

Introduction to
Mishkan HaNefesh:
Machzor for the Days of Awe

An Adult Education Curriculum

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Introduction

Mishkan HaNefesh, the new Reform *machzor*, was compiled with great care to meet the needs of the contemporary Reform Jewish community, and reflects the many changes that have occurred over the past decades. This series of lessons are meant to enable communities to explore and become familiar with *Mishkan HaNefesh*.

Mishkan HaNefesh follows the layout style and multiple option approach of *Mishkan T'filah* while introducing some significant changes from the familiar *Gates of Repentance*. Some of the biggest changes stem from the understanding that the contemporary Jewish experience is both a communal and a deeply personal spiritual journey. *Mishkan HaNefesh* aims to speak to and engage these dual desires. Traditional prayers are interwoven with contemporary literature and art: Walt Whitman, Leah Goldberg, Langston Hughes, Grace Paley, and Pablo Neruda sit next to the ancient prayers, engaging communities beyond the rote call-and-response of traditional worship – linking what is experienced in worship with experiences outside of the synagogue.

Like *Mishkan T'filah*, there is a large range of images of God, and a multivocal approach to theological ideas. There are “countertexts” that push back on the aspects of the traditional texts that use imagery or metaphors that are uncomfortable or dissonant, or that demand an unquestioning obedience to an all-powerful God.

The inclusion of meditations meant for individual reflection, as well as historical and philosophical commentary on the bottom of each page, create opportunities for personal study and exploration. Worshipers are meant to find the texts that speak to them, and create their own experience in the midst of communal worship. Original art by the acclaimed artist Joel Shapiro provides an additional opportunity for interpretation and connection.

The new faithful translations of prayers have been thoughtfully crafted with the knowledge that any translation of Hebrew is an art and not a science. The translations are based on the approach of a phrase-

by-phrase translation rather than a word-by-word translation, so that the overall sense of the Hebrew is conveyed as best as possible while maintaining a sense of the poetry and cadence of the original Hebrew.

These lessons will explore the changes and innovations in *Mishkan HaNefesh* and invite learners to find new meaning for their High Holy Days experiences. This curriculum seeks to familiarize the learners with *Mishkan HaNefesh* by inviting them to engage with the new *machzor* in comparison to other texts, as well as guiding them through the many different readings and changes to the service. *Mishkan HaNefesh* is a product of deep thought about the needs of today's Reform community. The layout, the translations, and the additional readings all reflect a desire to create a text that all worshipers can find a place for themselves within. Through their direct encounter with the new text, the learners will come to feel a level of ownership that will allow them to participate actively and meaningfully in their High Holy Days worship, no matter their different beliefs or approaches to Judaism.

Welcome to *Mishkan HaNefesh*

This first lesson will explore the Rosh HaShanah Evening service. We will compare and contrast selections from *Gates of Repentance*, *Mishkan T'filah*, and *Mishkan HaNefesh* to elucidate differences, development, and the goals of the editors. Using the *Sh'ma* as a lens to understanding these differences will help provide a familiar and comfortable backdrop for the learners. This will provide an introduction to the layout of *Mishkan HaNefesh*, as well as a view of the progress from one era of Reform liturgy to the next.

Background Materials

Rediscovering the *Sh'ma*, by Rabbi Dean Shapiro.

<http://ravblog.ccarnet.org/2014/02/machzor-blog-rediscovering-the-shema/>.

About Mishkan HaNefesh, CCAR Press.

https://www.ccarpress.org/content.asp?tid=349#mh_about.

Lesson Outline

Welcome and Personal Introductions (5–10 min.)

- The facilitator will introduce him or herself, and give an opportunity to the group to introduce themselves. A question may be asked about the individuals' most and least favorite pieces of the High Holy Days services.

Introducing *Mishkan HaNefesh* (5 min. maximum)

- Give learners a chance to thumb through the new books to familiarize themselves with the layout.

The *Sh'ma* (5 min.)

