The Theology of Redemption in Contemporary American Reform Liturgy

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(Rashi to Gen. 33:2; Bereishit Rabbah 78:8). Looking at the rabbinic thesis that I wrote in 1997, I see that I wrote then, “Heidi Lieberman experienced this process with me tirelessly and lovingly.” She has been Heidi Gold for nearly twenty years, thank God. Her strength, wisdom, and partnership mean everything, more than I have words to express. I am grateful every day for the unbelievable good fortune of her companionship and love.
ABSTRACT

The Theology of Redemption in Contemporary American Reform Liturgy

A thesis presented to the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies

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Redemption is an umbrella construct for a variety of eschatological ideas in classical Jewish thought, incorporating: a messiah, descended from the House of David; the ingathering of the Jewish exiles in the Land of Israel; the reestablishment of the priestly cult in a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem; an era of peace and universal knowledge of the God of Israel; retribution against the enemies of Israel; and the resurrection of the dead. Although all these ideas did not necessarily coexist simultaneously in the thought of individual Jewish philosophers throughout the ages, each notion appears in various contexts in the traditional Jewish prayerbook.

Modernity challenged each of these ideas in a variety of ways, and the responses to those challenges were expressed on the pages of Reform prayerbooks, first in Europe and then in America. While the development of Reform liturgy has been the subject of many studies, the theological underpinnings that have shaped contemporary prayerbooks have
not been well analyzed. This thesis explores the treatment of three of those themes—the personal messiah, the ingathering of exiles, and the resurrection of the dead—as they appeared in Reform prayerbooks, culminating in Mishkan T’filah, the official liturgy for the American Reform Jewish community in the first part of the twenty-first century. The rationalist confidence of the nineteenth century gave way to doubt, a limited rediscovery of Jewish particularism, and a desire to welcome a plurality of theologies by the second half of the twentieth century. In Mishkan T’filah, we observe a modest recovery of some of these classical, non-rational modes of Jewish eschatology, filtered through the prism of all that came before it.
I regard the old Jewish Siddur as the most important single Jewish book—a more personal expression, a closer record, of Jewish suffering, Jewish needs, Jewish hopes and aspirations, than the Bible itself.... If you want to know what Judaism is—the question which has no answer if debated on the plane of intellectual argument—you can find it by absorbing that book. The Jewish soul is mirrored there as nowhere else, mirrored or rather embodied there: the individual's soul in his private sorrows, and the people's soul in its historic burdens, its heroic passion and suffering, its unaltering faith, through the ages.¹

Introduction

Redemption has been a central Jewish theological construct since biblical times. When Israel faced conquest and exile in antiquity, its prophets offered consolation and hope to a people who considered itself God's elected nation and who tried to comprehend the justice of their suffering. The prophet known as Second Isaiah preached to the community of exiles in Babylonia a message of delirious enthusiasm that the moment of divine deliverance was about to arrive:

Arise, shine, for your light has dawned / the Presence of the Lord has shone upon you! (60:1)²

No longer shall you need the sun for light by day / nor the shining of the moon for radiance / For the Lord shall be your light everlasting, Your God shall be your glory. (60:18-19)

For behold! I am creating a new heaven and a new earth / The former things shall not be remembered, They shall never come to mind... I will rejoice in Jerusalem and

delight in her people / Never again shall be heard there the sounds of weeping and wailing. (65:19)

In describing Cyrus, the conquering Persian king who would allow the exiles to repatriate Judah and rebuild their Temple, this prophet used the traditional imagery associated with Israel’s anointed priesthood: “Thus said the Lord to Cyrus, God’s anointed one [משיחו]” (45:1). The promise of Israel’s restoration to its land was a recurring motif among other sixth century prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel. During the Second Temple period, more redemptive themes emerged, such as the apocalyptic imagery found in Daniel and Zechariah:

At that time, the great prince, Michael, who stands beside the sons of your people, will appear. It will be a time of trouble, the like of which has never been since the nation came into being. At that time, your people will be recued, all who are found inscribed in the book. Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, others to reproaches, to everlasting abhorrence. And the knowledgeable will be radiant like the bright expanse of the sky, and those who lead the many to righteousness will be like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12:1-2)

In that day, there shall be neither sunlight nor cold moonlight, but there shall be a continuous day—only the Lord knows when—of neither day nor night, and there shall be light at eventide. In that day, fresh water shall flow from Jerusalem, part of it to the Eastern Sea and part to the Western Sea, throughout the summer and winter. And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord with one name…. As for those peoples that warred against Jerusalem, the Lord will smite them with this plague: Their flesh shall rot away while they stand on their feet; their eyes shall rot away in their sockets; and their tongues shall rot away in their mouths (Zechariah 14:6-9,12).

These selections illustrate that in antiquity there were a variety of messianic ideas circulating in Jewish communities. By the first century CE, these themes included: a personal messiah, a descendent of King David; Israel’s liberation from foreign rule and the humbling of her adversaries; universal knowledge of and obeisance to the God of Israel; the restoration of Israel to its land and its Temple in Jerusalem; the reestablishment of the
sacrificial offerings under the authority of the priests; a utopian expectation of universal
peace and serenity; and the resurrection of the dead. The Rabbis did not share a consensus
view on which of these themes would dominate the messianic time, nor what would
precipitate them. The most sustained Talmudic discussion of these themes is found in
Tractate Sotah Chapter 9 and Tractate Sanhedrin Chapter 10, and in those passages the
Rabbis express a wide array of perspectives about the nature of the days of the messiah.

After the Bar Kokhba rebellion, which marked the end of Jewish autonomy in the
Land of Israel until the Zionist era, the nature of Jewish redemptive theology changed. For
the most part, the Rabbis counseled quietism and acceptance in the face of historical
tragedy and exile. They maintained that the Jewish people were bound by a series of oaths
to God: not to rebel against the yoke of their ruling nations, not to force the end times, and
not to return to the land of Israel “as a wall.” After all, the midrash rhetorically asks, if the
Jews were to violate these oaths, “Why would the King Messiah ever come to gather the
exiles of Israel?” As historian Jacob Katz notes, redemptive theology reinforced the Jews’
status in the Diaspora for centuries:

Messianism was both the cause and the result of the Jews’ segregated existence
throughout the centuries of exile. Initially the messianic belief may have
strengthened their will to resist absorption by a foreign environment. Once the
Jewish community established itself as a segregated socio-religious entity, its
pariah-like situation nourished expectations of an ultimate return to its own
homeland.

Exile, memory, and the yearning for redemption became overarching features of Jewish
theology.

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3 TB Ketubot 111b and Midrash Shir HaShirim Rabbah 2:7, 1.
In exile, Jewish eschatology went “underground.” No longer a force for political activism, it found its expression in liturgy, where messianic and redemptive themes are plentiful. The yearning for redemption in the traditional siddur is palpable on many of its pages, where it was honed and shaped by the rabbis to conform to this quietistic posture. One key example: redemptive theology is explicitly expressed in the daily Amidah. The sequence of the intermediate blessings of the Amidah (benedictions four through sixteen out of nineteen) conveys a directed sort of eschatology that embraces messianism even while holding it in check:

4. Wisdom  
5. Repentance  
6. Forgiveness  
7. Deliverance  
8. Healing  
9. Agricultural success  
10. Ingathering of exiles  
11. Restoration of judges  
12. Punishment of heretics  
13. Reward for the righteous  
14. Rebuilding Jerusalem  
15. Coming of the Messiah, descendent of David  
16. Acceptance of prayer

Liturgical scholar Lawrence Hoffman has demonstrated that there is a narrative drama unfolding in the sequence of these blessings. Redemption begins with wisdom, which causes the realization of repentance and then leads to forgiveness; national forgiveness “leads inextricably to Israel’s redemption, which has a number of stages to it, all of which follow in blessings eight to fifteen.”\(^5\) The sequence unfolds: pain and disease will cease; the Land will flourish; the exiles will return; Israel’s judiciary will be reestablished; the wicked will be punished and those who suffered unjustly will be rewarded; Jerusalem will be

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rebuilt; and a scion of David will be restored to his throne. However, Hoffman has shown that this is a restrained, *channeled* messianism: “Deliverance would occur, but only in God’s good time and in ways that God alone could know... All over the world, Jews so internalized the view of the Rabbis that they willingly, if not always happily, waited for the end of days to arrive in its own good time, unaided by messianic militarism.”

This posture remained largely unchallenged until the modern era. The advent of Enlightenment and Emancipation in Europe profoundly changed the historical status of the Jews and for many called into question the enduring relevance of this theology. As Jews were granted civil liberties, first in France and then in Germany and elsewhere in Western Europe, many premodern theological ideas were reconsidered. Many who tasted the fruits of Emancipation challenged the very notion of whether Europe should still be considered “Exile.” For the liberated Jews of Europe, citizenship was considered to be incompatible with messianic yearnings; in fact, it substituted for them. As Katz has pointed out, with surprising frequency Jews used messianic language to describe their emancipation from the ghetto; both Napoleon and Emperor Joseph II of Austria were compared to the biblical *mashiach* Cyrus of Persia, and the dawning of Enlightenment was often portrayed by enlightened Jews [*maskilim*] as the arrival of the messianic age.

Leaders of the nascent Reform movement responded to these implications in their prayer books. Their prayer book reforms omitted or corrected theological notions that no longer resonated (so they felt) with their historical condition. Nonetheless, it remains important to understand that 19th century Reform was a messianically driven movement.

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7 Katz, 157.
Their prayer books were infused with messianic and redemptive themes—but themes that were reworked to describe their specific ideologies. The early reformers generally replaced themes like a personal messiah, ingathering of the exiles, the resurrection of the dead, and mystical understandings of God’s nature with, respectively, desire for the (imminent) messianic era, recognition of Israel’s mission among the peoples of the world, the immortality of the soul, and confidence in reason and rationality. Their Siddurim reflected a world-view that 19th century Europe was on the precipice of a messianic era in human history, and the unprecedented freedom of the Jewish people to become part of Europe was the foremost sign that the exilic epoch had ended.

This confidence and optimism spread to the disciples of Reform in North America. American Reform Judaism, initially an ideological offshoot of German Reform, confidently adopted many of its precepts, including its overwhelming confidence in modernity and freedom, painted in messianic hues. As we shall see, American Reformers—especially the radical wing of the late 19th Century that came to be the shapers of early 20th Century liturgy—concurred that a messianic age of universal enlightenment and brotherhood was within reach, calling for radical reevaluations of Jewish thought and practice. Some of these reformulations went far beyond the limits of what their German forebears were willing to propose. They codified these beliefs in the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform and its liturgical offspring, the Union Prayer Book.

Needless to say, the twentieth century did not fulfill the messianic promises that the previous generation of Reformers imagined. A variety of historical events—most obviously, World War I, the mass immigration of eastern European Jews, the rise of Zionism, the cataclysm of the Shoah, and the threat of nuclear catastrophe—challenged Reformers to
reconsider the enthusiastic optimism that preceded them. As their confidence in modernity receded, they grew skeptical of their forebears’ confidence in matters such as the mission of Jews in the divine drama (including in the growing Yishuv), unchecked confidence in reason and technological progress, and most obviously the imminent arrival of a utopian era. Doubt, particularism, and theodicy became gnawing theological issues. By the 1960s, the classical Reform ideology of the *Union Prayer Book* began to seem particularly discomfiting to a generation that experienced the birth of the State of Israel, whose Zionist passions accelerated after the 1967 Six-Day War. A new Siddur was needed to address a new generation’s theological outlook. That Siddur arrived in 1975 with the publication of *Gates of Prayer*.

*Gates of Prayer* represented the prevailing ideology of late twentieth century American Reform Judaism, including its gradual reengagement with theological questions that previous generations had considered settled. It generally coincided with the release of an ideological platform—a “Centenary Perspective”—issued on the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the movement’s congregational organization and its rabbinical seminary. Considering that the *Union Prayer Book*, with revisions, served the American Reform community for eighty years, it is somewhat surprising that frustrations with *Gates of Prayer* deemed it outmoded after only about a quarter of a century. By the late 1990s, the Reform movement embarked on a national conversation and emerged with a new liturgy for the twenty-first century: *Mishkan T’filah* (2007) for Shabbat, weekdays, and festivals; and *Mishkan Hanefesh* (2015) for the Days of Awe.

A Siddur is an attempt to codify beliefs, attitudes, and values of a particular group of Jews at its specific time and place in history. It also articulates attitudes about theology,
especially the theology of redemption. Of course, no Siddur emerges *ex nihilo*. *Mishkan T'filah* not only represents the trends of American Reform Judaism in the early twenty-first century, it also stands upon the edifice of what has come before it.

Discussion of the historical evolution of these prayer books is a well-trodden road. However, less frequently analyzed are the theological underpinnings that have shaped the contemporary liturgy. We have seen that redemptive theology was a key component of the classic Siddur that became reformulated by the classical and later Reform rabbis. In this thesis, we will explore the legacy of these themes in the contemporary liberal prayer book. We will ask: how, and to what extent, are eschatological elements still expressed in twenty-first century Reform American liturgy? In particular, we will seek to understand what the contemporary liturgy says about the redemptive themes of the messiah, the ingathering of the exiles, and the resurrection of the dead—three themes that sustained Jewish prayers historically, became flashpoints for classical Reformers, and have undergone extensive reexamination in our own age.
1: The German Reformers’ Universalization of Redemptive Theology

The spiritual architecture of Reform Judaism begins with the advent of modernity, in the Enlightenment world of nineteenth century central Europe. In this milieu, liberal rabbis and their supporters openly wrestled with the received Ashkenazi prayer book. They had a willingness to delete or alter passages from the Siddur, not merely add to it—a stance that would have been unheard of in previous generations. It is important, in this regard, to view nineteenth century Reform as a religious movement—its leaders certainly did—and not as a secularist branch of Judaism. As we shall see, these men were profoundly spiritual, and motivated by a modern form of Jewish eschatology. The theological reforms that they initiated would reverberate in Europe and across the Atlantic in the century to come.

