to no avail. Now if you are able to fast one day a week and your soul desires it, then do it. But this is only helpful if you do as follows: Leave all your activities on that day and scrutinize your deeds in private. God forbid, do not think that by doing so you have paid your debt, but trust in the Lord who lets off those who sincerely repent, according to Rabbenu Jonah's description of the various types of repentance. If you desire to do more than this, do it, but take care that the defect does not outweigh the advantage. It seems to me, insofar as I have understood the opinions of the holy men on earth I have mentioned, that in this generation where there is so much weakness, if we fast we cannot pray or study properly. It is therefore undoubtedly better to leave off fasting, but instead to achieve whatever fasting is supposed to achieve without fasting.

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As for what fasting should achieve, the following are its desired effects: (1) There must be remorse, as above; (2) breaking the heart and the bodily energy which derives from the "Other Side"; (3) breaking desire; (4) humility; (5) an increase of bodily heat, as it is said, "Everything that may abide the fire, ye shall make go through the fire, and it shall be clean" (Numbers 31:23), as the *Reshit Hokhmah* states, and there are other things, too. But you can achieve all these things if you can compel your heart and the faculties of your body to offer your prayers with pure intention, which, as it is stated in the prayerbook *Shaarey Shamayyim*, is called *service*. For it involves great *service* to compel thought, busily occupied in worldly matters, to concentrate on the meaning of the words of the prayers. For this great strength is required, and this undoubtedly weakens all the limbs of the body. So if God helps you to pray occasionally with proper concentration you will undoubtedly feel remorse for your sins, your body will be broken, your desire humbled, and the burning flame that seizes hold of the heart in prayer purifies instead of the fire of fasting.

The truth is found in some new manuscripts I possess from Rabbi Rebbe Baer of blessed memory. There it is stated that a sign of prayer being acceptable in some way to God is whether it produces humility. That is to say, if the heart is still humble after prayer, this is called its effect, that is to say, where there is humility and meekness. But if not, God forbid, it is certainly unacceptable. Perhaps once in our lives we may merit this. It is stated there, too, that the Baal Shem Tov said that he became worthy of all the high degrees to which he attained only because of his regular immersions in the *mikveh*. In truth this is a very great thing, for the *mikveh* purifies both body and soul. But it all has to be done with intention, not, God forbid, as the commands of men learned by rote, for then, God forbid, it is worth nothing. It is necessary first to pull one's self together and to have proper intention.

The revisions of the classical Jewish Prayerbook from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1930s have, in divergent degrees, hewed to the liturgical framework as outlined by the Rabbis of the Talmud and stripped away what was considered medieval and other pre-modern excrescences, including kabbalistic and Hasidic material. By the middle of the twentieth century we witness, little by little, a change of heart, in that the Reform *Union Prayer Book*, Conservative *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book* and Reconstructionist *Sabbath Prayer Book* only sparingly incorporated selected items from the kabbalistic tradition. With all their avowed rationalism, the Reconstructionists showed themselves the least hesitant to draw upon mystical devotional compositions, less from the main currents of kabbalistic doctrine than from the occasional inner-oriented, contemplative pieces—prose and poetic—by writers from the Golden Age of Spanish (Sephardic) Jewry, like Bahya ibn Paqudah, Solomon ibn Gabirol, and Judah Halevi. Among the prayers of mystical provenance that have been reinstated in the Reform *Union Prayer Book: Newly Revised* (1940) are "An'im Zemirot," or the "Hymn of Glory," in just three verses, to be sung in Hebrew or in English as an introductory hymn for a Shabbat Morning Service:

Sweet hymns and songs will I recite
 To sing of Thee by day and night,
 Of Thee who art my soul's delight.

How doth my soul within me yearn
 Beneath Thy shadow to return,
 Thy secret mysteries to learn.

And e'en yet Thy glory fires
 My words and hymns of praise inspires,
 Thy love it is my heart desires.

My meditation day and night,
 May it be pleasant in Thy sight,
 For Thou art all my soul's delight.