- The facilitator will lead the group through an exploration of the ways in which the *sh'ma* has been presented throughout the history of Reform prayerbooks.
- The facilitator will explain that the *sh'ma* is taken directly from Deuteronomy 6, and although in this lesson we will be referring to the short, two-line prayer as the *sh'ma*, the entire rubric of prayers from *Barchu* to *G'ulah* is also referred to as *K'riat Sh'ma*.
- Early in the Reform Movement there was a focus on returning to the *Tanach* as the central piece of Jewish practice and thought as opposed to the Talmud. Traditionally, the *T'filah* (a group of prayers found first mentioned in the *Mishnah*) was the center of communal prayer in Jewish practice, but the shift of focus from Talmud to *Tanach* led to the *sh'ma* and its blessings gaining greater prominence in Reform Judaism.
- The facilitator will explain that we will use the *sh'ma* as a lens to consider the development of Reform prayerbooks.

Guiding questions (5 min.):

- What place does the *sh'ma* hold within your mind in regards to Jewish prayer?
- Does it have a special status amongst the liturgy for you? Why or why not?
- The *sh'ma* is traditionally said in many different contexts—during prayer services, when you wake up, when you go to sleep, etc. Do you feel the context of when you are saying the *sh'ma* changes the meaning or significance?

Gates of Repentance (10 min.)

- Provide copies of *Gates of Repentance* and direct participants to p. 26.
- Ask participants to reflect on the placement and presentation of the *sh'ma* in the book.

Guiding questions:

- Where does the *Sh'ma* sit on the page?

- What does the presentation of the prayer say about its importance?
- How do you feel it reflects your relationship to the *sh'ma*?
- How does it compare to the other prayers around it?

Mishkan T'filah (15 min.)

- Provide copies of *Mishkan T'filah* and direct participants to pp. 10–11 in both the Weekday and the Complete version, pp. 114–115 in the Shabbat version, and pp. 232–233 in the Complete version.
- Ask participants to reflect on the placement and presentation of the *sh'ma* in the book. Learners should be guided to pay attention to the sublinear notes.

Guiding questions:

- How does this presentation compare to *Gates of Repentance*?
- Do you think that this change is a meaningful shift in the liturgy? Why or why not?
- Which do you prefer? Why?
- What does the presentation of this page reflect about the importance of the prayer?
- What do the sublinear notes add?

Mishkan HaNefesh (25 min.)

- Provide copies of *Mishkan HaNefesh* and direct participants to RH: pp. 26–27.
- Ask participants to reflect on placement and presentation of the *sh'ma* in *Mishkan HaNefesh*. They should also be guided to pay attention to the previous page with a poetic reading for the *sh'ma*, along with the sublinear notes and the *kavanah* before the *sh'ma*.

Guiding questions:

- How does this new presentation compare to those in *Gates of Repentance* and to *Mishkan T'filah*?
- In comparison to *Mishkan T'filah*, how is the presentation of the *sh'ma* impacted by the context of the High Holy Days?

- What do the poetic readings and the sublinear commentary add?
- What does the different presentation of the *sh'ma* say to you about its place in the service? How does this compare to the presentation in *Gates of Repentance*?
- Ask participants to compare the different *sh'ma* pages throughout *Mishkan HaNefesh*, along with the poetic/study texts that come with them. See attachment #4.
 - What changes? What stays the same?
 - Do you find the attention paid to the *sh'ma* worthwhile? Why or why not? How does it help you to feel engaged by the prayer?
 - How do the different presentations and *kavanot* affect your reading of the *sh'ma*? How is your prayer experience enriched?
 - In what ways do the paired alternative readings guide your mind towards the meaning of the *sh'ma*?

Rabbi Shapiro on the *Sh'ma* (15 min.)

- Pass out copies of Rabbi Dean Shapiro's blogpost on his experience of the *sh'ma*. <http://ravblog.ccarnet.org/2014/02/machzor-blog-rediscovering-the-shema/>.
- Read this in a small group or in pairs, and then come back together as a large group to discuss.

