

Introduction

- This especially appeals to me because it has the potential to open Jewish liturgy, by intent, to include families and forebears of our congregation's members who are not Jewish. This opening up of liturgy can be humanistic, inclusive, pluralistic, and connecting. (After thousands of years of emphasizing separateness and purity through exclusiveness, now may be the time to promote inclusiveness.)
- **Using gender neutral and non-monarchic terms in prayer language**, applying principles of democracy and egalitarianism.
- **Affirming**, aloud, the true longing of one's heart, adding and gaining strength and finding comfort within the group. This is at the heart of Jewish peoplehood. I find one may acknowledge reverence and wonder and gratitude for the experiences and phenomena of life without invoking a deity and without diminishing the sanctity of the moment or the place.
- I consider these modified treatments of liturgy as design sketches, that is, they are all experimental works in process. I usually start by replacing a word in Hebrew with another that I have come across in passing or intentionally searching for in dictionaries. Revising the Hebrew text retains a significant ethnic base of our liturgy. I assume an interpretive poetic frame of mind, sometimes employing a free type of "Kabbalistic" letter/word play. (Hebrew scholars may question the propriety of some of the definitions, grammar, structure,, etc. of my work. I accept the criticism; however, at this point, fitting into the rhyme and rhythm and alliteration of the original texts, so that I can pray in my way without disrupting fellow congregants, is foremost in my approach...sometimes at the expense of readily accepted language.) Next I look at English translations, starting with what I find in *Kol HaNeshamah* and other prayerbooks.
- While I did not start with it or intend to promote it, I confess to a non-theistic bias; however there are some double entendre meanings that I welcome to soften what some may find disturbing. To have developed and affirmed this bias during this project proves to be a valuable outcome I hope to expand on later.
- For more extensive statements see future pages on **Concepts to Emphasize in Liturgy** and **Guide for Substitutions**.

Originally my intention to modify the Jewish liturgy of *Kol HaNeshamah*, the Reconstructionist prayerbook, was to support my desire to participate in congregational worship in my Reconstructionist synagogue with enthusiasm and affirmation.

As a Jew with a non-supernatural worldview I was drawn to Reconstructionist Judaism by the natural theology, and realist, humanist, democratic, principles proposed by its founder, Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan in *Judaism as a Civilization*. I wanted to join with the community, embracing Kaplan's philosophy as I understood it. However, some of the liturgy in *Kol HaNeshamah* I found to be unsatisfying. I desired connection but discovered in many cases that I was either quoting words I did not mean or standing-by in isolated silence (and resentment).

Now, experiencing the liberating and fulfilling effect of the work, I hope it also finds appeal to others in their quest to pursue roots, identity, and meaning in our Jewish civilization and culture.

Some of the principles of Reconstructionist Judaism that I try to implement here are:

- **Applying a natural non-supernatural theology** consistently in liturgy and everyday discourse. Kaplan, defined God as "the power that makes for salvation"...a process...which I restate as "the capacity to live a fulfilled life", being the best that one can be.
- **Using non-anthropomorphic non-personal gender-neutral forms** to emphasize the above point.
 - My practice is to substitute "life" or "the power life" for "God" in liturgical and other writing. Instead of "he, who, you, she, etc.," I substitute "it," or a natural human quality or action.
- **Rejecting the concept of Chosenness**, since he says there is no divine human type person who can choose a people as his own. Kaplan suggests that each self-identified religious group feels it has a special relationship with its deity; in a sense, all are chosen and have a vocation to live in accord with their groups understanding of ultimate concerns.
 - In text, I change "his..., your... people Israel, etc." to "the peoples and Israel".