

RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY

FALL 2016



Introducing *Siddur Lev Shalem* to Our Congregations: Reports from the Field

Siddur Lev Shalem for Shabbat and Festivals is already in its second printing and has been introduced in scores of our congregations. Several colleagues who have adopted the new siddur report on their experiences and the reception the book has received.

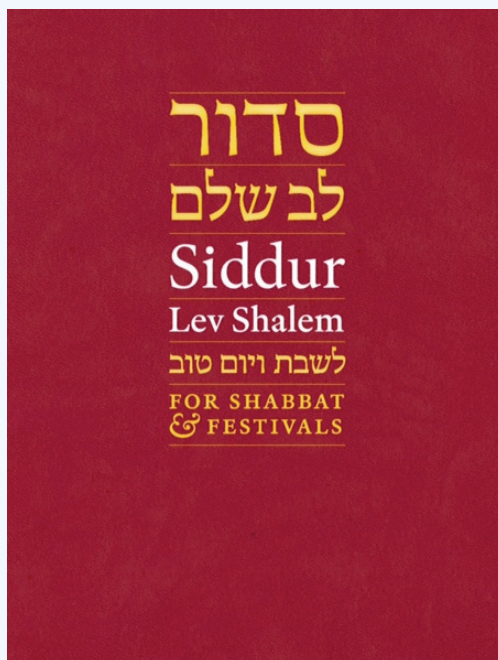
Rabbi Jeffrey Abraham

Congregation Agudas Achim
San Antonio, Texas

From the first moment we began using *Lev Shalem* this past May, the positive change in our services was felt immediately. As a synagogue that already had the mahzor, it did not take long for our congregants to get used to the incredible commentaries and readings on the far right and left sides of each page. Instead of sitting during a service and not understanding the prayers, our congregants can now “get lost” in the siddur and have a truly meaningful experience in a variety of ways that make sense for each individual.

It is wonderful having comprehensive explanations in *Lev Shalem* because it allows me as a rabbi to point to some of the explanations throughout the service. Now, instead of me simply explaining from the bimah and hoping that people listen and internalize the meanings behind the prayers, those who are visual learners can read and learn about it more themselves. Additionally, we have been able to incorporate some of the kavanot readings on the sides of the siddur into our service when appropriate.

Overall, our congregation loves that we have this amazing new siddur and the only complaint is that we did not have them earlier. Thank you to the Rabbinical Assembly for putting together such a meaningful new siddur for our movement!



Rabbi Amy Walkk Katz

Temple Beth El
Springfield, Massachusetts

The last time we used *Siddur Sim Shalom* at Temple Beth El was on Saturday, April 16, 2016. It was especially important to use the siddur that Shabbat because *Sim Shalom* was dedicated to Irving S. Rapaport, the bat mitzvah's great grandfather. I felt it was important to explain to the congregation that when it was first published, *Sim Shalom* made prayer more accessible and meaningful. To demonstrate my point, we read the English translation of the Psalm for Shabbat from the 1946 *Silverman Siddur*.

A Song for Shabbat

*It is good to acclaim the Lord,
to sing Your praise, exalted God,
to proclaim Your love each morning,
to tell of Your faithfulness each night,
to the music of the lute and the melody of the harp.
Your works, O Lord, make me glad;
I sing with joy of Your creation.*

*It is good to give thanks unto the Lord,
And to sing praises unto Thy name, O Most High;
To declare Thy lovingkindness each morning,
And Thy faithfulness every night,
With an instrument of ten strings and the lute,*

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Introducing *Siddur Lev Shalem* to Our Congregations

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With sacred music upon the harp.

For Thou, O Lord, hast made me rejoice in Thy work;


I will glory in the works of Thy hands.

As we recited the words to the Psalm, everyone realized how antiquated the English was. I didn't even need to explain to the congregation that when I received my copy of *Sim Shalom* as a rabbinical student in 1985 it was a precious gift. The accessible English, the fresh looking page, and the alternative readings made davening that much more compelling.

Sim Shalom has been my siddur of choice since 1985 and I wanted everyone in the congregation to understand it would be difficult to retire my siddur, which automatically opened to the right page, be it Shabbat or weekday. But the time had come. *Lev Shalem* does for the person sitting in the pews today, exactly what *Sim Shalom* did in 1985 and exactly what Silverman did in 1946. The siddurim look different because the times have changed and each siddur must respond to the sociological needs of its users. After lovingly retiring *Sim Shalom*, we began using *Lev Shalem* immediately.

Rabbi Debra Newman Kamin
Am Yisrael Congregation
Northfield, Illinois

Last February we made the amazing switch to *Siddur Lev Shalem*. I have made changes in the congregation over the years but I have never seen anything like this. Everyone is delighted. Not one complaint. That has never happened at my congregation before. And like so many other things as a Rabbi, I thought we were making the change for the Congregation. But the change has also affected me. I spend a fair amount of my time (don't ask how much) reading the poetry and writings on the side of the pages. I find myself moved and having a deeper engagement with liturgy than



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Created by Mackenzie Ball
in honor of her Bat Mitzvah
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I have had in a long time. The biggest challenge of the new siddur was learning new page numbers. We all spent a little time feeling lost. Then one of our students decided to create bookmarks in honor of her upcoming Bat Mitzvah and we now have them in all of our siddurim. We did not provide her with the page number; she figured this out on her own and we are very proud and grateful for her contribution. (Both sides of the book mark are shown below.)