Guiding questions

- How does this Rabbi's experience of the *sh'ma* in *Mishkan HaNefesh* mirror yours? What does it add to your understanding of the choices made in the layout?
- How do you feel that the aesthetics of a prayerbook play into the experience of those praying from it?

Wrap-up (5–10 min.)

- The facilitator will lead the group in a closing discussion, opening the floor for final questions.

Shofarot: A New Approach

This lesson will examine a distinctive feature of Rosh HaShanah liturgy, the shofar service, and will explore the new placement and structure of this material in *Mishkan HaNefesh*. Participants will look at the meaning of the shofar calls in each section—*Malchuyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofarot*—and the personal relevance of the shofar calls.

Background Materials

“The New Reform *Machzor* and the Shofar Service, Parts I & II,” by Rabbi Edwin Goldberg.

<http://blogs.rj.org/blog/2013/04/25/the-new-reform-machzor-and-the-shofar-service/#comments>.

<http://blogs.rj.org/blog/2013/05/02/the-new-reform-machzor-and-the-shofar-service-3/>.

“Shofar History and Tradition,” by Reuven Hammer.

<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/shofar-history-and-tradition/>.

“Decoding the Shofar”, by Saadia Gaon.

<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/decoding-the-shofar/>.

“Shofar Service: Shofar as Symbol”, by Rabbi Debra Reed Blank from *Machzor: Challenge and Change, Volume 2*, CCAR, 2014

Lesson Outline

Welcome and Personal Introductions (5–10 min.)

- Ask each participant what the shofar calls mean to them when they hear it for the first time each year. Or ask them to recount a particular time they remember hearing the shofar.

Introduction to the Shofar Service (15 min.)

- This is the most distinctive part of the Rosh HaShanah morning liturgy. It is visceral and certainly gets our attention. We blow the shofar in three different sections of liturgy called *Malchuyot* (or sovereignty), *Zichronot* (remembrance) and *Shofarot* (shofarot).
- Pass out and read “Decoding the Shofar,” by Saadia Gaon (linked above). Begin with the background information on Saadia found at the bottom of the article, and also explain that he lived from 882 CE–942 CE.
- Explain that the editors of *Mishkan HaNefesh* had many challenges as they tried to imagine how best to represent Saadia’s rationales in liturgical form, especially in light of the many shifts the Shofar service has made throughout history.
- The placement of the Shofar service has changed throughout history.
 - Torah tells us simply that the shofar is sounded, not when or how to do it.
 - In early rabbinic times, we learn that the shofar was blown during the *Shacharit* (morning) service, early in the day. At some point later, this was moved to later in the day for a practical reason.

It once happened that they sounded the shofar at the beginning [of the day]. The enemy [the Romans] assumed that this was the signal for an uprising against them so they attacked and killed them. (PT Rosh HaShanah 4:8 59c) [Rabbi Reuven Hammer, “Shofar History and Tradition”, myjewishlearning.com].
 - Currently, in traditional liturgy the three shofar blessings and soundings are at the very end of the service in the *Musaf* service, which is not a normative part of Reform prayer practice.
 - The question for the editorial committee then became where to put the shofar sections and their blessings. This was a question of where to best place them in order to enhance their meaning, and to enhance the experience of the congregant in hearing and interacting with them to create a meaningful worship experience.
 - After all, “the shofar is very potent. Shofar causes things to happen for the better.” The shofar is a symbol, something seemingly without objective meaning, but it carries great significance

(Rabbi Debra Reed Blank, “Shofar Service: Shofar as Symbol”, *Machzor: Challenge and Change, Volume 2*, CCAR Press, 2014).

- Let’s see how this powerful symbol is deployed in the new *machzor*.