The second hymn ("*Shahar Avaqqeshkha*") is a Sephardic one, by the medieval Jewish philosopher (author of the heavily Neoplatonic *Meqor Hayyim*, translated into Latin as *Fons Vitae*), physician, and prolific poet, Solomon ibn Gabirol. It was taken over by the *Union Prayer Book* in the Hebrew and, in Gustav Gottheil's translation, it reads:

Early will I seek Thee, God, my refuge strong,
 Late prepare to meet Thee with my evening song.

Though unto Thy greatness I with trembling soar,
 Yet my inmost thinking lies Thine eyes before.

What this frail heart dreameth and my poor tongue's speech
 Can they even distant to Thy greatness reach?

Because great in mercy, Thou wilt not despise
 Praises which till death's hour from my soul shall rise.

The official rite of the Conservative movement in Judaism, *The Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book* (1946) resuscitated likewise the "Hymn of Glory," credited to Judah the Pious, and "Blessed be His Name" ("*Berikh Shemeih*") in Aramaic, taken from the *Zohar*, the classical text of the Kabbalah which was composed between the time of the German Jewish Pietists and the emergence of the Lurianic Kabbalah. Like the Reform prayerbook, the Conservative one recovered the soulful piece by ibn Gabirol, albeit in an appendix and in English verse only, translated by Nina Salaman. Found in no other non-Orthodox prayer manual, however, is the Lurianic-style meditation (*kavvanah*) before taking the *lulav*, the palms with myrtle and willow twigs, and *etrog* (citron) during the Feast of Tabernacles (on the basis of Leviticus 23:40). The meditation, deriving from seventeenth-century Rabbi Nathan Hannover's "*Sha'arey Zion*," reads in the 1946 Conservative rite as follows:

I rise in reverence ready to fulfill the command of my Creator who hath enjoined upon us in His Torah: "And ye shall take for yourself on the first day the fruit of the goodly Hadar tree, branches of palm trees, a bough of the thick tree, and willows of

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the brook." As I wave them, may the blessing of God be vouchsafed unto me and may I be imbued with holy thoughts reminding me that God is the supreme Lord, whose divine rule pervades the earth below and the heavens above, and whose kingdom has dominion over all. May my observance of this commandment be accounted as though I had fulfilled it with whole-hearted devotion. And let the graciousness of the Lord our God be upon us; establish Thou the work of our hands; yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it. Blessed be the Lord forever. Amen.

The Reconstructionist *Sabbath Prayer Book* (1945) saw fit to include "An' im Zemirol" (only slightly condensed), the Aramaic "Berickh Shemeih" (a bit shortened) and ibn Gabirol's "Shahar Avaqqeshksha." The first two prayers are from the kabbalistic milieu; ibn Gabirol's and the one by Judah Halevi (to be reproduced below) are Sephardic—stemming from medieval Islamic Spain, when the mystically-tinged Neoplatonic influence permeated Judaism as well as Islam and Christianity before Neo-Aristotelianism held sway. Aptly included in the abundant supplementary section of the Reconstructionist *Sabbath Prayer Book* is Halevi's "God-intoxicated" "O Lord, where shall I find Thee?":

O Lord, where shall I find Thee?
Hid is Thy lofty place;
And where shall I not find Thee,
Whose glory fills all space?
Who formed the world, abides
Within man's soul always;
Refuge to them that seek Him,
Haven for them that stray.
O, how shall mortals praise Thee,
When angels strive in vain—
Or build for Thee a dwelling,
Whom worlds cannot contain?
Yet when they bow in worship
Before Thy throne, most high,
Closer than flesh or spirit,
They feel Thy presence nigh.
Then they, with lips exulting,
Bear witness Thou art one—
That Thou art their Creator,
Ruler and God alone.
Who shall not yield Thee reverence,
That holdest the world in thrall?
Who shall not seek Thy mercy,
That feeds and succors all?
Longing to draw anear Thee,
With all my heart I pray;

Then going forth to seek Thee,
 Thou meetest me on the way.

I find Thee in the marvels
 Of Thy creative might,
 In visions in Thy temple,
 In dreams that bless the night.