Prior to Emancipation, Jews were regarded, and regarded themselves, as a dispersed nation among the other nations of Europe. Napoleon’s “Sanhedrin” of 1807 signaled the beginning of the change of this status. The Jewish subjects of France, and subsequently other western nation-states, would become loyal members of their host countries—on the condition of relinquishing the notion of Jewish nationhood. For those inclined to join their European neighbors, this was a fair trade-off. However, this sparked a new set of theological questions—modern religious dilemmas that had not been faced by previous generations of Jewish thinkers:

There arose the problem of the meaning of the Jewish hankering after a return to Zion, a restoration of a kingdom of Israel, and a messianic redemption. Equally problematic from the contemporary theological vantage point was the stress on physical resurrection and the restoration of animal sacrifice that stood at the heart of so much of the prayer book. In an age that prided itself on reason, science, and the rejection of superstition, the presence of mystical formulations, the use of passages
from the Zohar, and the reference to angels were all a source of some embarrassment.\(^8\)

That “embarrassment” stemmed from within and without. Jews who were influenced by Enlightenment ideals were determined to demonstrate that their faith was rational and coherent with the inroads taking place in technology and culture. Robert L. Levine has noted the irony that, with their newly acquired set of equal (more or less) rights, “Jews had yet another reason to be fearful of their neighbors. With such proximity and contact on many levels, Jews didn’t want to be embarrassed by their beliefs, worship style, or historic associations.”\(^9\)

Certainly, some newly emancipated Jews fled from traditional practice and belief. Although Moses Mendelssohn was considered an intellectual trailblazer for many nineteenth century liberal Jews, George Y. Kohler has argued that in many ways the Maskilim should not be viewed as spiritual forerunners of Reform. Specifically, the secularist Maskilim were quick to abandon many traditional Jewish beliefs, especially messianic ones. Kohler notes that the Maskilim treated messianism “with barely concealed contempt,” and sought to eliminate it altogether, or at least to recast Judaism’s eschatological overtones as merely metaphor for civil rights.\(^10\) One prominent Maskil, David Friedlander,\(^11\) in 1799 celebrated Enlightenment’s gifts by maintaining that “the

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\(^9\) Robert L. Levine, *There is No Messiah—And You’re It* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2005), 149.


\(^11\) Friedlander, based in Berlin, was a disciple of Moses Mendelssohn and a radical proponent of assimilation. In 1799, he proposed to the head of the Lutheran Church that he and certain prominent Jewish families would be willing to undergo “dry baptism” for the sake of Jewish assimilation into Christian society if the Jews would not be forced to accept the divinity of Jesus. The proposal was scandalous on all sides, with Heinrich Graetz publicly deriding Friedlander as an “ape.” Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A History of the Jews in Germany, 1743-1933* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 73-75.
most powerful gain of the Jews is that they removed the yearning for the Messiah and Jerusalem from their hearts, as reason increasingly rejected those chimeras.”¹² The Reformers, however, should be seen in a different light. Their project was not to lead Jews out of Judaism, but rather to renew and revive Judaism for their perplexed generation. Many of the first generation of Reformers were trained at traditional yeshivot, and used classic Jewish sources and methods of argumentation to make the case for the modest (at first) reforms that they proposed. They were committed to God and to the Jewish people, and often their writing expresses deep spiritual sensitivity. Abraham Geiger, for example, could speak passionately about the reality of revelation—not only for the Jews of antiquity, but for those of modernity as well:

Truly, Judaism originated with the people of the revelation. Why, then, should we not be allowed to use this term when we speak of penetration to the deepest foundation of an illumination emanating from the higher spirit, which cannot be explained and which, though subject to later evolution, was not evolutionary in its origin?¹³

Kohler notes that in the 1840s, there was a resurgence in Reform synagogues in sermons about the theme of the messiah. Certainly, these discussions were couched in liberal terms. But Reformers like Levi Herzfeld (1810-1884, Brunswick) were openly critical of the Maskilim for their dismissal of messianism, and in 1844 he declared, “Thank God, the doctrine of the Jewish messiah is preached again from the pulpits and taught again in Jewish schools!”¹⁴

There is, perhaps, another reason why early Reform provided a welcoming home to modern manifestations of messianism. Gershom Scholem was the first to propose that the

¹² Kohler, 6.
¹⁴ Kohler, 10.
shock of the Sabbatian and Frankist debacles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had a profound but heretofore unnamed influence on Reform Judaism. In his seminal article “Redemption through Sin” (1937), Scholem maintained that these messianic disasters paved the way for both Haskalah and Reform. Sabbateanism and its spawn maintained that violation of the Torah could, paradoxically, “become its true fulfillment.”

Scholem argued that the Haskalah found “ready recruits” among ex-Sabbateans, precisely because their secularism provided fertile ground for those who had already rejected the binding nature of the commandments. In Reform, however, they found a different sort of welcome: one that was comfortable with messianic dialectic, spoke spiritual language, and considered the commandments to be non-binding. Scholem boldly asserted that “The Sabbateans, including those who clung to their messianic hopes and dreams of the great role of the sect in the past, became ‘new Jews,’ as several observers have remarked; i.e., supporters of the reform movement or indifferent to religion altogether.” Whether or not Scholem overstates the presence of former Frankists and Sabbateans in the Reform movement, his point illustrates that the movement was potentially appealing to those who harbored messianic spirituality and yet were liberal in praxis.

Indeed, even though Reform excised the idea of a personal messiah from its prayer books, that decision was not without significant debate and dissent. In 1845, the second nationwide conference in Germany of Reform-minded rabbis took place in Frankfurt-am-Main, and the main topic of discussion was liturgical reform on theological grounds. For two days, the conference focused on the question of the messiah in the Jewish prayerbook.

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16 Ibid., 170.
Radicals at the conference such as Samuel Holdheim (1806-1860) maintained the personal messiah must be replaced by a messianic idea that left Jewish nationalism behind. Rather than suffering in exile, Holdheim argued, “Exile represents the chance to fulfill Judaism’s universal mission.” Note that Holdheim, representing the radical flank, was profoundly messianic; his messianism was a reformulation of traditional notions into the spirit of his age. Leopold Stein (1810-1882), the president of the conference and local host, held that the personal messiah was a non-biblical notion, appended to Jewish thought by the Rabbis of the Talmud “exclusively as a result of a desire for national restoration gone astray.” He concurred with Holdheim on a key point: the mistaken geographical locus of the messianic dream. Stein would have the prayer book editors excise all references to the Land of Israel as the Jewish homeland, with its implication that “our present home was in fact a foreign country to us and that our true homeland was one thousand miles away.” Ultimately, the rabbis at the 1845 conference found this common ground: “The idea of the messiah is worthy of serious consideration in our prayers, but all requests concerning our return to the land of our fathers and the reestablishment of a Jewish state should be discarded from our prayers.”

Thus, the world of the nineteenth century Reform movement teemed with eschatological themes. The messiah was a crucial theological construct, although one that had to be de-Talmudized and revived with modern, universal sensibilities. Similarly, the Reformers spoke of a “mission of Israel” to all the nations of the world, a mission that made

17 Kohler, 18.
19 Kohler, 27.
20 Ibid., 27.
Exile no longer a punishment but a privilege. Finally, resurrection of the dead was a theme that was gradually reformulated as eternal spiritual life, the immortality of the spirit which transcended the temporality of the body. Each of these topics would find expression in the liturgical reforms that these rabbis made in their synagogues and siddurim.

The great scholar of liturgy Jakob J. Petuchowski noted that prayerbook reform in Europe was a process of an ideologically diverse movement. “One reformed prayerbook abolished something which another reformed prayerbook retained,” he pointed out:

For example, while none of the editors looked forward to the restoration of the sacrificial cult, the absence of that expectation manifested itself in any number of different ways. Some rituals, for example, went as far as to abolish the Musaph service altogether. Others introduced some slight verbal changes, which made such prayers express historical memories rather than pleas for the future. Still others retained the complete traditional text (in Hebrew), confining their departures from traditional teachings to paraphrases in the vernacular. Similar variations have been found in connection with the traditional prayers for the Return to Zion and the Coming of the (personal) Messiah.21

Thus the themes of redemption played out in a variety of ways. For our purposes, we will limit our discussion to the three most controversial areas of redemptive theology—a personal messiah, the restoration of the Jews to the Land of Israel, and the resurrection of the dead—and general trends that would have implications in North American siddurim in generations to come.

Messiah

References to a personal messiah, a descendent of David, appear with frequency in the traditional prayerbook. For instance, among many other examples, the redeemer is cited in the opening blessing (Avot) of the Amidah, the morning Kedushah, the fifteenth

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blessing (Tzemach David) of the Amidah, the Ya’aleh v’Yavo blessing for Rosh Chodesh and festivals, and the Haftarah blessings. Each of these blessings became a focal point for Reformers to express their theological reservations with the notion of a personal messiah.

In the Avot blessing opening the Amidah, almost all of the nineteenth century German siddurim retained the Hebrew formulation גואֵל וּמֵבִיא, "and bring a redeemer.” Reservations were on occasion expressed in the German translations that accompanied the text, preferring “redemption” to “redeemer.” The Breslau prayer book of 1881 kept the Hebrew text but reformulated its referent, making the word go-el refer to God rather than a messiah: “You remember the piety of the fathers, and remain their gracious redeemer for all time for the sake of Your Name.”

The traditional Shabbat Shacharit version of the Kedushah, with its references to waiting for God’s return to Jerusalem “Your city,” also makes explicit reference David, God’s mashiach. A common response especially among early Reform prayer books, including the Hamburg prayer books of 1819 and 1841, was to replace this Kedushah with the version traditionally recited in the Musaf service. Apparently, the allusions to sarfei kodesh in this text were less objectionable to the editors’ sensitivities than the presence of the messiah descended from David.

The problematic middle benedictions of the Amidah were also the subject of concern. The fourteenth blessing “Jerusalem” and the fifteenth “Sprout of David” both refer to God’s return to Jerusalem, “the throne of David,” the “sprout of David Your servant” in

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22 Ibid., 215.
23 S.J. Frankel and M.J. Bresselau, Seder Ha-Avodah / Ordnung der Öffentlichen Andacht für die Sabbath und Festtage des ganzen Jahres, Hamburg, 1819.
24 Seder Ha-Avodah / Gebetbuch, Hamburg, 1841.
the context of prayers for salvation and deliverance. Surprisingly, Geiger’s 1854 Siddur\(^\text{25}\) keeps these prayers almost entirely intact, including the reference to “the throne of David”; he only deletes “Your city.” The 1872 Siddur\(^\text{26}\) of Manuel Joel in Breslau offers two versions of each prayer. On the left-hand column, in slightly smaller type, he offers the traditional rendering of the prayers without German translations. Simultaneously, he offered modern variants. For “Jerusalem,” Joel offered a prayer for Jerusalem that was couched in the past, and “eternal remembrance... Blessed are You, O God, who remembers Jerusalem and her ruins.” For the “Sprout of David,” he replaced “David” with “righteousness” [צדקה] and reformulated the open line of the blessing: “Cause the sprout of righteousness to flourish as You have spoke, and let our horn be exalted...” He retains the traditional chatimah, thus keeping the theme of messianic salvation but removing the particularity of a personal messiah.

The series of blessings after the Haftarah also proved challenging. Traditionally four blessings conclude the reading from the prophets on Shabbat and holidays, expressing: (1) God’s faithfulness to keep divine promises expressed through the words of the prophets; (2) hope for the restoration of Zion; (3) a prayer for the establishment of a messianic monarch, the descendent of David; and (4) a blessing for Shabbat or the festival. The 1819 Hamburg Siddur omitted the prophetic reading altogether, so these blessings are absent. In 1854, Geiger retained the first and fourth blessings and deleted the middle ones with their references to restoration and a personal messiah. Joel’s 1872 Breslau Siddur followed suit, setting a pattern that would reappear in American Reform prayer books.


\(^{26}\) Manuel Joel, *Seder Tefillah / Israelitisches Gebetbuch fur die öffentliche Andacht des ganzen Jahres*, Berlin, 1872.
Restoration of the Jews to Zion

In addition to the passages cited above, the German Reformers objected mightily to prayers that yearned for an ingathering of the exiles in the Land of Israel. From one perspective, this was pragmatic politics: after emancipation, Jews were understandably fearful about charges of “dual loyalty” from the states they inhabited.\textsuperscript{27} With citizenship came the expectation that Jews would demonstrate complete loyalty to their homelands; as Count Claremont-Tonnerre famously declared in December 1789, “To the Jews as individuals, everything; to the Jews as a people, nothing!” As we have seen, many of the Reformers interpreted the freedoms they had found amidst German civilization to be a harbinger that exile had come to an end, and that Germany was the new Promised Land.

The moderates’ instinct, such as that of Manuel Joel, was to retain Jerusalem’s place in the prayerbook as a place of nostalgia for Israel’s past:

There has never been any argument about the fact that Jerusalem has to be mentioned in the prayerbook. If one has but the slightest idea of the essence of worship, he will declare a Jewish prayerbook, from which Jerusalem is missing, to be resting upon faulty liturgical principles. If the historical past is to find its place in the worship service, and nobody denies this, then Jerusalem and Palestine occupy the most important place in that past. That is why they will always remain a precious and indelible memory in the Jewish heart.... The prayers for the restoration of Jerusalem from her lamentable circumstances are harmless. The difference in principle only begins where we give expression in prayer to the wish for a personal return. Modern consciousness is unable to make this wish its own; and it is the point against which protest is made.\textsuperscript{28}

For Joel, Jerusalem occupied a place of nostalgia and, in positive-historical mode, a remembrance of the Jewish past. But not everyone considered this attitude to be


\textsuperscript{28} Petuchowski, \textit{Prayerbook Reform in Europe}, 279.
“harmless.” Geiger responded vehemently to Joel, his successor at the Temple in Breslau (as rabbis emerita occasionally will):

Jerusalem and Zion are places from which instruction went forth. On that basis, the changes in my prayerbook have been made. What goes beyond that is evil. [!] Dr. J., in his desire for concessions and their theoretical justification, seeks to go a little beyond that... According to him, we shall not only remember her in our prayer, but we shall also ask of the Lord “that He lift her up out of her present sad condition. In this way, too, the prayers for the restoration of Jerusalem from her lamentable circumstances are harmless.” Here is the parting of the ways. As far as we are concerned—and I speak in the name of the majority with the same right in which Dr. J. does so—as far as we are concerned, the Jerusalem of today is not the cradle of religion. It is for us an entirely indifferent city.... Indeed, such a prayer for the splendor of those places is a veritable suicide, a blasphemy of God. Their power would lead to the ruin of all. It would always be misused for the presumptuous desire to wield a spiritual and ecclesiastical rule over all the adherents of that religion.29

Geiger articulated a fear that nascent Zionism was in direct opposition to the universalist mission of his breed of modern Jews—and that a “Jewish Rome” based in Palestine would be regressive for all the strides that Reform was making in Europe.