Investigating the Choices (20 min.):

- Divide the group of participants into three groups, and assign each group one part of the Shofar service.
- Each group should look to answer the questions:
 - What are the various meanings of the shofar in these verses?
 - According to the reading, why do we blow the shofar at this point?
 - What do we hope the shofar is doing for us? For God?
 - What does the shofar sound like at this point? (This is meant as an artistic, interpretive question.)
 - Does it fit in this part of the service? Why or why not?
 - How does it feel to hear the shofar at this point in the service?
 - How does this piece of the Shofar service respond to Saadia’s ten reasons?
- Additionally, each group should be provided with the content below based on the section that they have been assigned.

Group 1: *Malchuyot* (RH: pp. 199–207)

- This first blowing of the shofar happens just as we are getting into the heart of the prayer service during the *Amidah*, which is the center of all Jewish prayer services.
- There is a special blessing for the holy day, *K’dushat HaYom* (RH: p. 194).
 - In Your love, Eternal our God, You have given us [this Shabbat and] this Day of Remembrance; a day for the shofar’s joyful sound [remembered and cherished in our hearts]; a day of sacred assembly; a day to be mindful of our people’s going-out from Egypt.
 - Just as we bless this day, *Malchuyot* starts. It is introduced by a commentary on p. 199, readings appropriate to the theme, including verses from Torah follow.

- Read p. 199 and p. 200.
 - How is the idea of sovereignty echoed in this piece of liturgy?
- Discuss answers to these questions.

Group 2: *Zichronot* (RH: pp. 262–269)

- There is a large break between the *Malchuyot* part of the Shofar service and this next part. The Torah service has taken place in between them.
- The Torah is still out, the haftarah reading is complete. Now it is time for *Zichronot*.
 - Read the commentary on p. 262. What is the relationship between memory and shofar?
 - How do the Torah and haftarah readings relate to the theme of memory?
 - Read pp. 264–265
- Discuss these questions.

Group 3: *Shofarot* (RH: pp. 278–285)

- This part of the service comes at the end, after prayers for Israel and the congregation, and after the Torah is returned to the ark.
- It is the last of the three themed shofar sections and contains the long *t'kiah g'dolah* blast at the end.
- Translated, this title is simply the plural of shofar. The editors call it the “voice of hope” (p. 278), but what does it mean?
 - Read commentary on p. 278
 - Read pp. 280–281 [verses are in italics] (in small groups or as a whole group)
 - What are the various meanings of the shofar in these verses?
 - What does the shofar do for our forebears? The Israelites?
 - There is a hopeful tone to the shofar. What does this prayer hope that the shofar do in the future, after the world has been redeemed and repaired?
 - How can we understand this hope today (see p. 282 bottom or p. 284 for further ideas)?

- How does this section of the Shofar service fit at this point in the *Shacharit* service?
- What does the shofar sound like when it is blown this time?
- Discuss the answers.

Putting It All Together (30 min.)

- Ask groups to present their findings to the whole class.
- Lead a discussion about how the three segments fit together.
 - Do the three segments combined contain Saadia's ten reasons?
 - Now that we have a better understanding of what each segment means, what do you see the rationale being behind their new format in *Mishkan HaNefesh*?

Wrap-up (15 min.)

- Rabbi Edwin Goldberg, one of the editors of *Mishkan HaNefesh*, wrote:

The Shofar service is more than sounding the shofar. It features three themes, much like a classical sonata, which invite study and contemplation, if only there were the time. Our new *machzor* allows the time because we have altered the Shofar service in a dramatic way.

Our service takes the three themes of the Shofar service and presents them in three different parts of the service, towards the beginning, in the middle, and close to the end. The theme of God's sovereignty appears near the "coronation of God" at the beginning of the service. The theme of God's remembering appears near the Torah reading where we read that God remembers Sarah. And the theme of God's redeeming the world comes near the end of our morning prayer, when we are contemplating renewal and improvement.

When we first announced this three-part presentation of the Shofar service there was a great deal of resistance from colleagues. First of all, they argued it was not traditional. Our response was, ever since Reform Judaism took the *Musaf* service away, that argument has lost its luster. Second, some folks felt if people heard the shofar near the beginning, they would not stay for latter parts of the service (re: the sermon). Our response: "Write better sermons!"