Rabbi Rob Scheinberg
United Synagogue of Hoboken
Hoboken, New Jersey

"The liturgy is basically the same every week, but I'm not. What I love about *Siddur Lev Shalem* is that it meets me where I am." These were the comments of Louise Kurtz, a member of the United Synagogue of Hoboken, shortly after we adopted *Siddur Lev Shalem* this summer. I was excited to bring *Siddur Lev Shalem* to my congregation, especially after serving on its editorial committee, but the feedback I have received from congregants goes even beyond what I had hoped for. A common theme: this siddur, unlike most siddurim, respects the individual differences of different daveners and functions as a guide for them on their various different journeys.

Another synagogue member, Todd Clear, wrote these words to me (which I passed on to the committee): "I want to write my personal thanks for the new siddur.... The opening section that puts Jewish corporate prayer in context, giving thought to the anchor ideas underlying the prayer service, was deeply helpful to me and gave me so much to think about and to use in my own journey. The alternative prayers in the margins were again and again so very on point. In particular, the alternative prayers for our country and for Israel were so moving, so rich with new content that I watered up as I read them." Todd continues: "As you probably know, I am in continual tension with text as I work through my personal journey with religion. It is one of the reasons I feel so comfortable as a



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Jew; working in engagement with the text is one of our tasks. What the committee has done in this new siddur is an enormous gift to a person like me—moving, meaningful, and helpful.”

I find that in my rabbinic work, I am often oscillating between focusing on the committed core of the Jewish community and focusing on the periphery. So often it feels that a given experience in my congregation is designed either for the core or for the periphery; for example, a weekday *yom tov* is definitely for the committed core, while a Shabbat morning service with many bar/bat mitzvah guests can be a rare opportunity to reach many of those who are on the margins of the Jewish community. *Siddur Lev Shalem*, in my experience so far, is both a tool for deepening the prayer experience of the committed core (including myself), and a tool for making that experience more comprehensible and welcoming for those on the periphery. This siddur is such a precious gift to my community—in part because it conveys to them, in all of their diversity, the precious gift of Jewish prayer itself.

Rabbi Gerald Skolnik

Forest Hills Jewish Center
Queens, New York

A Momentous Change

Changing siddurim is never an easy task, even for an individual. Those of us who daven every day develop an almost mystical relationship with the siddur that we use, often stuffed into our tallit bag only to be lovingly reclaimed the next morning. When a synagogue changes the siddur that it has been using for many years, there is, of course, the simple matter of having to get used to something that is new and unfamiliar. I used to know what page Ashrei is on, where Hallel is, etc. On the simplest of levels, there is a need to become familiar with new pagination, new fonts, new translation and many more changes that are not always welcome.

Like every synagogue that moved on from whatever it was using before—most often *Sim Shalom*—to *Siddur Lev Shalem*, we at the Forest Hills Jewish Center had to deal with the same natural resistance to change. But our transition was fraught with an underlying psycho-social dimension that was bound to make the change even more difficult. Since the 1950’s, the Forest Hills Jewish Center has been using the siddur (and mahzor!) edited and translated by its late and much-loved Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, of blessed memory. How the congregation would respond to such a dramatic change was a source of considerable concern to me.

Rabbi Bokser z”l died in January of 1984 and I assumed the leadership of the Forest Hills Jewish Center shortly thereafter. There were many things about the synagogue that I wanted

ultimately to change, most significantly to move the synagogue into an egalitarian posture. Over a period of years, we did just that. I wanted to change the humash we were using, and we did indeed change from the Hertz to *Humash Etz Hayim*, which was warmly received. When *Mahzor Lev Shalem* was published, I gently persuaded the lay leadership that, particularly with such a wonderful option available, the time had come to move into a more contemporary version of the classic High Holiday liturgy. We made the change, and again, it was warmly received. Only one liturgical challenge remained ... what to do with the siddur.

A Last Connection

When I assumed the mantle of rabbinic leadership at the Forest Hills Jewish Center, I did so with a deep and loving respect for Rabbi Bokser with whom I had worked for the last almost three years of his life. Frankly, holding on to that siddur was for me, as it was for the congregation, tantamount to holding on to his memory. It was never my highest priority to change siddurim. Yes, the English was archaic, and the supplementary readings in the back of the siddur were almost laughably dated. But that siddur was part of the spiritual fabric of the congregation. I was loathe to tamper with that delicate connection to Rabbi Bokser’s memory. It was the last connection to him that my congregants had.

The publication of *Siddur Lev Shalem* more than fifty years after his death was a sign from above that the time had come. I had had the luxury of honoring Rabbi Bokser’s memory and spiritual legacy for many years after his death, and being that the congregation had responded positively to *Mahzor Lev Shalem*, all the stars, as it were, seemed to be aligned. When I announced that we were going to make the move, we invited members to dedicate either one or a number of siddurim for a price slightly higher than the pre-publication cost the RA was offering, and people jumped on the chance. That dedication campaign more than paid for the cost of one thousand siddurim and also sent a clear signal that people were ready.

Well, we’re now about half-a-year into using *Siddur Lev Shalem* and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Regardless of where you are on the continuum of Jewish prayer, *Siddur Lev Shalem* has something for you and I personally am enjoying it as much as my congregants. The only question about it I can’t answer is ... why is Minha for weekdays after Ma’ariv for weekdays, after the Shabbat Minha service?

If you know the answer to that question, please feel free to share it with me. Inquiring minds want to know! Other than that... even the Forest Hills Jewish Center has made the move and we’re glad we did!