The most radical among the Reformers, such as Samuel Holdheim, held that Exile was no punishment, but rather the divine impetus to pursue the true “mission of Israel” to spread ethical monotheism among the nations of the world. In the 1848 Gebetbuch of Berlin, Holdheim wrote an elaborate prayer, explaining how Israel's history of exile from Zion would lead to the fulfillment of its messianic mission:

...Thou didst bring them from servitude to freedom; and to the liberated people who saw Thine omnipotence so visibly displayed, Thou didst reveal Thyself anew. Brighter and purer and more radiant did the torch of Thy knowledge shine, borne by the loyal servant Moses before the wandering people into the land of promise.

There it stood, tall and erect, on Mount Zion, the Temple of worship dedicated to Thee, who didst reveal Thyself as the One invisible, and infinite. Into its halls flocked the sons and daughters of Thy people, making supplication to Thee and professing Thy holy name. Tall and erect stood the lamp of Thy knowledge in

29 Ibid., Prayerbook Reform in Europe, 279-280.
Jerusalem and in Israel, but a dark, impenetrable night hovered about its borders, and no ray of Thy light reached the nations all around.

But behold! The Temple’s mighty edifice crumbles, the columns break asunder which bear its dome, for Thy hand, O God, has dashed them in pieces. Thine arms have shattered them and torn down the walls of Jerusalem. With lamentations the sons of Israel now went forth into distant desolation, and at the rivers of Babylon they sat and wept. And when once more they returned to the place of Thy Temple, to build it anew, Thy right hand again took them up and dispersed them over the whole globe, as far away as the sun casts its rays.

And now? Have we sinned so grievously, O gracious God, that Thou didst banish us without recall?... No! Thou hast called us, O Lord, to found the kingdom of truth and love on the whole earth. And for this Thou didst disperse us, so that the sparks of Thy light might fly to all nations, to dispel the darkness of delusion from the farthest corners of the globe. For this Thou didst surrender us to bitter persecution, so that their pride might consume itself before our humility; so that their hatred destroy itself before our confidence in Thee; so that their faithlessness perish before our faith. And lo! Love has flowered where hatred was sown; light has come where darkness dwelt. The sun of knowledge is rising over the earth, and they who carry Thy name among the nations stand erect, and Thy praise resounds more loudly and audibly in the ears of the sons of men...

Perhaps no other German Reformer articulated the messianic confidence in nineteenth century progress as eloquently and excitedly as Holdheim did in this prayer. The negation of returning to Zion is not a negation of messianism; one can sense, reading this passage, Holdheim’s enthusiasm that Israel, and all the world, was about to enter a new epoch of universal peace. He reinterprets the entire purpose of Israel’s exile from its land; Zionist parochialism would stand in direct contrast to the fulfillment of Israel’s mission. Since the restoration of the exiles to Zion is a common motif in the traditional Siddur, these passages especially drew the Reformers’ attentions.

30 From the *Gebetbuch*, the Prayer Book of the Berlin Reform Association, Berlin, 1848. Plaut notes that the prayer is “most likely” the work of Holdheim. In Plaut, *The Rise of Reform Judaism*, 2015, 139-140.

31 In fact, this seemingly heterodox perspective is found in the Talmud. The mainstream Jewish theology of Exile, according to TB Yoma 9b, maintained that Israel was exiled for its sins; the First Temple was destroyed because of idolatry, sexual immorality, and bloodshed, and the Second Temple because of senseless hatred among the Jews. However, a different perspective emerges in TB Pesachim 87b: “Rabbi Elazar said: The Holy and Blessed One exiled Israel among the nations only so that converts would join them, as it is written, ‘And I will sow her to Me in the land’ (Hosea 2:25). Surely a person sows a tiny amount of seeds only in order to harvest much more!”
In the *Ahavah Rabbah*, the second blessing preceding the recitation of the *Shema Yisrael* in the morning blessings, the traditional Ashkenazi siddur includes a petition for the ingathering of the exiles of Israel: “Bring us in peace from the four corners of the earth.”

The Sephardi rite—*Ahavat Olam*—does not include this formulation; it reads instead, “Bring us blessing and peace from the four corners of the earth.” Whereas the 1819 Hamburg Siddur merely deleted the lines from its liturgy, other Reform prayer books, including 1841 Hamburg and Manuel Joel’s 1872 Siddur, chose to emend their text with the Sephardi alternative.

Similarly challenging was the *Avodah*, the seventeenth blessing of the Amidah, which traditionally petitioned God to “restore the sacrificial worship to the sanctuary, Your house, an in favor accept the fire-offerings of Israel and their prayers in love...Blessed are You, O God, who restores the divine presence to Zion.” While the Reformers had a broad agreement to delete prayers for restoring sacrifices, the *Avodah* also called for God’s presence to return to Zion. The 1841 Hamburg Siddur, among others, changed this chatimah to a more universal image of Israel’s worship: “Blessed are You, O God, for You alone do we worship in awe,” which David Ellenson notes is in fact an early Palestinian formulation of the blessing.32

As noted above, the “channeled messianism” of the intermediate blessings of the Amidah presents a redemptive drama that culminates with Israel’s return to the land, the reestablishment of its judiciary, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. All of these notions, of course, contradict the Reformers’ universalist theology. The tenth petition of the traditional Amidah (“Sound the great shofar for our freedom...”) calls for the ingathering of the Jewish

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exiles. Geiger’s 1854 prayerbook, after these opening words, inserts a phrase, “...and save, O God, Your people, the remnant of Israel, in the four corners of the earth.” He also changes the chatimah: “…who saves the remnant of Your people Israel.” Geiger’s concern was expressed for the emancipation of Jews everywhere, not merely in Palestine.

The eleventh blessing of the Amidah calls for the restoration of Israel’s judges as in the days of the Sanhedrin, and to relieve the Jews’ oppression presumably from the judgment of the courts of other nations. Geiger reformulated the meaning of the blessing, implying that God alone was the Judge of Israel; his 1854 prayerbook opened this benediction with the words, ”Restore to us the joy of Your salvation, and may a noble spirit sustain us...” Joel’s 1872 Breslau version offered the traditional blessing and a modern alternative side-by-side, as was his style; his version read, ”Justify us [צדקנו] with Your justice, and guide us with Your counsel...”

The fourteenth blessing of the traditional Amidah calls for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. As we have seen, this was a major ideological problem for Geiger and any Reformer to his left. However, his 1854 prayerbook keeps the prayer mostly intact; he simply deletes the phrase, “Build her up speedily in our days as an everlasting building.” Geiger surprisingly retains the reference to the “throne of David,” in his siddur. Joel, however, again offers a traditional and a modern version. In keeping with his historical approach, above, he looks upon Jerusalem’s glory with the eye of memory: “And may you again have mercy on Jerusalem, and raise up her ruins as an eternal remembrance [l’zekher olam]. Blessed are You, O God, who remembers Jerusalem and her ruins.”
**Resurrection of the Dead**

In many streams of rabbinic theology, the resurrection of the dead became linked to the eschatological drama. Perhaps the connection is not obvious; Maimonides famously neglected to discuss the resurrection of the dead as he described his naturalist understanding of redemption in the final chapters of the *Mishneh Torah*. Rambam was forced by his critics to defend his views in a subsequent “Treatise on the Resurrection of the Dead.” The Reformers, too, were ambivalent; they generally found resurrection to be a primitive and decidedly unmodern belief. Geiger insisted:

> Many religious concepts have taken on a more spiritual character and, therefore, their expression in prayer must be more spiritual. From now on the hope for an after-life should not be expressed in terms which suggest a future revival, a resurrection of the body; rather, they must stress the immortality of the human soul.\(^{33}\)

Geiger spoke for the majority that the primitive notion of resurrection was more appropriately understood as the survival and immortality of the soul.

It is surprising, then, to note that this was an element of the Siddur that many German Reformers were loath to change. Both the 1819 and 1841 Hamburg prayer books, for instance, retain formulation מגדים המתים, “giving life to the dead,” in the second blessing of the Amidah, *Gevurot*. Whereas this particular prayer, with its “fivefold reference to the resurrection of the dead,”\(^{34}\) would get a lot of attention from American Reformers in generations and prayer books to come, it seems not to have been a particular focus of their European forebears:

> The European Liberals and Reformers did not share the strong feelings of their American brethren. (The latter, having made the denial of the Resurrection

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\(^{33}\) Plaut, *The Rise of Reform Judaism*, 158.

practically an article of faith, consistently changed the Hebrew text and translated accordingly. Not a single one of the rituals under consideration here found it necessary to change the Hebrew text, although many of them (but not all!) substituted the concept of Immortality in their vernacular translation or paraphrase.\textsuperscript{35}

Indeed, while Geiger himself was critical about the Hamburg Siddur’s stance on \textit{tehiyat ha-metim}, he retained those Hebrew references in his own prayerbooks of 1854 and 1870. His belief was expressed in the German translations of the prayer, emphasizing spiritual immortality over physical return.

Their belief in the immortality of the soul was often, then, expressed in German Reform prayerbooks as an addition rather than as a substitution. In the 1819 Hamburg prayerbook, a meditation was added before the Mourner’s Kaddish on the Talmudic theme “all Israel has a share in the world to come.”\textsuperscript{36} Their Kaddish in fact adds an Aramaic paragraph to the traditional text: “May there be to Israel, to the righteous, and to all who have departed from this world by the will of God, abundant peace and a good portion in the life of the world-to-come, and grace and mercy from the master of heaven earth, and say: Amen.” This passage, derived from a Sephardic prayer for the dead, the graveside Kaddish, and the \textit{Kaddish D'Rabbanan}, was retained in the 1841 Hamburg Siddur and Geiger’s prayerbooks. Ellenson has noted that their rationalism led them to include this paragraph so that the Kaddish would, in fact, acknowledge death—something that the traditional text avoids.\textsuperscript{37}

Prayer book reform was a hallmark of nineteenth century Reform: their movement was, first and foremost, a movement of liturgical change. As we have seen, these figures

\textsuperscript{35} Petuchowski, \textit{Prayerbook Reform in Europe}, 215.
\textsuperscript{36} Sanhedrin 90a, which launches the Talmud’s most sustained discussion about the nature of messianic time.
from an era of Enlightenment and Emancipation lived religious lives that were infused with eschatological themes: they truly believed that rationalism, progress, and Israel’s new status were the signs that a new utopian era was dawning for humanity. In their prayer books, they strove to create liturgies that expressed this eschatological excitement. By downplaying a Messiah son of David, they opened the doors for Israel itself to be perceived as a Messiah, with a universal message of redemption for all humankind. In removing particularistic prayers for restoration to Zion, they emphasized that their redemption was of a universal variety. And in their ambivalence around the resurrection of the dead, they emphasized that there was an element of eternity embedded in the human soul, even when rationalism demanded acknowledgement that material bodies fall away.

These ideas, and the ways in which they were formulated in their prayerbooks, would reverberate across the ocean, where the Jewish community of America was beginning to awaken. Their theology, expressed through the words of their Siddurim, would continue to echo into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
German Reform Judaism took root in the spiritual soil of America. Many of the factors that restricted the growth of Reform in Europe—coexisting within European institutions of diverse religious practice, disputes with entrenched Orthodox leadership, and wrestling with European intellectual and Christian movements that were not hospitable to liberal Judaism—were absent from the American religious landscape. The Europeans likewise were functioning in Jewish communities with generations-old minhagim that were resistant to change. The United States, the first nation in the world to grant civic emancipation to its Jewish citizens, was innately hospitable to unorthodox religious expression. It also stoked utopian and messianic theological tendencies. Jewish leaders among American Reformers expressed their confidence in western acculturation and could recast America, even more than Germany, as the new Promised Land.

The architect of many of the most enduring American Reform institutions was Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900), who emigrated in 1846 from Radnitz, Bohemia. While his leadership in American synagogues was not without its share of controversy, Wise’s instinct was to be a unifier rather than a radical. There was no doubt, though, that theologically he was a scion of European Reform. At a public forum on the question of

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39 At Congregation Beth El in Albany, NY, Wise clashed with the community’s traditionalist president. He was fired two days before Rosh Hashanah; when he refused to accept his dismissal and tried to lead the service on the holiday, the president launched a fistfight with Wise on the bimah. Subsequently Wise and his supporters launched a splinter congregation in Albany, Anshe Emeth. Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 96-97.
Jewish religious reform in 1850, Orthodox Rabbi Morris Raphall (1798-1868) confronted Wise to explicate his theological stand:

At a climactic moment in the debate, Raphall turned to the thirty-one-year-old Wise, who was in the audience, with a thrusting challenge: “Do you believe in the personal Messiah? Do you believe in bodily resurrection?” “No!” the young preacher replied loudly and decisively.\(^{40}\)

Wise’s theological outlook, as well his precepts for a modern prayer book, were outlined in his memoirs:

It was out of the question to retain the old prayers unchanged, because the belief in the coming of a personal messiah descended from the House of David had disappeared from among the people. The return to Palestine, the restoration of the Davidic dynasty, of the sacrificial cult, and the accompanying priestly caste, were neither articles of faith nor commandments of Judaism, while the lamentations over oppression, persecution, and the accompanying cry for vengeance were untrue and immoral so far as American Jews were concerned. The cabalistic portions which had crept into the prayerbook, and the obstinate adherence to the doctrine of bodily resurrection were regarded as unjustified.\(^{41}\)

What is most striking about this statement is its contextual lack of controversy. That is to say, Wise is regularly identified as a unifier and a consensus-builder, not a radical. We can infer that this modern theological outlook—all of which perfectly echoes German Reform—was quite mainstream and typical among Wise’s constituency in the 1850s.

As an expression of his desire to unify American Jewry, Wise composed a prayer book, *Minhag America*, first published in 1857. As expected, he continues the trends of Reform Judaism from Europe; like Geiger, Wise kept some of his strongest reforming instincts in check in order to build the widest possible consensus for his Siddur. For instance, his book opens with a selection, solely in Hebrew, of *dinim*, laws on the subject of

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\(^{40}\) Sarna, 96.

prayer, so as to justify and legitimize the prayerbook to traditional mindsets. Nonetheless, *Minhag America* carried through on themes that were pioneered in the German prayerbooks that preceded it.