Over all, once piloting of Rosh HaShanah began in various congregations, people have been surprised and delighted by the change. (Rabbi Edwin Goldberg, “The New Reform *Machzor* and the Shofar Service”, blogs.rj.org/blog/2013/04/25/the-new-reform-machzor-and-the-shofar-service/#comments, April 25, 2013.)

- Our Review:
 - What have you experienced in taking this deeper look at the shofar service?
 - How did you experience it differently having to take each section of the service on its own? What additional reflections did it invite?
 - What is the benefit, if any, of separating the three themes? Does it create or showcase additional meaning for the congregants?
 - What connections can you make between the three shofar sections? Are there any unifying messages that the shofar brings?
 - When the *t'kiah g'dolah* is blown at the end of the service, how might your study of the Shofar service affect its significance for you this year?

Avinu Malkeinu: ***Machzor* and Metaphor**

This lesson will explore the usage of metaphor in the Yom Kippur Evening service. We will focus on *Avinu Malkeinu*, and in particular on the idea of God as King. This traditional metaphor for God is one that is fraught with issues, discussion of which will be aided by an essay by Rabbi David Stern. We will look at how *Mishkan HaNefesh* engages these issues. We will also explore other metaphors for God used elsewhere within the Yom Kippur Evening service in the new *machzor*.

Background Material

For the Facilitator: For a short overview of the history of *Avinu Malkeinu* and an exploration of the themes and metaphors, see “*Avinu Malkeinu: Historical Background*”, by Edward Feld in *Machzor: Challenge and Change*, New York: CCAR Press, 2010, pp 7–9.

“Before the Law” by Franz Kafka.

<http://www.kafka-online.info/before-the-law.html>.

Machzor and *Malchut* by Rabbi David Stern, in *Machzor and Change, Volume 2*, New York: CCAR Press, 2014. pp. 239–244.

A Prayer of Protest, by Rabbi Rebekah Stern.

<http://ravblog.ccarnet.org/2013/01/machzor-blog-wrestling-with-god/>.

How Current Should a Prayer Book Be? by Rabbi Leon Morris.,

<http://ravblog.ccarnet.org/2012/11/how-current-should-a-prayer-book-be/>.

Lesson Outline

Welcome and Personal Introductions (5 min.)

- Ask participants to share their most and least favorite metaphor for God found in the liturgy.

Metaphor and Prayer (20 min.)

- The facilitator will begin by handing out copies of “Before the Law” by Franz Kafka as a set induction. See <http://www.kafka-online.info/before-the-law.html>.
- A quick discussion about the use of metaphor, and the location of God-metaphor, in this work will help to prime the group to think about metaphor.

Framing questions:

- What do the metaphors in this text do?
 - Why does an author use metaphor, figurative language, instead of direct references?
 - What purpose does this kind of language serve?
- The facilitator will then hand out the David Stern essay (*Machzor and Change, Volume 2*, New York: CCAR Press, 2014. pp. 239–244) to read and briefly discuss.
 - The facilitator will explain that the focus of this session will be the metaphors present within *Avinu Malkeinu*, and the different ways in which the new *machzor* makes use of metaphor within the liturgy.

Guiding questions:

- How does metaphor help one understand the goal of prayer?
- Does a bad metaphor detract from prayer more than a lack of metaphor?
- Is it possible to pray without metaphor at all? What would it look like?

Avinu Malkeinu (25 min.)

- The facilitator will lead the group in a reading of *Avinu Malkeinu* (Pick one: RH: pp. 74–77; 222–225; YK: pp. 112–115; 252–253) from *Mishkan HaNefesh*.
- Options to take turns reading around the room, break off in groups, or read frontally based on time constraints.
- Discuss *Avinu Malkeinu*, the translations, and the metaphor itself.

