

# A Rabbinic Perspective *By Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom*

Reprinted from the May 2008 Adath Jeshurun Newsletter

## A New Seder Avodah



On the first day of *Pesah*, at our Annual Passover Gathering, I introduced for the first time in fifty-seven years a new prayer book for Congregation Adath Jeshurun, a revision of Rabbi Max D. Klein's *Seder Avodah*. This prototype edition is meant to enable us to discover problems with the format or errors in text or instruction so that we can make final corrections before the book goes to press in June. I urge you to share your thoughts about the book, and anything that seems to be in error, with me. Your input will be most helpful. In this issue, as we begin our

150th Anniversary Celebration, I would like to share with you an excerpt from the Preface to this revised edition of *Seder Avodah* so that you can understand the place of the book in AJ's history. A second excerpt will appear in the June *Newsletter*.

### From the Preface to the Revised Edition of *Seder Avodah*, Part I

#### Background and History

It is fitting that the publication of a new prayerbook should coincide with our 150th anniversary. The *Siddur* has historically been the articulation of the faith of our people, based on fundamental theological beliefs, but with new expressions that respond to time and place. Similarly, this *Siddur* represents both our link to the history of our congregation, and our vision of its future spiritual needs.

The original 1951 edition of the *Seder Avodah* bears a dedication to Hermann and Pauline Rosenberger, cherished friends of Rabbi Max D. Klein, editor of the prayer book and rabbi of Congregation Adath Jeshurun. The fourth edition was rededicated to their daughter Rosa Rosenberger Demchick by Rosa's son Marvin and his wife Mildred.

This soon-to-be-published volume continues the *Seder Avodah* tradition and is dedicated by Marvin N. and Mildred W. Demchick whose generosity and commitment to Congregation Adath Jeshurun make this publication possible.

The revered liturgical tradition of Congregation Adath Jeshurun comprehends both word and music that are blended together to create the unique spirituality of our worship service. It reflects the development of the congregation during the century and a half of its existence.

For many decades, beginning in the late nineteenth century, the congregation used the Abodath Israel prayerbooks of Rabbi Marcus Jastrow, rabbi of Rodeph Shalom in Philadelphia, and Rabbi Benjamin Szold of Baltimore, the father of Henrietta Szold, founder of Hadassah. These slender volumes, both developed for the Reform movement, served the congregation well until 1951, when Rabbi Klein introduced *Seder Avodah*, a new *Shabbat*, festival and weekday prayerbook, and upon his retirement in 1960, a companion *Mahzor*.

The publication and adoption of *Seder Avodah* was a major step in bringing the congregation more towards the traditional liturgy, while maintaining some structural and stylistic forms that were familiar from the Abodath Israel prayerbooks. While newcomers to the congregation may see *Seder Avodah* as an abridgement of the traditional *Siddur*, it is in fact an expansion of Abodath Israel, and is best understood as a step towards tradition for the congregation, without being so jarring as to disrupt the congregation's sensibilities.

Nevertheless, *Seder Avodah* is an original work by Rabbi Klein, reflecting his individual creativity, and his vast knowledge of the variety of liturgical traditions among our people. Many innovations were borrowed from the Sephardic tradition. Some were based on *Talmudic* tradition and the early prayerbooks of ancient sages.

One of the great achievements of *Seder Avodah* was the literary quality of the English translation. In my introduction to the revised *Mahzor Seder Avodah*, I wrote:

Having used Rabbi Klein's translation, I have found it marked by a particular felicity of the English text that is pleasing to the ear and inspirational to the soul. There is a graceful poetry and elegance to it that is reverential and meaningful. It feels like prayer and is easily used in worship. There are lovely turns of phrase which touch the heart, even as its thoughtfulness stimulates the mind. The translations balance the formality we expect when we approach God in prayer and plea, with the invitation necessary to become involved. The language of *Seder Avodah* resonates with the worshiper, particularly those of us who have been using this translation in the congregation, some since its introduction forty years ago. It evokes memories that link our lives with the synagogue, our People, and each other.

This newly-revised edition of the *Seder Avodah* is a continuation of the process we began with the publication of the *Mahzor* in 2004. We had come to realize that prayerbooks that had been in use for over half a century—forty-four years when the new *Mahzor* was published, and, now, fifty-seven years with the publication of this volume—need revision and modification. As the congregation grows and new members join us, their reference is not the Abodath Israel, which to them is but a historic footnote, but the traditional liturgy of the Silverman prayerbook or *Siddur Sim Shalom*, the Conservative movement prayerbook edited by Rabbi Jules Harlow and first published in 1984.

When I became rabbi in 1978, I made a commitment to the continuity of the prayer service. Gradually, beginning in the mid-1980's, nuanced changes began to appear in the service, including inserting the *Kaddish Shalem* which is omitted in *Seder Avodah*, modifying the holiday *Torah* reading to conform with tradition, and other modest developments. It was not until 1996, that, after a long process of congregational discussion, it was decided to restore the traditional text of *Alenu* for use in public worship, perhaps the most universally notable variation in *Seder Avodah*. While the traditional text is the standard for our service today, the Klein version is presented in this *Siddur* as an alternate *nusah*.

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### **A New Seder Avodah** *(continued)*

In order to accomplish many of the recent liturgical changes, we have been incorporating paste-over pages in *Seder Avodah* that modify the liturgy and make it more in conformity with tradition. At times, responding to members of the AJ Havurah who were celebrating the *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah* of a child with the main congregation, we have used the Silverman prayerbook in our main service alongside *Seder Avodah*. As the paste-overs mounted in number, it became evident that we needed a more traditional prayerbook at this point in the congregation's history.

While the simplest solution would have been to adopt one of the "movement prayerbooks," we realized that this was not the best course for AJ. The AJ service includes prayers, rites and arrangements that are found only in *Seder Avodah*. An "off the shelf" prayerbook would itself have to be modified in order for the congregation to maintain its own liturgical integrity. Moreover, while in need of updating, the Klein translation continues to resonate with the congregation, and has a literary and devotional quality that is worthy of being preserved.

So rather than abandoning *Seder Avodah*, we decided to modify, update, and expand it. In taking that route, by modifying our existing prayerbook to establish continuity with the history of our congregation, yet at the same time embracing the established traditions of our people, we follow the same process as Rabbi Klein himself as he set out to publish *Seder Avodah* as a successor to *Abodath Israel* in 1951.

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