Regarding messianism, *MA* reflects the approach that Wise announced when he was confronted by Raphall. Hoffman describes Wise as “a firm messianist... [he described the] Time-to-Come as the perfect world order, which he and his generation had already begun to usher in!” This optimism was born of rationalism, and thus Wise purged references to a personal messiah in favor of a messianic era. Thus in the Avot prayer he replaces the Hebrew גואל, “redeemer,” with גאולה, “redemption”, a change that most German Reformers only offered in their vernacular translations. The theological significance of this one-letter change was, in the words of Steven S. Schwarzschild, “linguistically minor but doctrinally major,” since it not only depersonalized the messiah, but became an established part of the prayer for generations of Reform prayerbooks to come. Likewise, in the fifteenth blessing of the Amidah, he removed reference to the “sprout of David,” and replaced it with references to the offspring of all Israel:

> Let sprout, O Lord, our offsprings with the descendants of Thy servants, and bend their hearts toward Thee, that they may walk in Thy ways and promote and glorify Thy laws. Increase their strength by Thy salvation; for which we daily wait. Praised be Thou, God, who art our might of salvation.

Wise’s more persistent edits focused on excising all references to the restoration of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. He revised all the middle blessings of the Amidah

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that called for the restoration of Israel’s national institutions in its historical homeland. In the ninth blessing, *Birkat Shanim*, in which the worshipper traditionally inserts lines that are seasonally appropriate for the Land of Israel, Wise universalized the text “Bless with goodness...; give dew and rain for blessing on the face of the earth...” He similarly standardized these words in every recital of the Gevurot blessing. In the tenth blessing, which calls for the sounding the “great shofar for our freedom” and the ingathering of the exiles, Wise similarly transformed it into a universal hope: “Let resound the trumpet for the liberty of all nations [העמים כל לחרות גד ובלשופר תקע]; lift up the banner to unite them in the covenant of peace...”45 Here his *chatimah* is particularly instructive: instead of praising God “who gathers the dispersed among His people Israel,” Wise has: בורו אמת הוא והב עיד לאמות: “Blessed be thou who loveth the community of nations.”46 Similarly, the blessing that traditionally calls for the restoration of Israel’s judges was replaced with a general appeal for justice and freedom from violence.

In his confrontation with Raphall, Wise had publicly denied bodily resurrection; *Minhag America* codified his belief. As we have seen, the German Reformers were reticent to remove the traditional language of resurrection in the prayer book; this was not their primary battle. Wise, however, purged his Siddur of references to resurrection, in Hebrew as well as translation. In the Gevurot, he deleted the phrases מהתים מחיה, changing the cadences of the prayer for those who knew what was missing. He replaced the phrase לישני עפר, “those who sleep in the dust”, with עפר לשבי…: “...keepest Thy faith to those who return to the dust.” And the revised prayer culminated with a new *chatimah*: “Praised art Thou, O

45 *Minhag America*, 44-45.
46 Ibid., 44-45.
God who keepeth alive the souls of dying mortals” (מַחַד נְשָׁמָתָן), an explicit reference to the immortality of the soul with the revival of the body.\textsuperscript{47}

However, \textit{MA} would not be the defining legacy of nineteenth century American liturgical Reform. That honor would belong to the liturgy of Wise’s rival, David Einhorn. Einhorn (1808-1879) was born near Furth, Bavaria. He was a Talmudic prodigy who left Orthodoxy and embraced what he called “Mosaism,” a radical expression of Reform that emphasized the Biblical “essence” of Judaism over the anachronisms of the Talmudic Rabbis. Einhorn proved to be a radical and controversial figure in Europe; the authorities closed down the Hungarian temple that he was invited to lead. Arriving in the United States in 1855, he served pulpits in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, continuing to articulate the most radical ideology of Reform. “First truth, then peace,” was his motto.\textsuperscript{48}

Unlike Wise, Einhorn’s prayerbook was not designed to build consensus. Instead, it was intended for the enlightened elite. \textit{Olah Tamid}, published in 1856 (one year before \textit{Minhag America}) was intensely idealistic; it “reflects the positivism of the nineteenth century and indicates Einhorn’s own commitment to \textit{Wissenschaft des Judentums} as a ‘scientific’ guide to Reform.”\textsuperscript{49} Certainly the siddur incorporates the trends that we have come to expect: excision of references to the sacrificial cult and return to the Land of Israel, an emphasis on the immortality of the soul rather than the resurrection of the body, and an embrace of idealistic excitement for the modern age.

What is especially striking about Einhorn’s book, besides its drastic reduction of Hebrew text, is the messianic fervor that imbibes its English passages. Einhorn composed a

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 40-41.

\textsuperscript{48} Sarna, 99.

\textsuperscript{49} Ellenson, \textit{Between Tradition and Culture}, 191.
prayer for Tisha B'Av—“the Anniversary of the Destruction of Jerusalem”—that radically changed the theological meaning of the day. While not shrinking from the historical sufferings of Israel, he maintained that “The true and real sanctuary, Thy imperishable testimony, remained ours, untouched and undimmed. It assumed a new glory and emerged purer and in increased splendor from the flames.” In this messianic drama, Israel would bring its message to God’s true temple, the human family:

Let the time speedily draw near when all the earth will become one atoning altar, from which all hearts and spirits shall flame up to Thee in burning love. Let Thy message of truth and Thy word of righteousness like protecting cherubim spread their wings over the sanctuary of mankind united in and with Thee. Let this brotherhood of man, like yon candlestick of pure gold, shine in seven-fold luster in the higher temple, and from the ruins of desolation, rise this new temple wide as the earth—and unwalled as its fresh air, the temple which will be a house of prayer and inspiration unto all the nations,—the Sinai and Zion of all the world, the new Jerusalem on this earth, rebuilt in righteousness universal, and saved by justice flowing like a stream through all the lands.50

Einhorn’s sense of Israel’s mission was literally messianic. In the Ya’aleh v’Yavo prayer, recited on festivals and Rosh Chodesh, he transformed a petition for the Messiah son of David; in Einhorn’s formulation, the people of Israel itself become God’s anointed messiah: “May our petition and our supplications laid before Thee in the remembrance of our fathers and of Israel’s Messianic appointment [ acomp הירוקי אבותינו וברוך עמך בית ישראל משיחך זכרון אבותינו וברוך] be acceptable in Thy sight.” For Einhorn, a messianic drama was unfolding and Israel, displaced from its ancient soil and embedded among the nations of the world, played a crucial role: God’s historical suffering servant had a mission to bring the age of redemption.

Similarly, Einhorn’s heterodox ideas about the immortality of the soul were couched in his powerful prose. For instance, in his Shabbat Amidah, he composed English prayers

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50 David Einhorn, Olath Tamid: Book of Prayers for Jewish Congregations (1896), 146.
that enlarged the theme of the *Kedushat Ha-Yom*, which replaces the weekday intermediate petitions. In Einhorn’s prayer, he turns a prayer on the holiness of Shabbat into a meditation on the destiny of the soul:

Thy love never forsaketh us, not even in death. Through the darkness of the tomb Thou leadest the righteous to the portals of Eternity’s Sabbath...

Swiftly we know it, the weeks roll by, they lengthen into months and years—we scarce perceive it; and ere we are aware of it or prepared for it ringeth out the end of the work and the workdays of our earthly career. O may, in that supreme hour, our soul look back with contentment upon the passing shadow, and soar up full of hope toward Thee, the fountain-head of its being, in Thy light to be forever, O our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.\(^{51}\)

Likewise, he composed an English version of the morning prayer of gratitude for the soul, *Elohai Neshama* (no Hebrew text is provided). Whereas Einhorn clearly objected to the Rabbinic view of bodily resurrection in the traditional “Elohai Neshama” (the prayer is found in TB Berakhot 60b), he emphasized the divine origin and immortality of the human soul:

O Lord, the soul which Thou hast given us came pure from Thee. Thou hast breathed it into us, and guardest it within us. Thou wilt take it from us, that it abide with Thee in the higher state. As long as the breath of life is within us, we shall adore Thee, O Lord, our God, the God of our forefathers. Thou art the Ruler of all creation, in Thee all that liveth hath its being. Be praised, O God, who hast given us an immortal soul.\(^{52}\)

Thus in Wise and especially in Einhorn we see the next stage of development of Reform liturgy; each took principles established by European Reformers and raised them to another level in their American context. Each a product of nineteenth century enlightenment and rationalism, their prayerbooks were infused with redemptive theology

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 26.  
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 121.
that merged the eternity of the soul, the sense of the imminent arrival of a new era of human history, and a profound sense of Israel’s mission in bringing that moment to fruition.

\textit{The Union Prayer Book}

When the Reform movement in America elected to adopt an official institutional liturgy, its rabbinic leadership chose Einhorn’s radical model over Wise’s moderate consensus-builder. The publication of the \textit{Union Prayer Book} in 1895, marking Reform’s “drift to radicalism,”\footnote{Ellenson, \textit{Between Tradition and Culture}, 202.} would influence all the subsequent generations of Reform worshippers and their synagogues. As Meyer makes clear, “Its theology was basically Einhorn’s.”\footnote{Meyer, 279.}

The \textit{Union Prayer Book} was also a reflection of the zeitgeist of the turn of the century, and a codification of the prevailing theology of Reform leaders. It embraced a faith in modernity versus premodern “superstition”. In this sense, some scholars have seen the \textit{UPB} as an ideological line in the sand between “western” German Jews and their eastern European coreligionists. Eastern European Jews, who were starting to arrive in America in significant numbers, were, generally speaking, more traditional, less acculturated, more sympathetic to Zionism, and less enamored of the trappings of modernity than the Germans were. The \textit{UPB} can be seen as a codification of classical Reform theology at a time when a large number of Jews where arriving to challenge the status quo.
In the history of American Reform, the publication of new prayer books have coincided with the issuance of ideological platform-statements.\textsuperscript{55} UPB was an outgrowth of the “Declaration of Principles” of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in Pittsburgh, 1885; so, too—as we shall see—did the movement’s platforms of 1937 (“The Columbus Platform”), 1977 (“A Centenary Perspective”) and 1999 (“The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism”) coincide with the publication of new liturgies. At the call of Kaufmann Kohler, Einhorn’s son-in-law and a future President of Hebrew Union College, Reform rabbis assembled in November, 1885, to create a defining statement for the movement. Isaac Mayer Wise presided over the gathering. For our purposes, the most relevant passages of the Pittsburgh Platform capture the way modernity led to enlightenment of God’s ways:

We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the Infinite, and in every mode, source or book of revelation held sacred in any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man. We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our Holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by the Jewish teachers, in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended amidst continual struggles and trial and under enforced isolation, this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race.\textsuperscript{56}

Here is a codification of a universal consciousness among all the world’s faith traditions, although Israel is special precisely because its theological refinement “presents the highest conception” of what God actually means. Similarly, Israel has a unique mission to bring the message of God’s truth to all humanity. Revelation is progressive, implying that the modern era is the pinnacle of all that has come before it. In order to fulfill its mission, Israel had to


reject its nationalist elements and affirm its place among the nations of the world, and thus the rabbis squelched any nascent Zionist seedlings:

We recognize, in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching of the realization of Israel’s great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.

In its rejection of Jewish nationalism, this mission to all the nations is affirmed. But this paragraph also reveals something about its framers: classical Reform Judaism was explicitly defined here as a messianic movement. Its vision was directed not just towards the redemption of Israel, but sought to usher in an imminent new era for the world, and the surety of this vision was presented with great self-confidence. As for individual redemption, the Platform also affirmed immortality of the soul:

We reassert the doctrine of Judaism that the soul is immortal, grounding the belief on the divine nature of human spirit, which forever finds bliss in righteousness and misery in wickedness. We reject as ideas not rooted in Judaism, the beliefs both in bodily resurrection and in Gehenna and Eden (Hell and Paradise) as abodes for everlasting punishment and reward.

The Pittsburgh Platform, with its emphasis on the arrival of a messianic time, universal brotherhood, Israel’s mission to the nations, and the immortal nature of the human soul, expresses an eschatological vision rooted in the theological trends of its era.

The UPB is the liturgical accompaniment to the Pittsburgh Platform. The sacred myth that UPB espoused was quite divergent from traditional Jewish theology; as Hoffman has pointed out, it also stakes out distinct territory from other modern, competing ideologies such as secular socialism and Zionism. To some degree, the enthusiasms of UPB are more restrained than those Einhorn exhibited in Olath Tamid. For instance, like OT,
UPB contains a special reading for Tisha B'Av. The selection is much shorter than Einhorn's redemptive prayer, and its language is toned down. However, it reaches the same eschatological conclusions as Einhorn:

Like the thorn-bush on Sinai which burned, but was not consumed, because God's majesty was manifested in it, so was Israel preserved by the very fire that raged about him. It had pleased the Lord to make His servant the wonder of the nations, and a witness to His own imperishable truth; though a bruised reed, he was not broken. He was put to grief and numbered with the transgressors, yet he bore the sin of the nations, and out of his wounds flowed the balm of healing for mankind. A man of sorrows, smitten of God, despised and rejected of men, he was as a lamb brought to slaughter and would not open his mouth; yet his death did give life, the darkness of his imprisonment brought light to the Gentiles. The One temple in Jerusalem sank, but thousands of the sanctuaries of the God who once hallowed it, rose in its stead all over the globe where the same God was worshiped and the same truth proclaimed. Thus has the Lord comforted Israel and turned his sackcloth into garments of joy. Praise be to Him. Amen.  

According to this theodicy, Israel suffered greatly in its exile (some might consider UPB to be understating the depth of Jewish suffering), but its dispersion served a messianic purpose: to “bring light to the Gentiles.” Missing from UPB, however, is Einhorn's theology that turned Israel itself into God’s messiah, as found in his “Ya’aleh V’yyavo.” The entire prayer is absent from the UPB festival service.

In the weekday service, expressions of Jewish particularity and return to Zion are excised. In Ahavah Rabbah, for instance, the traditional lines calling for the ingathering of the exiles are, as expected, absent. The final lines of the prayer (בון בחרת וקורבתו לְשֵׁם and homevol hele באמה) are rendered: “Thou hast called us as the teachers of Thy law; Thou hast chosen us for a holy mission unto mankind; therefore do we joyfully lift up our voices and

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58 Union Prayer Book, 1895, 284.
proclaim Thy unity.”59 Elsewhere, the mission of Israel remains present and prominent, as in this meditation for the Days of Awe:

Not backward do we turn our eyes, O Lord, but forward to the promised and certain future... and though we cherish and revere the place where stood the cradle of our people, the land where Israel grew up like a tender plant, and the knowledge of Thee rose like the morning-dew, our longings and aspirations reach out toward a higher goal. The morning-dawn shall yet brighten into a radiant noontday; the tender sprout shall yet become a heaven-aspiring tree beneath which all the families of the earth will find shelter.60

Most radically, however, the entire eschatological drama of the intermediate blessings of the Amidah is removed from UPB. In their place is one page of English prayers that paraphrase the blessings in the most universal way:

Grant, O Lord, that the sound of freedom be heard throughout all lands, and all nations enjoy the blessings of true liberty; let the reign of wickedness vanish like smoke and all dwellers on earth recognize Thee alone as their King, and all Thy children be united in a covenant of peace and love.