Guiding questions:

- How do the requests in this poem elucidate the metaphor of *Avinu Malkeinu*? If the addressee is capable of granting these requests, what does it say about the addressee?
 - How does this prayer fit within your own understanding of what prayer is and what God is?
 - What is the understanding of God that this prayer is outlining in its description? Do you think it is purely metaphor or also literal description?
- Read the poetic accompaniment, “*Avinu Malkeinu: A Prayer of Protest.*” (YK: p. 113).

Guiding questions:

- How does this shift or nuance the metaphor found within *Avinu Malkeinu*?
 - Does it add? Take away? How do you feel having read it after reading the prayer, and how do you think it would have affected your reading of the prayer had you read it before the traditional reading?
- Read Rabbi Rebekah Stern’s blogpost about the positive effects of “A Prayer of Protest.” <http://ravblog.ccarnet.org/2013/01/machzor-blog-wrestling-with-god/>.

Guiding questions:

- Does Rabbi Stern’s view on “A Prayer of Protest” reflect your own experience?
 - How does this clarify the goal of the reading?
 - What does this add to the liturgy? Does it help you to understand the impetus behind the prayer?
 - What do you think is the impetus?
- Read Rabbi Leon Morris’ blogpost, “How ‘current’ should a prayer book be?” <http://ravblog.ccarnet.org/2012/11/how-current-should-a-prayer-book-be/>.

Guiding questions

- What is the limit to what a prayer book should include?

- Do you find meaning in the alternate readings included? Do they help you to connect with the ancient prayers?
- If so, what have they elucidated for you? If not, where do you find the gap between the two?
 - Participants will break into pairs or small groups to read it over and discuss.
- Group discussion questions:
 - How does *Avinu Malkeinu* challenge you to reflect on the transcendent? What was your mind drawn to by the prayer?
 - How does humility affect your day to day life? Is it helpful to have metaphors that make you feel humble?
 - Where do the words and ideas within *Avinu Malkeinu* help you to “springboard” to?

Search the *machzor* for metaphors (15 min.)

- The facilitator will direct the participants individually, in pairs, or in groups to begin exploring the *machzor* for metaphors that they find compelling, that lead them to a sense of the transcendent, or that most bring them to a state of mind that they feel matches their sense of Yom Kippur.

Wrap-up: Share and Discuss (20 min.)

- Ask each individual, pair, or group to share what they found most compelling and explain why.
- Discuss the differences between what people chose.

Guiding questions:

- How wide was the range of metaphors found?
- How many spoke to you?
- Which did you find least inspirational?
- What do you think the impetus was behind these metaphors?
- Who do you think might find them inspirational or meaningful?
- Are there any voices you find missing? What metaphors would you add?

Sin and Forgiveness in the 21st Century

This lesson will take a close look at the *Al Cheit* and *S'lichot* prayers in the Yom Kippur *Shacharit* (Morning) Service. In particular, it will explore: 1) the idea of *cheit*, often translated as sin, 2) modern interpretations of the *Al Cheit* prayer, and 3) a *Mishkan HaNefesh* innovation of offering prayers for the good that we have done. The group will then look at the theological implications of the translation of the traditional prayer and the inclusion of new material.

Background Materials

“We Have Sinned: An Interview with Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman”, *Reform Judaism Magazine*, Fall 2013.

<http://www.reformjudaism.org/we-have-sinned>.

“Machzor Blog: To Sin or Not to Sin by Janet and Sheldon Marder”, Sept. 23, 2013.

<http://ravblog.ccarnet.org/2013/09/machzor-blog-to-sin-or-not-to-sin/>.

“Introduction to ‘A Philosophy of Faithful Translation,’” by the *Mishkan HaNefesh* Editorial Team.

https://www.ccarpress.org/getfile_contents.asp?tid=04066.

Lesson Outline

Welcome and Personal Introductions (5–10 min.)

- Ask each participant to offer a quick, immediate reaction to the word “sin”.

Introduction to the Yom Kippur liturgy. (5 min.)