Who says he has not seen Thee,
 Thy heavens refute his word;
 Their hosts declare Thy glory,
 Though never voice be heard.

Dare mortal think such wonder?
 And yet, believe I must
 That God, the Uncreated,
 Dwells in this frame of dust,

That Thou, transcendant, holy,
 Joyest in thy creatures' praise,
 And comest where men are gathered
 To glorify Thy ways.

And where celestial beings
 Adore Thee, as they stand
 Upon the heights eternal—
 And Thou, above their band,

Hast set Thy throne of Glory—
 Thou hearest when they call;
 They sing Thine infinite wonders,
 And Thou upholdest all.

It was not until the fifties and the sixties—when the works of Buber, Scholem, and Heschel made their rounds; Eastern mysticism was both seriously and trendily experimented with; Native American religion came to be appreciated anew; and a recognition grew that the scientific outlook scarcely explained everything or quenched the yearning soul and hungry heart—that the non-Orthodox Jewish prayerbooks gave a much wider berth to mystical outpourings, old and new—without, fortunately, yielding to defeatist or obscurantist sentiment, though an element of nostalgia can be detected. The prayerbooks that have been published under the auspices of the main branches of American Judaism over the last decade reflecting this turn of events in the spiritual realm are *Gates of Prayer (Sha'arey Tefillah)* (Reform); *Siddur Sim Shalom* (Conservative); and, most recently, *Kol Haneshamah* (Reconstructionist). We see how they generously help themselves to treasures of Jewish spirituality that had hitherto been regarded with suspicion and even disdain. What is of some interest is the kind of borrowing that is done. The theurgic, metaphysical, speculative, or theosophical dimensions of the Kabbalah are still given little weight or underplayed,

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inasmuch as the personal, emotional, evocative, and relational aspects are highlighted.

The Reform *Gates of Prayer* (1975) retained all of the mystical additions from the 1940 edition of the *Union Prayer Book*, introduced “*Yedid Nefesh*” (“Heart’s Delight”) by Eliezer Azikri, another sixteenth-century poet of the Safed community, two meditations ascribed to Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (one of these quoted above and another to be quoted below), and, in the supplementary section, the aforesaid table songs. In the Hebrew, Azikri’s poem begins each stanza with a succeeding letter of the Divine Name, or Tetragrammaton, YHVH. After the manner of the biblical Song of Songs and of mystics of all climes, the language is noticeably amatory. The rendition of “*Yedid Nefesh*” in the *Gates of Prayer* runs thus:

Heart’s delight, Source of mercy,
draw Your servant into Your arms:
I leap like a deer
to stand in awe before You.
Your love is sweeter to me
than the taste of honey.

World’s light, shining glory,
my heart is faint for love of You:
heal it, Lord, help my heart,
show me Your radiant splendor.
Let me return to strength
and have joy for ever.

Have compassion, O Faithful One,
pity for Your loved child:
how long have I hoped
to see Your glorious might.
O God, my heart’s desire,
have pity, hold back no more.

Show Yourself, Beloved, and cover me
with the shelter of Your peace.
Light up the world with Your presence,
that we may exult and rejoice in You.
Hurry, Loved One, the holy day has come:
show us grace as long ago.

The Bratslaver *Rebbe*, Nahman of Bratslav (1770-1811), stressed the need for solitude in a natural setting, to be alone with God. His private meditation in this vein serves as a suggested reading after the regular *’Amidah*:

Master of the universe, grant me the ability to be alone:
may it be my custom to go outdoors each day,
among the trees and grasses, among all growing things,
there to be alone and enter into prayer.

There may I express all that is in my heart,
talking with Him to whom I belong.

And may all grasses, trees, and plants
awake at my coming.

Send the power of their life into my prayer,
making whole my heart and my speech
through the life and spirit of growing things,
made whole by their transcendent Source.

O that they would enter into my prayer!
Then would I fully open my heart
in prayer, supplication and holy speech;
then, O God, would I pour out the words
of my heart before Your presence.