Remember, O God, in love the just and virtuous of all nations, and strengthen all who sincerely trust in Thee. Help us in our weakness, enlighten our darkness, and arm us against danger and temptation.61

This material has traveled a long distance from the reforms of a half-century earlier. No longer is there any attempt to mildly adapt the traditional prayers; the Hebrew text is not present. Instead, the book offers universal readings of the channeled messianism of the Amidah. Wise and his European predecessors strove to design books that, however radical their contents, looked like traditional Siddurim. UPB, instead, conveys the zeitgeist of its own era.

59 Ibid., 271.
60 Union Prayer Book, vol.2, 255.
61 Union Prayer Book, 275.
UPB disregards the idea of bodily resurrection (the Pittsburgh Platform made that rejection a specific article of faith). The Elohai Neshama prayer sounds like an adaptation of Einhorn’s, with an emphasis on life everlasting (but without Einhorn’s conviction that the soul will enter a “higher state.”) A meditation before the Kaddish also has toned down Einhorn’s convictions about eternal life, and the text counsels spiritual patience:

Though vanished from bodily life, they have not ceased to be, and it is well with them; they dwell in safety with the everlasting Spirit. Let those who mourn for them be comforted. Let them submit their aching hearts to God and truly believe that He is just and wise and merciful in all His doings, though no man can comprehend His ways. In the divine order of nature both life and death, joy and sorrow, serve beneficent ends, and in the fullness of time we shall know why we are tried, and why our love brings us sorrows as well as happiness. Wait patiently all ye that mourn, and be ye of good courage; for surely your longing souls shall be satisfied.  

In the Gevurot prayer in the Amidah, UPB also rejects bodily resurrection in favor of spiritual immortality. It deletes the phrase מתייה מהחיים from throughout the prayer. In the second line of the prayer, the Hebrew reads רבים ברחמים כלמה. The prayer concludes with Einhorn’s בורחך אבינו ברוך אתה ה’ ומשנהו וי ושלמה, which is translated “Praise be to Thee, O God, who hast implanted within us immortal life.”

Thus, the standard liturgy of turn-of-the-century Reform encapsulates the theology of the Pittsburgh Platform. Nonetheless, when compared to OT, its ostensible blueprint, there seems to be a toning-down of its eschatological drive. The arrival of the messianic age no longer seems quite so imminent; the assured grandeur of eternal life no longer seems so certain.

UPB represents the high water mark of classical Reform theology. By the turn of the century, changes were that would challenge many of its theological tenets. The most

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62 Ibid., 105.
significant of these changes was the enormous influx of Eastern European Jews to America. The initial response of Reform leaders towards the immigrants was to treat them with condescension, as a primitive group of co-religionists who needed to be acculturated to the modern American milieu. However, as Jonathan Sarna has shown, in the first decade of the new century walls between the two groups were occasionally breached. At Temple Emanu-El in New York, Reform leader (and future Reform Zionist exemplar) Judah L. Magnes castigated his followers for having too few interactions with “the living Jewish people... the bulk and body of the Jewish masses, the poor as well as the rich, the lowly as well as the learned, the immigrant as well as the native.” While Magnes’s words convey the elitism that continued to characterize the attitude of German Jews, nonetheless they signify a willingness to engage with the Eastern European Jews. Furthermore, in the first decades of the twentieth century, Hebrew Union College accepted Eastern European Jews into its rabbinical program (one survey indicated that 70 percent of its students from 1904-1929 were of Eastern European descent), a change that was bound to alter the ideology of the Reform movement.

The arrival of the Eastern Europeans coincided with, and greatly influenced, the growing normalization of Zionism among Reform Jews. The Pittsburgh Platform continued to represent the mainstream opinion of most Reform leaders, that the Jews were “no longer a nation” and that they harbored no fantasies about repopulating Palestine. However, nationalism was much more widespread among the Eastern European Jews, and in the first decade of the century the Second Aliyah was well underway. Important Reform leaders,

63 Sarna, 196.
64 Ibid., 196.
such as Magnes and especially Stephen S. Wise, made the case for Zionism and Jewish peoplehood. Furthermore, the horrors of World War I caused many to reconsider their confidence in technological progress, and Germany became the villain among western nations. Finally, the suffering during the Great Depression caused a sea change from the once-optimistic posture of many Jews. All of these sparked soul-searching (literally) in Reform quarters.

A leading Reform thinker, Samuel S. Cohon, launched a critique on the theological outlook of the *UPB* in 1928. Cohon, who was born in Russia and educated in traditional yeshivot in Minsk, later became Professor of Theology at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. His Reform credentials were impeccable; he was a modernist who espoused a progressive view of revelation. Nonetheless, he was skeptical of early Reformers’ dismissive attitude toward postbiblical rabbinic Judaism, a stance which he called an “imitation of Karaism.”\(^\text{65}\) Unlike many Reformers of the previous generation, Cohon was open to mystical experiences as an authentic feature of religious life. Regarding *UPB*’s theological stance, he was critical. He rejected its “needless polemic against both religious and political Zionism,” including the notion that a return to Zion was somehow “backward” (specifically citing the progressive passage from the *UPB*, vol. II, above).\(^\text{66}\) He was willing to challenge the entire theological set of assumptions about modernity:

The temper of the Union Prayer-book on Israel’s place in the world is reflected in the petition: “Be Thou with the whole house of Israel, so that we may live in freedom everywhere and unite with all men in singing a new song of salvation and deliverance” (*UPB*, vol.I, p.227)… The Union Prayer-book leaves the impression that all is well with Israel and with the world. Indeed, references abound to injustice,

\(^{65}\) Cohon, 257.

\(^{66}\) Ibid., 263.
poverty, oppression and war—but these only furnish opportunities for melioration.67

Cohon’s critique would resonate deeply among the Reform rabbis of the period between the world wars; “in the mid-thirties, the majority of Reform rabbis shared all or most of Cohon’s views.”68

The discontent with received classical Reform attitudes led the way for critical rethinking that culminated in the Columbus Platform of 1937; indeed, Cohon authored the original draft. A half-century had passed since the Pittsburgh Platform, and the 1937 statement of “Guiding Principles” reflects a distancing from earlier ideas. To be sure, the Columbus Platform continues to embrace a confidence in progressive revelation and a sense that some attitudes and practices (unspecified) found in the Torah were anachronisms. But the posture of messianic self-confidence has been markedly toned down from the Pittsburgh Platform’s assurance that a glorious age of redemption was imminent:

These timeless aims and ideals of our faith we present anew to a confused and troubled world. We call upon our fellow Jews to rededicate themselves to them, and, in harmony with all men, hopefully and courageously to continue Israel’s eternal quest after God and his kingdom.69

No longer was the arrival of the kingdom of God in the near future assured; to the contrary, the World Wars, the Depression, the rise of the Nazis in Germany, and more all contributed to a sense that the generation inhabited “a confused and troubled world.”

The most dramatic shift was the Columbus Platform’s view of Zionism:

Judaism is the soul of which Israel is the body... Though we recognize in the group loyalty of Jews who have become estranged from our religious tradition, a bond

67 Ibid., 263-264.
68 Meyer, 318.
which still unites them with us, we maintain that is by its religion and for its religion that the Jewish people has lived.... In the rehabilitation of Palestine, the land hallowed by memories and hopes, we behold the promise of renewed life for many of our brethren. We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in it upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life. 70

This culminated with the Platform’s explicit reference to bringing about the age of the messiah:

Throughout the ages it has been Israel’s mission to witness to the Divine in the face of every form of paganism and materialism. We regard it as our historic task to cooperate with all men in the establishment of the kingdom of God, of universal brotherhood, justice, truth, and peace on earth. This is our Messianic goal. 71

Certain modernist attitudes remain: a universalist commitment to the improvement of the whole human family, as well as a specific mission of Israel to the world. Nonetheless, there is an unmistakable new particularism as well, which Zionism has brought to the theological table. The building-up of the Yishuv was not merely to be a political haven for Jewish refugees. It was also seen as a renewed “center of Jewish culture and spiritual life”; here the influence of Ahad Ha’am is overt. Furthermore—in a religious point that goes beyond Ahad Ha’am—the Zionist enterprise could be part of Israel’s messianic endeavors. The Columbus Platform retains its predecessors’ eschatological hopes, even if they have been modified and reined in.

The theology in this platform was translated into liturgical reform. The Columbus Platform signaled revisions in the UPB (1940) which would reflect these new outlooks. There were allowances for the place of ritual (such as lulav and etrog, and the sounding of the shofar) and more Hebrew. Selected stanzas from Lecha Dodi, from the sixteenth century

70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
Safed Kabbalists, made their first appearance in an American Reform prayer book. Of course, the stanzas that explicitly allude to a messiah descended from David were not among those that were brought in.

The revised UPB offered five different Shabbat services; the fifth Friday evening service specifically explored Zionist themes. In this service, there is no traditional Amidah whatsoever. The Shema Yisrael leads directly into V'shamru (half of its traditional verses, Exodus 31:16-17a), which is followed by an English unison reading, “Praised be the Lord by day and praised by He by night...” This segues into the most explicitly Zionist passage in the service:

...Extend Thy protection and help unto our brothers who struggle in lands of darkness as victims of oppression and persecution. Fill the hearts of all men with a love of freedom and justice, that tyranny may vanish and the reign of righteousness be established everywhere on earth. Uphold also the hands of our brothers who toil to rebuild Zion. In their pilgrimage among the nations, Thy people have always turned in love to the land where Israel was born, where our prophets taught their imperishable message of justice and brotherhood and where our psalmists sang their deathless songs of love for Thee and of Thy love for us and all humanity. Ever enshrined in the hearts of Israel was the hope that Zion might be restored, not for their own pride or vainglory, but as a living witness to the truth of Thy word which shall lead the nations to the reign of peace. Grant us strength that with Thy help we may bring a new light to shine upon Zion. Imbue us who live in lands of freedom with a sense of Israel’s spiritual unity that we may share joyously in the work of redemption so that from Zion shall go forth the law and the word of God from Jerusalem.

Given all that has come before, this is a rather astonishing passage. One wonders what a Holdheim, Wise, or Einhorn would make of the assertion that “Ever enshrined in the hearts of Israel was the hope that Zion might be restored” or that “Thy people have always turned in love to the land where Israel was born”! As reflected in the Columbus Platform, there is a

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72 Union Prayer Book (1940), 68.
73 Ibid., 68-69.
theological assertion here that the Zionist enterprise could be, in fact, part of the historical mission of Israel towards the redemption of the world; the editors of *UPB* were striving to couch the nationalist Jewish movement into a broader universalist mandate. It is also worth noting the choice of messianic image in this passage: “a new light to shine upon Zion.” Light is occasionally an eschatological image from the Bible (Isaiah 60:19, Zechariah 14:7).74 Traditionalists would recognize this reference from the *Yotzer Or*, the first blessing prior to the *Shema Yisrael* in the morning service. The phrase was controversial in the history of Reform liturgy: the Hamburg Siddur of 1819 removed it; Geiger retained it but left it untranslated; Wise and Einhorn both deleted it from their services.75 In the 1940 *UPB*, the phrase has reappeared, with nationalist and eschatological nuances, but in a completely different context from the traditional service.

After World War II, many of these theological trends in American Reform Judaism accelerated. If the first World War had shaken many who clung to modernity, the fallout from the Shoah was devastating. Germany was now a pariah among nations; there remained little sentiment for its emancipations from the previous century. It is painful from a post-Shoah standpoint to reread the great idealism that came forth from the likes of Geiger and Holdheim and their contemporaries, who believed that the crown of human creation was about to emerge from German enlightenment. If anything, the voices of classical Reform were revealed to be false messiahs. Auschwitz represented the flipside of eschatological belief: apocalypse.

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Furthermore, the Zionist endeavor came to fruition with the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948. Zionism had become more and more mainstream during the previous decades, and its ideology appeared justified as Israel entered the community of nations. Before the war, some Reform leaders participated in the American Council for Judaism and its anti-Zionist activities. When the atrocities of the Shoah were revealed, along with the realization that the gates to Palestine and much of the rest of the world had been sealed, the anti-Zionist cause largely collapsed: “It became apparent that [anti-Zionist institutions] represented the last major assertion of that classical Reform Judaism whose strength had been waning for many years.” Reform Judaism, like almost every Jewish movement, emerged from the 1940s with a fundamentally different outlook and set of theological principles. As Hoffman summarizes, this new condition “required a restatement of eschatological expectations.” UPB, even after having undergone its series of revisions, no longer served that purpose. Thus a new generation of Reform rabbis commenced working on its sequel.

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76 Meyer, Response to Modernity, 334.
77 Hoffman, Beyond the Text, 131.
3: Themes of Redemption in Late Twentieth Century American Reform Prayerbooks

*Gates of Prayer [Shaarei Tefillah]*, published in 1975, was the liturgical sequel to *UPB*. In addition to the Shoah and the establishment of the State of Israel, a variety of postwar experiences shaped its editors’ spiritual consciousness: first-wave feminism (although its theological implications would not appear in the liturgy until subsequent decades); the liberation movements of other minority groups, especially black consciousness; Hiroshima and the spectre of nuclear annihilation; and 1960s-era flirtations with eastern modes of spirituality, signaling a new interest in mysticism. The Six-Day War in 1967 had a major theological impact, coming a mere twenty-two years after the liberation of Auschwitz: “They did note a prevalent sense of renewed divine presence: God had not, after all, it seemed, forsaken Israel.”

In this setting, reframing liberal Jewish theology acquired a sense of urgency. Meyer discusses a 1950s-era caucus of Reform theologians who gathered in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin in order to create a new theological agenda for Reform Judaism:

> Few still believed that Auschwitz and Jerusalem could remain outside a persuasive Jewish theology. All in all, Jewish theologians [by the] seventies had become relatively less concerned with the dialogue between God and Israel in ancient times and more intent on understanding its presence—or absence—in their own age.

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78 Chaim Stern, the editor, translator, adapter, of the prayer book, and often the author of its new prayers, seems to have preferred to call the book by its Hebrew title, for instance, in his editorial notes in *Gates of Understanding*. Both colloquially and in academic articles, however, the book is almost universally known as *Gates of Prayer*, so that is the title that will be used here.


