

Siddur Lev Shalem: Creating a More Inclusive Liturgy **by Rabbi Carol Levithan**

1. Adding *Emoteinu* after *Avoteinu* in the Amidah

There are now two options for the first blessing in each of the *Amidot*: the names of the four matriarchs are included in one, next to the traditional option - “With patriarchs”, giving our foremothers equal significance. Moreover, the word for “our mothers” - *Emoteinu* – appears in brackets as an option to include when referencing “our fathers” – *Avoteinu* – in every blessing that includes the patriarchs.

2. Bringing Miriam into the Siddur

- Acknowledging that a few lines of *Shirat haYam* are attributed to her in the Biblical text, the siddur includes an option to include these few lines after the recitation of the full song in the morning service. (p. 144)
- Miriam is also included in a first column commentary that cites ancient sources suggesting she might have recited each line of the song with the women repeating after her, emphasizing that all Israel - men and women together – participated at that signal moment in the history. (p. 144)
- Miriam’s name also appears along with Moses at the end of the Shema and its blessings as we approach the Amidah: “Moses, Miriam, and the people Israel joyfully sing this song to You.” (p.158)
- For the end of Shabbat, *Siddur Lev Shalem* turns once again to Miriam who is included in a song for the Havdalah ceremony along with Elijah, the prophet as announcing the coming of the Messiah in a verse written by a woman – “Miriam will dance with us, repairing the world....” (p. 284)

3. More of the Matriarchs

- Alternate prayers for rain using the names of the matriarchs, to be recited on Shemini Atzeret (p.379) were written especially for this siddur. (p.379)
- The first and fourth column commentaries contribute significantly to an appreciation of gender diversity within the tradition: a discussion of the personification of Shabbat as the “bridal queen” and a comment from the Zohar about inviting the Sabbath bride are found on the same page. (p. 25, 1st and 4th columns)
- A concluding song for Shabbat – *Shabbat, Our Queen* – by the great modern Hebrew poet Hayim Nahman Bialik, has a page all to itself in Hebrew with translation on the facing page. (p. 60)

4. Avoiding Gender Language and Stereotypes

- A subtle example of the scrupulous avoidance of gender language – “*One sets the dining table before the onset of Shabbat*” – is part of an extensive commentary describing the increasingly shared roles in both the home and the synagogue, ending with the observation that “Shabbat is sometimes referred to as a king and sometimes as a queen.” (p. 32)

- The “Shabbat at Home” section includes both Eishet Hayil and Psalm 112 (as did *Sim Shalom*) and also includes *Mi ha ish?* (Psalm 34:13-15) – “words that could be addressed to either member of a couple”. (p. 75, first column)

5. Bringing Other Community Members into the Siddur

- *Mi Sheberakh* blessings for adoption and the birth of a grandchild are both new to this siddur but they also acknowledge the variety of families in the Jewish community with language appropriate for a single man or woman, gay or heterosexual couples. Traditional blessings for a bar and bat mitzvah also include options for single parents and couples. Blessings for a couple before a wedding are also inclusive of gay and heterosexual couples as are blessings for an anniversary, which are also appropriate for couples who have children and those who do not.

6. Sensitivities for Non-Jews

- *Siddur Lev Shalem* includes an option to omit the words of the fourth berakhah of the *Amidah* - “v’lo natati elokeinu l’goyei ha aratzot”. The comment explaining this option points out that this language came into the siddur in the Middle Ages when there was persecution of Jews: “Our situation today is quite different, and we welcome non-Jews to join with us in celebrating Shabbat.” (p. 163, first column)
- A similar comment on p. 231 (first column) notes the problems some Jews have with the Aleinu prayer which also came into the siddur during a time of Jewish-Christian hostility: “Some ... bridle at the exclusive affirmation of the people Israel’s faith and have substituted other phrases”. (p. 231, first column).
- On a related subject, the reason for adding the phrase “v’al kol yosh’vei teiveil” – “and to all who dwell on earth” – to all versions of Kaddish is explained as “including a universalist dimension to certain prayers for peace, which would otherwise mention only Israel.” (p. 54, first column)