The Conservative *Siddur Sim Shalom* kept all that its immediate forerunner, the *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*, carried from the mystical tradition, with the exception of the *kavvanah* before waving the *lulav* and *etrog* during Tabernacles. Nahman of Bratslav's prayer for world peace appears fittingly in *Siddur Sim Shalom*, after the entreaties on behalf of the United States and of Israel. As in *Gates of Prayer*, the updated Conservative rite presently has "*Yedid Nefesh*," successfully translated by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shelomi, optimally capturing the mood and lilt of the original:

Soul mate, loving God, compassion's gentle source,
Take my disposition and shape it to Your will.
Like a darting deer will I rush to You.
Before your glorious Presence humbly will I bow.
Let Your sweet love delight me with its thrill,
Because no other dainty will my hunger still.

How splendid is Your light, illumining the world.
My soul is weary yearning for Your love's delight.
Please, good God, do heal her; reveal to her Your face,
The pleasure of Your Presence, bathed in Your grace.
She will find strength and healing in Your sight;
Forever will she serve You, grateful, with all her might.

What mercy stirs in You since days of old, my God.
Be kind to me, Your own child; my love for You requite.
With deep and endless longing I yearned for Your embrace,
To see my light in Your light, basking in Your grace.
My heart's desire, find me worthy in Your sight.
Do not delay Your mercy, please hide not Your light.

Reveal Yourself, Beloved, for all the world to see,
And shelter me in peace beneath Your canopy.
Illumine all creation, lighting up the earth,
And we shall celebrate You in choruses of mirth.

Mystical Influences in Jewish Liturgical Renewal

The time, my Love, is now; rush, be quick, be bold.
Let Your favor grace me, in the spirit of days of old.

The editors did well to restore the Lurianic custom of beginning each day's worship with the *kavvanah*: "I hereby accept the obligation of fulfilling my Creator's mitzvah in the Torah: Love your neighbor as yourself." They also added many excerpts from the literary output of Abraham Joshua Heschel who, though a modern theologian, was the scion of a Hasidic dynasty. He taught at the (Conservative) Jewish Theological Seminary in New York until his death in 1972. All of these readings are intended to facilitate the worshiper's entry into the mood of authentic prayer. We pick one to illustrate:

The focus of prayer is not the self. A man may spend hours meditating about himself, or be stirred by the deepest sympathy for his fellow man, and no prayer will come to pass. Prayer comes to pass in a complete turning of the heart toward God, toward His goodness and power. It is the momentary disregard of one's personal concerns, the absence of self-centered thoughts, which constitute the art of prayer. Feeling becomes prayer in the moment in which one forgets oneself and becomes aware of God. When we analyze the consciousness of a supplicant, we discover that it is not concentrated upon his own interests, but on something beyond the self. The thought of personal need is absent, and the thought of divine grace alone is present in his mind. Thus, in beseeching Him for bread, there is one instant, at least, in which the mind is directed neither to one's hunger nor to food, but to His mercy. This instant is prayer.

In prayer we shift the center of living from self-consciousness to self-surrender. God is the center toward which all forces tend. He is the source, and we are the flowing of His force, the ebb and flow of His tides.

The Reconstructionists in their brand-new *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Eve* (1989) have gone perhaps a bit further than the rest in providing not only some of the items the other rites revived but also a running commentary which by turns is openly rationalist and mystical; a *Shivviti* illustration, reminiscent of a mandala, with scriptural verses to aid the pray-er in focusing; and sections from the Song of Songs which traditionally symbolize the love between God and Israel/the individual and are, by custom in mystic circles, to be read on Shabbat Eve.

All this goes to show that the appeal of the mystical to the modern has hardly dimmed and that the need for the more embracing, deeper, more intimate relationship with God is an ongoing one. A person's spiritual health is attested by the frank recognition of that vital elemental need. In the eyes of the Jew on the verge of the twenty-first century—because of the ineradicable conviction, "God saw that it is good"—the secular world and the universe of science are acclaimed, even amid their joys and tragedies, but not without according the *mysterium tremendum* and the One who is at the heart of it their full due—and praise.