80 Ibid., 364.
Examining the work of Jewish existentialists, especially Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, these rabbis developed a conceptual framework around the traditional Jewish concept of *brit*, “covenant.” Covenant theology would have a significant impact on Reform Jewish thought and liturgy in the latter part of the twentieth century.

For these thinkers, the messianism of classical Reform receded even further. Certainly, the redemption of the world was not anticipated to arrive immanently. Indeed, the spectre of nuclear catastrophe was more likely to bring apocalypse than an era of universal understanding and peace. They firmly retained the notion of a “mission of Israel,” but without the historical swagger and ethnocentrism of their forebears (recalling the earlier German Jews’ attitudes towards their “primitive” co-religionists from Eastern Europe). This mission was exemplified, and amplified, by their participation in the civil rights movement. Nonetheless—their openness to non-rational expressions of Judaism notwithstanding—they generally were not interested in embracing a traditional notion of resurrection of the dead. The previous ideas of the immortality of the human soul endured; Reform theology in the 1970s was still in large part rationalist in its outlook.

_Gates of Prayer_ preceded by a year the next official platform of American Reform, entitled “A Centenary Perspective.” Led by Eugene B. Borowitz (1924-2016), the premier postwar theologian of liberal Judaism, the 1976 platform attempted to balance Reform’s

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81 On June 18, 1964, a group of Reform rabbis, and Reform social justice leader Albert Vorspan, were arrested in St. Augustine, Florida, for praying in an integrated group in front of a downtown restaurant. They were invited to St. Augustine at the request of Martin Luther King, Jr. Writing for the group, premier Reform theologian Eugene B. Borowitz wrote: “We came because we could not stand silently by our brother’s blood. We had done that too many times before. We have been vocal in our exhortation of others but the idleness of our hands too often revealed an inner silence, silence at a time when silence has become the unpardonable sin of our time. We came in hope that the God of us all would accept our small involvement as partial atonement for the many things we wish we had done before and often…. We make no messianic estimate of man’s power and certainly not of what we did here. But it has reaffirmed our faith in the significance of the deed.” “Why We Went: A Joint Letter from the Rabbis Arrested in St. Augustine,” in Eugene B. Borowitz, _Studies in the Meaning of Judaism_ (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 90-91.
longstanding universalist ideals with renewed particularist concerns. It also reflected a new ambivalence, “the breakdown of the intellectual underpinnings of classical Reform Judaism.”\textsuperscript{82} The hallmark of the Centenary Perspective, and 1970s Reform in general, was pluralism. Chronicler of the Reform movement Dana Evan Kaplan suggests that Borowitz and the shapers of the Centenary Perspective seemed tentative “not because Reform theologians did not know what they believed. Rather, there were opposing groups who had dramatically different approaches to God, Torah, and Israel, and the Centenary Perspective was trying to avoid alienating any one group.”\textsuperscript{83} For the first time, Reform theology could be properly identified as “postmodern.” That is to say, the ideology reflected in this document does not reject modernity per se, but rather its shapers do not grant it an exclusive veto on the entire religious experience. Borowitz acknowledged that his task as a theologian was “to be as rational as I can about what I know to be my nonrational Jewish faith.”\textsuperscript{84}

The spirit of a theological big tent pervades \textit{GOP}. The Siddur is well over seven hundred pages, and includes ten alternatives for Friday night services, six choices for Shabbat morning services, and four different weekday services. It also includes five variant services for Torah readings and four choices for Aleinu. Indeed, “choice” has become its hallmark. Among the Friday night services are themed services—usually expressed through translation, paraphrase, and newly composed prayers; the Hebrew of the essential prayers was fairly consistent—on tropes such as “The Classical Siddur,” “Religious

\textsuperscript{82} Peter Knobel, in Kaplan, \textit{Platforms and Prayerbooks}, 160.

\textsuperscript{83} Dana Evan Kaplan, \textit{The New Reform Judaism} (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2013), 37.

Naturalism,” “Mystical Search,” “Social Justice,” and “Our Reform Heritage.” Especially noteworthy is the sixth service, which editor Chaim Stern (1930-2001) called an “Equivocal Service.” Although the Hebrew remains generally consistent with tradition (more than the usual number of prayers are excised, however), the English avoids theistic language. Passages like Barechu, Shema Yisrael, and Mi Chamokha are left untranslated; in other places, the deity is called “the will that orders the stars,” “the source of life and love,” “the power that makes for freedom,” and “the source of joy within us.” This willingness in GOP to experiment with a variety of theological approaches, with no single perspective being awarded preeminence, is encapsulated in an English responsive reading offered as a paraphrase of Ahavat Olam in the eighth Friday night service (“Confrontation with Estrangement”):

Once we learned one truth, and it was cherished or discarded, but it was one. 
*Now we are told that the world can be perceived by many truths; now, in the reality all of us encounter, some find lessons that others deny.*

Once we learned one kind of life, and one reality; it too we either adopted or scorned.

*But right was always right, and wrong was always wrong.*

Now we are told that there are many rights, that what is wrong may well be wrong for you, but right for me.

*Yet we sense that some acts must be wrong for everyone, and that beyond the many half-truths is a single truth all of us may one day grasp.*

That clear way, that single truth, is what we seek in coming here, to join our people who saw the eternal One when others saw only the temporal Now…

In this way, GOP aimed to turn a lack of theological consensus into a virtue. As David Ellenson has noted, with this Siddur “Reform forcefully signaled its abandonment of the

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86 *Gates of Prayer*, 204-218.

87 Ibid., 249-250. The prayer was composed by Richard N. Levy.
sectarian [i.e., Einhorn] posture it had assumed with the adoption of the *Union Prayer Book*.”

*GOP* continues the twentieth century trend of holding messianism in abeyance and dialing back the early Reformers’ enthusiasm for the coming of the messianic era. Several references to the messiah, son of David, have returned to the liturgy. For instance, the “traditional” Friday evening service (pp. 117-141) incorporates the complete text of *Lecha Dodi* (pp.123-125), which only appeared in fragmentary form in one *UPB* service. The text does not flinch from translating the overtly messianic passages literally:

Royal shrine, city of kings, rise up and leave your ravaged state. You have dwelt long enough in the valley of tears—now God will shower His mercy upon you.

Lift yourself up! Shake off the dust! Array yourself in beauty, O my people! At hand is Bethlehem’s David, Jesse’s son, bringing deliverance into my life. 

Likewise, *דוד בן משיח* appears in the “Eliyahu Hanavi” concluding passage to the Havdalah liturgy. But its presence is downplayed: in GOP the prayer is untranslated, and in the editor’s notes Stern refers to it merely as “a traditional folk song.” Yet in its liturgical context, Elijah is introduced with an overt reference to the messianic age:

Amid the reality of a world shrouded in deep darkness, our hope is steadfast and our faith sure. There will come a Shabbat without Havdalah, when the glory of Shabbat, its peace and its love, will endure for ever. Herald of that wondrous Shabbat is Elijah, whom now, in hope and trust, we invoke in song...

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89 *Gates of Prayer*, 124.
90 Stern, in *Gates of Understanding*, 254.
91 *Gates of Prayer*, 641.
The phrase “a Shabbat without Havdalah” is an allusion to the Mishnaic expression of the messianic time as ששבת שפלת שבת, a day “that is completely Shabbat for all eternity.”\(^92\) There are messianic allusions here, although they are subtle.

In one other instance does GOP explicitly mention a personal messiah. In the service for Tisha B’Av and Yom Ha-Shoah (the two days marking historical catastrophes are nominally separate, but the editors have linked them in a single service), the liturgical reformulation of Maimonides’s twelfth principle of faith appears, in Hebrew and in English:

אני מאמיןまれת שלמה בברות התורה, בא-photo בושה, לעל פיסתרומאות, לעכ-האבות-ולכל-ים שברוח.
I believe with perfect faith in the Messiah’s coming.
And even if he be delayed, I will await him.\(^93\)

After all the polemics against a personal messiah in Reform liturgy that have come before, its appearance here—couched in the formula of “I believe with perfect faith”—is startling. In 1975 the Shoah was a fresh, open wound, with many survivors present in congregational life. It is possible that, like Eliyahu Ha-Navi in the Havdalah service, its presence here is simply because as a song it had become ubiquitous. By the 1970s, Ani Ma’amín had come to be associated with the faith of victims of the Shoah\(^94\), and it had been incorporated into many Yom HaShoah commemorations in Israel and the Diaspora. (The English print is in the sans-serif font, which the introduction to the Siddur explains indicates a passage that is customarily sung in the synagogue.) Or perhaps the very extremity of the assertion here—Reform congregations singing of their perfect faith in the Messiah’s coming!—is an argument a fortiori: the victims and survivors did not lose faith, and neither shall we.

\(^92\) Mishna, Tamid 7:4. “On Shabbat they would say, ‘A Psalm, a Song for the Sabbath day’ (Psalm 93). It is a psalm for the future, for the day that is completely Shabbat rest [לימים שבת שבת נבואה] for all eternity.”

\(^93\) Gates of Prayer, 575.

\(^94\) Chabad historiography—not entirely trustworthy—attributes the haunting melody to Azriel David Fastag, a Modzitzer chasid, who composed it on a railway transport to Treblinka. https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/332502/jewish/Ani-Maamin.htm
Outside of the context of Yom HaShoah, in the hymn *Yigdal*, the reference to the messiah has been replaced as it was in *UPB*; instead of singing ‘At the end of the days, He will send our messiah / To save all who wait for His final redemption” the prayer book has, “At the end of days He will send an everlasting redemption / all that lives and breathes shall witness His deliverance.” The depersonalization of the messiah, now well over a century old in Reform liturgy, endures in *Yigdal*.

The larger trend in *GOP* is ambivalence towards messianism; it certainly lacks the redemptive fervor of the early Reformers. In the middle blessings of the Amidah, *GOP* retains its predecessors’ inclination to universalize the texts that refer to Israel’s particular redemption, and, despite the Zionist tendencies in other places, still deletes references to the ingathering of the exiles. Thus the tenth blessing, traditionally on the theme of *kibbutz galuyot*, is labeled “חרות—For Freedom.” The siddur universalizes the text and removes all references to the return to Zion: “Sound the great horn to proclaim freedom, inspire us to strive for the liberation of the oppressed, and let the song of liberty be heard in the four corners of the earth.” The prayer becomes a universal plea for all oppressed people everywhere, rather than a call for return to Eretz Yisrael. Similarly, the next blessing, *Mishpat*, is not about the restoration of Israel’s judiciary, but a call for justice everywhere. The twelfth traditional blessing, condemning the *minim*, remains completely deleted. The next blessing, for the *tzaddikim*, is not about the righteous of among “your people the House of Israel,” as per the traditional text, but rather for the “righteous and faithful of all

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95 *Gates of Prayer*, 731-732.
96 The multiplicity of choices for each service in *GOP* makes the job of comparison difficult. For this discussion of the intermediate blessings of the Amidah, I refer to the “traditional” weekday evening service, pp.33-47.
97 *Gates of Prayer*, 64.
peoples, and upon all of us.” In this way, the text of the Amidah has removed most references to Jewish particularism and universalized the redemptive themes of the text. When the prayer turns to “Jerusalem,” GOP rewrites almost the whole prayer. Instead of a prayer for building up Jerusalem, it becomes a prayer for the peace of Jerusalem, paraphrasing Psalm 122:7 and Isaiah 2:3. Finally, the blessing calling for the “Sprout of David” has been retitled לישעה /“for Deliverance.” The blessing is completely universalized in GOP, with allusions to an age of redemption for everyone; the chatimah reads: ברוך אתה זמך קורין ישועה and the English reinforces the point that this includes everyone: “Blessed is the Lord, who will cause the light of deliverance to dawn for all the world.”

Thus, the messianic themes of GOP, following the lead of UPB, remain focused on universal redemption. There is no explicit reference to the ingathering of the exiles, and the prayers that traditionally call for a return to Zion remain emended as they have been in earlier Reform liturgies. In one notable addition, GOP incorporates a prayer for the State of Israel among its “Special Prayers” after the Torah service:

May Your favor rest upon Israel, her land, her people. Protect her against hatred and war. Grant that the promise of her beginning may ripen into fulfillment, bringing comfort to those who seek refuge, light to those who dwell in darkness, new hope to all humanity. And let us say: Amen.

Many early Zionist thinkers considered the Jewish return to the Land to be a catalyst of redemption for the entire human family, and here the editor of GOP concurs. The prayer for the well being of the State of Israel prays that her “promise” will be for “all humanity.” In this sense, the early Reformers’ sense of Israel’s mission has been adapted: rather than

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99 Ibid., 452.
accomplishing that mission dispersed among the nations of the world (as Holdheim and Einhorn would have it), in GOP the Jewish State could be a force for its fulfillment.

As for the resurrection of the dead, GOP shares its forebears’ rejection of bodily resurrection. The version of the Gevurot has been adapted since UPB. UPB dealt with the sticky phrase מוחה המוחים in a variety of ways, as we have seen; in one instance, the phrase was replaced with the words מוחה כול. Stern apparently appreciated that trend, because he employs the phrase three times in his Gevurot. In only one unusual circumstance does he depart from this convention: in the service for Yom Ha-atzma’ut, GOP employs an “old Palestinian” variant of the prayer, discovered in the Cairo Genizah fragments.100 The text retains the expression מוחה המוחים in a formulation that would seem unfamiliar to most worshippers. This selection is notable for two reasons. First, by selecting an alternate text connected to the Land of Israel, Stern follows the Zionist convention of celebrating traditions that are indigenous to Eretz Yisrael. Second, he demonstrates that by employing מוחה המוחים as a metaphor for Israel’s national rebirth, it is indeed possible to read this prayer in a symbolic, non-literal way. Although that path is not followed for the other occurrences of the Gevurot in GOP, it will open a possibility for the next generation of liturgies, as we shall see.