- One of the most distinctive features of the Yom Kippur liturgy is the inclusion of a short and long confession, as well as a prayer calling on God to be gracious and compassionate and forgive us in all

services (except *N'ilah*, which only contains the short confession). In this lesson, we will look at the longer confession, *Al Cheit* (YK: pp. 300–306), in the *Shacharit* service and the following *S'lichot* prayer. [Participants should have access to *Mishkan HaNefesh*].

Al Cheit — Translation (15 min.)

- This long communal confession, each petition beginning *al cheit shechatanu*, for the sin we have sinned, presents challenges for a modern, liberal prayerbook. The first is in the issue of translation.
- Does the contemporary understanding of the word “sin” fit the liturgy? While the word *cheit* means sin, the sublinear note on p. 301 says:

“The Hebrew word *cheit*, often translated as “sin,” is from a root meaning “to miss the mark,” as in archery or stone-throwing. For example, we find a reference to soldiers in Judges 20:16 who “could sling a stone at a hair and not miss (*v'lo yachati*).” Many commentators have drawn important implications from the etymology of *cheit*: As with a stone thrower or archer, our intent is to aim true and to do the right thing; wrongdoing does not cause an ineradicable stain. With practice and attention, we can improve our aim and do better in the future.”

- With this in mind, read through the confession and see what the editors of *Mishkan HaNefesh* decided to do with the *Al Cheit*. [Read this prayer as you would read it in services, involving the learners in the repetition].
 - Does the English word “sin” fit the Jewish notion of wrongdoing? Why or why not?
 - What did you notice about what the editors did with the word “*cheit*?”
 - *Gates Of Repentance* always used the word “sin.” How do the translations used in *Mishkan HaNefesh* provide a different experience of this liturgy?
 - How does the translation in *Mishkan HaNefesh* affect the theology of the prayer?

Al Cheit — Poetic Material (20 min.)

- Translation is about more than just one word, however. The editors also had to think about how the meaning of prayers as a whole would get transmitted to the congregation. *Mishkan HaNefesh* has added poetic material to enhance and supplement the prayers. Now that we have read the traditional *Al Cheit* prayer, let's look at the other interpretive possibilities *Mishkan HaNefesh* has given us.
 - Work in pairs. Pick either “*Al Chet Shechatani* — A Personal Confession,” by Rabbi Rachel Barenblat (YK: p. 301) or “For the Sin,” by Rabbi Lionel Blue (YK: p. 299). Read aloud.
 - How does this work compare to the traditional prayer?
 - This work uses the word “sin.” How does that influence the meaning of the piece for you?
 - Which of the “new” sins mentioned by the work stood out for you or made you think?
 - Still in pairs, now read “On New Year’s Day,” by Yehuda Amichai (YK: p. 303) aloud.
 - What is this poem about?
 - Why is it placed in the section with *Al Cheit*? How does it relate?
 - Does this poem bring up any sins/wrongs/issues that the traditional prayer doesn’t?
 - In what ways, if any, does it enhance your understanding of confession in the Yom Kippur liturgy?
 - Reconvene and discuss answers.

S’lichot —The Other Side of Sin (20 min.)

- The confession of *Al Cheit* ends in *S’lichot* (YK: pp. 310–311), a prayer for forgiveness. At the heart of that prayer is the repetition of the thirteen attributes of God:
 - “Adonai, Adonai, God, compassionate, gracious, endlessly patient, loving, and true showing mercy to the thousandth generation; forgiving evil, defiance, and wrongdoing; granting pardon.”

- We call on God’s compassionate and forgiving nature to pardon us from the wrongs (or sins) we have committed. The editors have worked with the meaning of the word *cheit* to expand our concept of sin or missing the mark. In this section, using the additional readings, they help us reexamine our notion of forgiveness and a God who pardons.
 - In pairs, read either “It Is Not Easy to Forgive God,” by Rabbi Will Berkovitz (YK: p. 235) or “For Every Act of Goodness” (YK: p. 313).
 - How does this reading compare to the traditional prayer calling on God to forgive?
 - How do you think it fits in with the theme of this prayer?
 - What new ideas does this reading raise?
 - What is your opinion of this reading?
 - Return to the group and share answers.