In sum, GOP reflects a progression from ideas that were developed in the revised versions of the UPB. The theological crises that were triggered in the years after World War II are represented in its pages. The prayer book has one foot planted in modernity, as its ambivalence to the resurrection of the dead, the ingathering of the exiles, and a personal messiah make clear. However, in its commitment to pluralism, GOP modestly acknowledges

100 Gates of Understanding, 249.
that there are other modalities that coexist in Reform communities, and this is reflected in its acceptance of the mystical tradition and even in its one non-theistic service. Israel's mission remains intact, but is expressed less frequently and with less fervor than the Siddur's predecessors. Zionism is a dominant theme, but it is a Zionism that links itself to the Jewish people's universal mission to the entire world. It is a Zionism in tension with itself, since the prayerbook celebrates the State of Israel but continues to delete references to the ingathering of the exiles. These tensions signify a movement theologically in transition, and some of them would be addressed in the next iteration of American Reform liturgy.
4: Redemptive Theology in Twenty-First Century Reform Liturgy

_GOP_ became obsolete surprisingly quickly. By way of comparison, _UPB_ served American Reform congregations for nearly eighty years, with revised editions appearing in 1918 and 1940. Frustrations about _GOP_ appeared already by the late 1980s, largely over the Siddur’s use of masculine pronouns for God and a growing interest in new modes of spirituality.101 Similarly, the demographics of the movement were changing: it was trying simultaneously to accommodate the growing number of non-Jewish spouses in congregations and to appeal to Jews seeking more a more traditional approach. Theologically, as we shall see, Reform Judaism was evolving as well.

As Bronstein has pointed out, new prayer books regularly have been accompanied by new platforms.102 In 1999, twenty-three years after “A Centenary Perspective,” the Central Conference of American Rabbis issued “A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism.” If the 1976 statement was marked by ambivalence (after all, it modestly referred to itself as a “perspective”), the new platform was an attempt to harness unity within an ideologically diverse movement. The key themes of the “Principles” reflect a renewed openness to ritual and a general re-embracing of tradition, with clear Jewish identifiers, such as the use of Hebrew (always followed by transliteration, in parentheses). But what

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102 Bronstein, 25.
theological changes can be observed in the 1999 statement, especially in the realm of redemptive themes?

The “Principles” unfold like a syllogism: In three sections—God, Torah, Israel—short, concise sentences begin “We affirm...”, “We believe...”, “We are committed...”, and each section culminates with the assertion, “In all these ways and more, God/Torah/Israel gives meaning and purpose to our lives.” Obvious touchstones are Abraham Joshua Heschel (“We encounter God’s presence in moments of awe and wonder...”) and Eugene Borowitz’s covenental theology (“...the partnership of God and humanity...”). By far the longest paragraph of the platform is one that also explicitly touches on eschatological themes, and which directly mentions messianism:

We bring Torah into the world when we strive to fulfill the highest ethical mandates in our relationships with others and with all of God’s creation. Partners with God in תikkun Olam, repairing the world, we are called to help bring nearer the messianic age...103

The reference to tikkun olam is telling. By the twenty-first century, it had become a common replacement for the mission-driven language of the early Reformers. It was also a mystical term, prominent in Lurianic kabbalah. This usage of spiritual language to describe the contemporary outlook of liberal Jews is also found in the statement’s perspective on the soul and afterlife: “We trust in our tradition’s promise that, although God created us as finite beings, the spirit within us is eternal.” This statement retains Reform’s historic ambivalence to bodily resurrection; note the reservations implied in the word “although.” As in past platforms, the 1999 Principles affirm the immortality of the human soul.

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Regarding Israel, the Principles reflect a renewed emphasis on Jewish particularism. The early Reformers’ sense of mission endures:

We are Israel, a people aspiring to holiness, singled out through our ancient covenant and our unique history among the nations to be witnesses to God’s presence. We are linked by that covenant and that history to all Jews in every age and place.¹⁰⁴

One suspects that even Einhorn would not have objected to that statement of Jewish election to bring the message of ethical monotheism to the peoples of the world. But we can only imagine how he would have reacted to what comes next:

We are committed to מדינת ישראל (Medinat Yisrael), the State of Israel, and rejoice in its accomplishments. We affirm the unique qualities of living in ארץ ישראל (Eretz Yisrael), the land of Israel, and encourage עליה (aliyah), immigration to Israel.

The Zionism of the post-Columbus Platform years had been a Zionism “from afar,” supporting the pioneers building up the state of Israel while most of its constituents would never honestly consider immigrating to Eretz Yisrael for themselves. In this statement, a dramatic shift has taken place: it acknowledges that aliya is the fullest expression of Zionism, an ideal behavior—a Mitzvah?—that is to be actively promoted. Elsewhere in the platform, the “negation of the Diaspora” is rejected: "We affirm that both Israeli and Diaspora Jewry should remain vibrant and interdependent communities." These mutual sentiments—which stand in some tension with each other—would soon be translated to the liturgy.

Theologically, the “Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism” is an evolution from the platforms of previous generations. Its sense of mission is present in a prophetic call for social justice. However, its redemptive themes retain Reform’s postwar trend to distance

¹⁰⁴Ibid.
itself from the idea that redemption was immanent. Rather, through this lens the messianic age seems far off in the future.

The CCAR published *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* in 2007 after years of discussion and piloting test editions in congregations. Certain religious trends emerge from its pages: social inclusion and ideological diversity; feminism; an openness to mysticism; Zionism and a re-embracing of Jewish particularism; and a new receptivity to traditional practices and texts. Theologically, the siddur stands on the shoulders of what has come before; many of these themes were gradually coming to the surface in the prayerbooks that preceded it. But *MT* also offers some major departures from, or revisions of, earlier ideas. As we explore the redemptive themes found in its liturgy, we will compare its sense of eschatology with all that has come before.

The Messiah in *Mishkan T'filah*

We have seen that the late twentieth century Reformers agreed with their predecessors when they rejected a personal messiah and universalized their vision of redemption. At the same time, they restrained the messianic enthusiasm of the nineteenth century. Has the Reform ambivalence about the Messiah been corrected in *MT*? Can the theology of this Siddur be properly called “messianic”? And to what degree is redemptive theology still a primary motivator in its prayers?

Regarding explicit references to a personal messiah, *MT* in many places continues the trends of its predecessors. For instance, in the *Avot* (now called *Avot v’Imahot*), the longstanding American Reform tradition of using גאולה instead of גואל remains intact. In intermediate blessing number fifteen—traditionally a prayer for the messianic kingdom
invoking, "the sprout of David"—MT offers a completely new prayer. The personal messiah is still absent; there is no reference to David. However, the prayer is markedly different from GOP. GOP universalized this blessing for freedom and a redeemed world: “Let the light of deliverance shine forth... to dawn for all the world.” \(^{105}\) In MT, the language is substantially more particularistic (and rather clunky poetically):

May truth spring up from the earth;
May justice look down from the heavens.
May the strength of Your people flourish through
Your deliverance for we continually hope for Your deliverance.
Blessed are You, Adonai, who causes salvation to flourish. \(^{106}\)

As we saw in GOP, the Messiah son of David appears in MT explicitly in the Havdalah service and in Lecha Dodi. In GOP’s Havdalah, דוד בן משיח went untranslated; in MT, the translation resorts to the well-established device of replacing a personal messiah with the messianic age:

May Elijah the prophet,
Elijah the Tishbite,
Elijah of Gilead,
quickly in our day come to us
heralding redemption. \(^{107}\)

The footnote explains that Elijah is “the harbinger of the messianic age.” MT’s convention is to put Hebrew prayers and English translations on the right-hand page and to use the left side for study texts, alternative translations, or contemporary prayers and poetry paralleling the liturgical themes. Corresponding to Eliyahu Ha-Navi is a parallel (in the same poetic meter, so it can be sung to the same melody as Eliyahu) Miriam Ha-Nevi’ah, capturing a feminist image of redemption:

105 Gates of Prayer, 66.
107 Ibid., 616.
Miriam the prophet, strength and song are in her hand.
Miriam will dance with us to swell earth’s song.
Miriam will dance with us to redeem the world.
Soon, in our day, she will bring us to the waters of redemption.\textsuperscript{108}

In both cases, “redemption” and “messianic age” are preferred over a personal redeemer, whether it is a 	extit{mashiach} or a 	extit{m’shichah}. As in GOP, the Messiah son of David is literally translated in the English of 	extit{Lecha Dodi} (“Bethlehem’s David, Jesse’s son”), repeating Stern’s translation.

\textit{Yigdal}, too, is the same as GOP: the final two stanzas of Maimonides’s thirteen principles of faith remain altered from the traditional text: “an everlasting redemption” instead of “our messiah” and “eternal life within us” rather than “God will resurrect the dead.” In fact, in one place \textit{MT} has retreated from an explicit reference to the personal messiah found in GOP: the Haftarah blessings. GOP had offered an abridged version of the blessing after the Haftarah, cutting the number of benedictions from four to two. However, it also offered the four traditional blessings as an “alternative version,” including the second\
\textsuperscript{91} (בבניה ציון משמח) and third (משימה ציון הבנים) which offered a blessing for Zion and an explicit reference to Elijah and David, respectively. \textit{MT} deletes this traditional “alternative,” excising two blessings that the early Reformers would have similarly rejected (if they offered a Haftarah in their prayerbooks at all\textsuperscript{109}).

Thus there is a messianic ambivalence in \textit{MT}. In some places, such as Havdalah and \textit{Lecha Dodi}, the Hebrew text overtly mentions a personal messiah; in the case of Havdalah, the translation obscures the literal meaning of the text. In other prayers, such as \textit{Yigdal},

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 617, by Leila Gal Berner and Arthur Waskow.
\item \textsuperscript{109} OT mentions that there is a reading from the Haftarah, but offers no blessings either before or after (p.32); UPB (1895) follows the same practice (p.98). The blessings before, and abridged afterwards, appear in the revised edition of \textit{UPB}, 1940 (pp.146-147).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Avot v’Imahot, and the middle blessings of the daily Amidah, MT follows its predecessors by universalizing and calling for a messianic age. And in the case of the Haftarah blessings, it even takes a step back from messianic allusions that GOP found acceptable. Thus, its editorial policy on the matter of the messiah is not consistent. Yet as one observer has pointed out, inconsistency can be considered a strength for a prayerbook trying to be inclusive of a diverse audience, even “by including words that are not fully consistent with Reform tenets.”

The Ingathering of the Exiles in Mishkan T’filah

Considering the renewed approach to Zionism and aliyah found in the 1999 “Statement of Principles”, we may ask: Has this prayer book resolved the tension of the earlier generations’ approach to Zionism? Does it specifically promote aliyah and consider the ingathering of the exiles to be a redemptive act? In contrast to its stance on the personal Messiah, here MT is more consistent. Perhaps more than anywhere else, in these themes the most dramatic ideological changes from its predecessors can be identified.

For instance, in Yotzer Or, MT has generally retained the text of previous Reform siddurim; it has not embraced the traditional text’s lengthy and mystical angelology. However, just before the chatimah, MT has restored the traditional phrase beginning with the words חדש אור: “Shine a new light upon Zion, that we all may swiftly merit its radiance.” Ellenson’s commentary at the bottom of the page explains that by including this traditional sentence the book “conciously affirms its devotion to the modern State of Israel and

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signals its recognition of the religious significance of the reborn Jewish commonwealth.”

It is indeed a sign of identification, because the reintroduction of \( \newmoon \) has been a hallmark of every Israeli Reform siddur. Yet Richard Sarason takes this one step further: he suggests that \( \newmoon \) has eschatological significance: “The phrase draws a poetic connection between the renewal of sunlight every morning and the messianic ‘light’ of Israel’s redemption that God has promised to shine upon Zion in the future.”

The revision of the next prayer, \( Ahavah Rabbah, \) is even more dramatic. Here the editors have restore the traditional (Ashkenazi) call to “Gather us in peace from the four corners of the earth and lead us upright to our land.” Omitted since the first Reform prayerbooks, this is a significant reversal. Sarason calls it “a gesture of solidarity” with Israel. But surely it is more than that; after all, \( GOP \) stood with Israel as well. As an echo of Isaiah 11:12 (unattested in the MT footnotes) the ingathering of Israel and Judah “from the four corners of the earth” is a prophet’s promise of divine deliverance. Its reinstatement is a reflection of 1999 Principles which, for the first time in a Reform platform, called for \( aliyah \) as an expression of Zionism.

Similar changes are afoot in the Amidah. In the Gevurot blessing, for instance, \( MT \) adds the seasonal blessings for spring and summer (\( \text{-poetry} \)) and autumn and winter (\( \text{Mesubim} \)). Earlier Reform prayerbooks had avoided this explicit association with Eretz Yisrael. A footnote in \( MT \) makes clear: “With these words, we join our Israeli brothers and sisters in their prayers for seasonal rains in the Land of Israel.”

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111 \( Mishkan T'filah, 60. \)
112 Richard S. Sarason, \( Divrei Mishkan T'filah: Delving into the Siddur \) (New York: CCAR Press, 2018), 47.
113 Ibid., 49.
114 \( Mishkan T'filah, 79. \)
blessing of the Amidah, however, *MT* takes a step back from its renewed called for the ingathering of the exiles. Instead of the traditional blessing “Sound the great shofar for our freedom, raise high the banner to gather our exiles, and gather us together from the four quarters of the earth,” *MT* uses the same text as *GOP*, universalizing the call as a general plea “for freedom/חרות.” This curious backtracking is not addressed in the *MT*’s explanatory notes nor in Sarason’s commentary to the prayer book; after all, nothing in the traditional text would seem to violate the stance that *MT* has taken in *Ahavah Rabbah*. It must be said, however, that the *MT* text does correspond to the theology of Tikkun Olam and human partnership with God to bring redemption that was expressed in the 1999 Principles. Retaining *GOP*’s formulation “...let the voice of liberty be heard in the four corners of the earth...” reinforces this idea, as Benji Stanley has noted: “This line in the Reform liturgies suggests that humans must play a role in bringing a new age of freedom; social action is necessary as the voice of freedom will be heard, and then, it may be inferred, people must act on it.” The wider context of the Amidah, however, is lost: for the moment, the ingathering of the Jewish exiles to Israel has been left out of this part of the narrative of redemption.

The 14th petition of the Amidah, the prayer for Jerusalem, is also emended. It is the same text that was found in *GOP*: instead of שבח / “To Jerusalem, Your city, may You return,” *MT* has תפנה / “turn.” Stanley notes an important distinction between “return” and “turn”: *MT* holds that Jerusalem no longer needs to be physically rebuilt—it already

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116 *Mishkan T’filah*, 90.
is—nor does God need to specifically dwell there. The Reform liturgy remains defensive on the theme of גאולתנו and the implication that Judaism in the Diaspora is less fulfilling or authentic than life in Israel. This echoes the 1999 Principles’ assertion that Jewish life in Israel and the Diaspora are both worthy, and have much to learn from each other. In this prayer, the messianic imagery of rebuilding Jerusalem has been abandoned; MT instead prays for the peace of Jerusalem with allusions to Psalm 122 and Isaiah 2.

When MT turns its prayers explicitly to the State of Israel, redemptive themes emerge. Following the lead of Israeli siddurim, MT has created an Al Hanissim insert for the Hoda’ah to be recited on Yom Ha-Atzma’ut. In the theological language of the Siddur, the events leading to Israel’s establishment qualify for “miracle” status, akin to Purim and Chanukah. Further, MT includes a prayer “For the State of Israel” in its Torah service. (In GOP, a paragraph for the well-being of Israel, specially composed by Chaim Stern, was amended to a series of prayers for the community at large.) The prayer for Israel in MT is an abridged version of the prayer that was composed by Israel’s Chief Rabbis in 1948, and it is the first time this prayer appears in American Reform liturgy. It is more than a prayer for peace, for its allusions are messianic: Israel is גאולתנו, literally “the beginning of the flowering of our redemption.” The presence of this prayer, with its Rav Kook-style theology that sees redemptive promise in the Jewish return to Eretz Yisrael, is surprising for a Reform siddur. The English translation tempers the messianism of the Hebrew a bit by universalizing it: “...bless the State of Israel which marks the dawning of hope for all who

117 Stanley, 61.
118 MT’s Al Ha-Nissim, p.555, is a completely different text from the prayer found in the Israeli Reform prayer book Ha-avodah Shebalev (1982, p.46).
seek peace.” Nonetheless, here is a specific prayer that links Israel with redemption, a significant development.

**The Resurrection of the Dead in Mishkan T’filah**

The willingness of *MT* to reengage traditional language alluding to the resurrection of physical bodies was, at the time of the book’s publication, one of its most noted and controversial features. The most obvious flashpoint is in the second blessing of the Amidah, Gevurot. As noted above, the German Reformers generally did not change the Hebrew text, but preferred to emphasize the immortality of the soul in their translations. Their American counterparts actively sought to replace the phrase with a more theologically acceptable alternative; *GOP* preferred Rabbi Leo Merzbacher’s solution of from 1860. Sarason reports that the phrase was a substantial topic of debate during the editorial process of *MT*, and early on the committee urged restoring the original language of:

> ...מך מהותם

The CCAR should take note of the greater appreciation now being given to the traditional texts and should consider, for example, the paragraphs of the Shema which have been deleted in *GOP*, resurrection of the dead, and other elements of the traditional siddur which Reform has dropped... Consideration should be given to the possibility of alternatives within the same prayer (e.g., *mechayyeh hakol* next to *mechayyeh meitim*).

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119 *Mishkan T’filah*, 377.


121 Sarason, *Divrei Mishkan T’filah*, 65.

122 Ibid., 66.
This was almost the approach *MT* adopted. The standard reading it proposes in all four instances where the phrase appears; in parentheses it offers the alternative.

This is reinforced in the English translation:

You are forever mighty, Adonai; You give life to all (revive the dead)...
You sustain life through love, giving life to all (reviving the dead)...
Who resembles You... faithfully giving life to all (reviving that which is dead)?
Blessed are You, Adonai, who gives life to all (revives the dead).  

The presence of the traditional Hebrew text together plus the literal translation referring to bodily resurrection are a first for a Reform prayer book.

Does this mean that *MT* countenances a literal belief in resurrection? At first blush, the Siddur seems to hedge its bets, urging worshippers to read the traditional language non-literally. A commentary to one passage notes, “The metaphor of reviving the dead is widely used rabbinically,” citing TB Berakhot 58b and TY Berakhot 4:2. Another reads, “*MT* provides the original language as an option, acknowledging its metaphorical power.”

The emphasis on metaphor would seem to indicate that the editors have restored מחיה המתים because of their rejection of their predecessors’ tendency to read traditional texts literally. In one service, however, the commentary is willing to venture a little further.

Judith Z. Abrams, consulting editor of *MT*, writes,

*G'vurot* emphasizes God’s ability to renew us in the future. The resurrection of the dead, which may be taken literally, is best understood as a powerful metaphor for understanding the miracle of hope. Winter gives way to spring.

Abrams opens up the possibility that a valid reading of the text may be its literal meaning, even while acknowledging that the “best” understanding is the symbolic one. In the twenty-

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123 *MT*, 78, et al.
124 Ibid., 79.
125 Ibid., 246.
first century, there appears to be a loosening of liberal restraints on the idea of bodily resurrection.

In fact, there may be more going on here theologically than meets the eye. At the turn of the century, a variety of Jewish thinkers reopened the topic of the afterlife, most notably Conservative theologian Neil Gillman in his influential book *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought.* Commenting on the renewal of the traditional language in *MT,* Gillman said,

> When the rabbis envisioned how God would like us to be for eternity, God would like us to be as we are now in historical time and in society—as embodied beings. The way we are now is so important and so treasured by God that that’s how he wants us to be for eternity.

Even more compelling is the influence of feminism here. Feminist politics—the inclusion of women in all realms of Jewish life—are a notable feature of *MT,* but overt feminist theology is less conspicuous. Yet one aspect of feminist thought is to challenge modern philosophy’s strict separation of body and soul. In her seminal work *Standing Again at Sinai,* which pioneered the field of Jewish feminist theology, Judith Plaskow writes:

> Feminists have set out the dualisms that have shaped religious and cultural disgust at women’s bodies, and also have tried to overcome these dualisms, reclaiming women’s body experience in a conscious and affirming way... The consistent goal of feminist writing has been to undercut dualisms, to find a way through and beyond the either/or thinking (either spirit or body, either virgin or whore) so central to western attitudes toward sexuality.

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128 Harris, 23.
From this rejection of the rationalist separation of spirit and body, Plaskow concludes that
carnality and spirituality are mutually nourishing and represent the fullness of religious
experience: “When we touch that place in our lives where sexuality and spirituality come
together, we touch our wholeness and the fullness of our power, and at the same time our
connection with a power larger than ourselves.”\textsuperscript{130} Borowitz, who was a key theology
teacher for most of \textit{MT}'s editorial committee, concurs that the shift regarding resurrection
can be attributed to feminist thought:

\begin{quote}
Gender is substantially a bodily matter. So if body is that critical to our proper sense
of self, then to hope that God will grant us life is— with all the difficulties involved in
the phrase—a way of saying that in some sense life after death is also embodied.\textsuperscript{131}
\end{quote}

Postmodern theologians are unwilling to accept the longstanding postulate that souls and
bodies are distinct entities, or that the soul is a more significant part of individual identity
than the body. By restoring the traditional language of the \textit{Gevurot}, \textit{MT} joins a new wave of
feminist, postmodern theological trends that are willing to consider that, somehow, the
body survives as the soul does.

\textit{MT} merely opens the door to these possibilities. Recalling Abrams’s preference that
the “best” understandings are the metaphorical ones, the Siddur does not reinstitute
traditional language in other prayers that allude to bodily resurrection. For instance, \textit{Elohai
Neshama} is the same Hebrew and English text as \textit{GOP}, and does not retain the traditional
“One day You will take [my soul] from me, and You will restore it to me in the time to
come.” As noted above, \textit{Yigdal} does not restore bodily resurrection to its thirteenth
principle of faith. No mention of resurrection is made anywhere in the meditations

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 197. In this regard, Plaskow echoes some themes of Lurianic kabbalah, which considers human
sexuality to be an evocation of divine union of disparate but complementary \textit{sefirot}.
\textsuperscript{131} Harris, 23.
\end{footnotes}
preceding the Kaddish. Only in the *Gevurot*, it seems, have the editors determined to reintroduce terminology that so vexed America Reform rabbis from a century earlier.
In a little town, tucked into the woods and far from the main roads, the Jews were afraid that the Messiah would come and pass them by. They decided to build a tower on the outskirts of town, and appointed one of the town’s beggars to serve there as watchman. If the Messiah should come, the watchman would give him directions to the town.

One day a stranger approached the tower, and the watchman came down to greet him. “What are you doing here in the middle of the forest?” the stranger asked.

“I sit on top of the tower and wait for the Messiah,” answered the watchman.

“How do you like your job?” the stranger asked. “I’m sure it doesn’t pay very much.”

“That’s true,” answered the watchman. “But it’s steady work.”

The Siddur has been an evolving repository of Jewish expression, values, and desires for two thousand years. However, as liturgical scholar Dalia Marx has pointed out, the ideology of the traditional Siddur did not develop in a conscious or systematic way. “One of the innovations brought by the Reform movement,” Marx notes, “is ideological and theological expressions in prayer books that are the products of explicit and conscious choice.” Reform prayerbooks, from the first modest liturgical reforms in early nineteenth century Germany to the prayer books today, can be characterized by this self-consciousness: the desire for the words of the prayer book to correctly convey the spiritual situation of the worshipper. The Siddur is not the only locus where the theology of a community plays out, but it is a significant place to measure what a certain group of leaders perceived to be the fundamental values of, and for, their community.

In this paper, I have attempted to trace the evolution in Reform prayerbooks of three traditional ideas of redemption—the messiah, the restoration of the Jews to the Land

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of Israel, and the resurrection of the dead—to determine the place of these ideas
contemporary Reform liturgy. As we have seen, each of these themes carries a history of
theological polemics. After considering the history of prayer book reform, we must ask: to
what degree can Reform Judaism be called a “messianic movement”?

Nineteenth century German Reform was undeniably messianic. This
characterization is often forgotten when considering the early Reformers; they are
remembered, correctly, as products of enlightenment, rationalism, and emancipation. But
rationalists can get caught up in messianic excitement as easily as, say, mystics can. A look
at prayers composed by Geiger, Holdheim, and others demonstrates their tremendous
confidence that they were living on the precipice of a new epoch in human history, and that
Jews were the protagonists of a grand redemptive drama that was unfolding on the world
stage. Their polemics against the restoration of the Jews to the Land of Israel, for instance,
must be understood on a deeper level than simply a desire to defuse charges of “dual
loyalty” from their new fellow citizens. The evidence of their reforms shows that they
considered themselves to be the bearers of ethical monotheism to the world, the authentic
“true religion” of the Bible, before it was encrusted with the myth, superstition, and
mysticism of later Judaism. They may have rejected the idea of a personal messiah for a
“mission of Israel” to bring about the “messianic age,” but “mission” and “messianism” still
characterize their theological stance. Their objection to the restoration of Jews to Zion was
that it would inhibit, not advance this messianic mission. We see this clearly in Holdheim’s
audacious statement of Israel’s mission that replaced the intermediate blessings of the
Amidah in the 1848 Gebetbuch from Berlin, and his certainty that the true secret of Jewish
exile was to spread the message of monotheism throughout the earth. Redemption is the theological underpinning of their liturgies.

In America, this redemptive enthusiasm was, if anything, even more fervent. For David Einhorn—whose liturgy became the theoretical basis for Reform prayerbooks for nearly a century—the messianic moment was close. Einhorn, too, can be classified as messianist: in his liturgy, he replaced the Messiah son of David with “Israel, Your messiah.” Einhorn and others of his generation placed an enormous amount of faith in the idea that reason, science, and technological progress were steps towards utopia, and that America was the promised land where this new order would emerge. This spiritual optimism was codified in the publication of the *Union Prayer Book* in 1895, the pinnacle of the modernist excitement in Reform Judaism that a new day was quickly dawning.

Our study of twentieth century Reform liturgy shows a growing awareness of just how wrong the theological strategies of their predecessors proved to be. How shocking it is today to read the optimistic certainty of the German Reformers, knowing that the annihilation of German Jewry was around the corner. The history of the messiah is the history of false messiahs, and in this regard the twentieth century Reformers’ more tentative, careful approach must be appreciated. In the twentieth century, philosophers of all persuasions became convinced that technology and progress were not automatically harbingers of redemption. The Nazi atrocities were proof that modernity did not lead to morality. Nuclear weapons made clear that science could just as easily lead to devastation rather than salvation. Thus the revised *Union Prayer Books* and *Gates of Prayer* evinced a new ambivalence on theological matters about which earlier Rabbis had been so certain.
It would be a distortion to say that these reevaluations were caused only by disillusionment. Other historical trends shaped the twentieth century reconsideration of messianism. For instance, within the first few decades of the twentieth century, the idea of the restoration of the Jews to Eretz Yisrael was no longer hypothetical; Israel became a fact. Zionism outright contradicted the Pittsburgh Platform's confidence that the Jews were no longer a nation. Theologians considered the implications of the State of Israel and wrestled with the meaning of the Jewish return to history. Furthermore, the emancipation of other groups in society profoundly influenced liberal rabbis. Perhaps most significantly, feminism permeated Reform Jewish life and thought. All of these impacted the theology of redemption and the prayer book.

*Mishkan T'filah* in the twenty-first century demonstrates a willingness to reengage old ideas. Like its predecessors, *MT* is a measure of the condition of its constituency’s beliefs (or, to be more precise, where its editors perceive and desire that constituency’s beliefs to be). As we have seen, the personal messiah is a tentative presence in *MT*. Long gone is the classical Reformers’ certainty of an imminent messianic age, but their objection to a personal messiah largely remains. In contrast, the restoration of Israel to its land has significantly emerged in many parts of *MT*, surely an outgrowth of its Zionist proclivities. And the cautious return in places of the resurrection of the dead indicates a willingness to reengage with previously discarded concepts and language.

These ideas indicate that twenty-first century American Reform Judaism is not engaged in a theological break from the past. To the contrary, the prayer book is willing to engage with ideas from the Jewish past that had been discarded by the liturgists of the previous century. This is a natural evolution of ideas, influenced by the historical
experiences of liberal Jews in America. We can detect a tapering-off of messianic ideas from the intense optimism of early Reformers. In exchange, a theology focused on Tikkun Olam and covenantal responsibility has emerged.

It is debatable whether or not these ideas are eschatological; there is a difference between social improvement and a time when the world's troubles have permanently evaporated in a new age of history. Recent Reform liturgies have become much more conservative in this regard. If their theology embraces eschatology, it is an eschatology that has been put off further into the future than previous Reform liturgies imagined. In a postmodern way, this is in fact the classic Jewish stance. Perhaps this is best characterized by Hoffman’s explanation of the “channeled messianism” of the Amidah: the Jewish hope for redemption is real—and it remains delayed. This is like the man in the classic joke, above, who sits all along the watchtower waiting for the messiah, confident at least in his job security. Even if redemption does not arrive today or tomorrow, the messianic vision has sustained Jews in their various Diasporas, shaping their prayers for the future.
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