A Look Behind the Scenes (20 min.)

- Rabbis Janet Marder and Sheldon Marder, editors of *Mishkan HaNefesh* write:

In all our work on the *Machzor*, we remember the tremendous variety of people who will be in our congregations, and the misdeeds they will be remembering. Those engaged in *vidui* and *t’shuvah* may include sexual compulsives who have betrayed their spouses thousands of times, wife beaters, serial rapists, soldiers who have engaged in torture, embezzlers, addicts, and child abusers – but also 13 year olds who have been rude to their parents, teased another child on the playground, made snide remarks behind a teacher’s back or cheated on a test, as well as adults who have inflated their resumes, been inattentive to an elderly aunt, received multiple speeding tickets, pilfered office supplies, neglected a friend with cancer, been ill-tempered with their spouse, failed to get to the gym often enough or paid less than their fair share of temple dues. These are certainly not admirable acts, but we hope you would agree that to describe the full range of human misdeeds by the word “sin” simply empties the word of its meaning.

We hope, in fact, to restore some sense of power to the simple English word “wrong.” There is a difference between right and wrong, and the *Machzor* wants us to remember that. So do we. (“Machzor Blog: To Sin or Not to Sin” by Janet and Sheldon Marder, Sept. 23, 2013. <http://ravblog.ccarnet.org/2013/09/machzor-blog-to-sin-or-not-to-sin/>.)

- Has the service we just studied done what the Marders hoped it would do — made room for a full range of human behavior without placing it all in one category? How?
- After study, how do you feel about their use of the word “wrong?” When do you think it is appropriate to use the word sin?
- What do you think the most effective *Al Cheit* and *S’lichot* sections would be like? Which readings would you choose if you were leading the service and why?

Wrestling with *Untaneh Tokef*

This lesson engages with one of the most challenging prayers in the *machzor*, *Untaneh Tokef*. This prayer which focuses on mortality, divine judgment, destiny, and the relationship between humanity and God is rich with opportunities for discussion. By comparing both additional readings from *Gates of Repentance* and *Mishkan HaNefesh* and translations, participants will explore the ways in which *Mishkan HaNefesh* seeks to make this difficult and central piece of High Holy Days liturgy relevant today.

Background Materials

“Machzor Blog: *Untaneh Tokef*,” by Rabbi Edwin Goldberg.
<http://wp.me/p3v0Aa-fp>.

“*Untaneh Tokef: Contemporary Challenges*,” by Dr. Rachel Mikva, from *Machzor: Challenge and Change*, CCAR Press, 2010, pp. 31–34.

Lesson Outline

Welcome and Personal Introductions (5 min.)

- Ask each participant about how they make sense of the idea of divine judgment present in the High Holy Days liturgy.

Explanation of *Untaneh Tokef* (40 min.)

- If possible, play a recording of *Untaneh Tokef*, and pass out the words in both Hebrew and English, (YK: pp. 208–216).
 - Ask each individual to reflect on the tone of the tune and the tone of the prayer, and what it evokes.
- If possible, play a recording of “Who By Fire,” by Leonard Cohen. The words are found on YK: p. 207.

- Ask individuals to reflect on the words and meaning of the song in comparison to the traditional prayer.
 - Draw attention to the line “Who may I say is calling?” —many see this as a critique of the underlying assumption that God is rendering life or death judgment based on people’s deeds alone.
- Read “Machzor Blog: *Untaneh Tokef*,” by Rabbi Edwin Goldberg. <http://wp.me/p3v0Aa-fp>.
 - Take time to go over the more challenging aspects of the article, especially the jargon and historical references that may be difficult to understand.
 - This challenge, implicit to *Untaneh Tokef*, has been dealt with in many ways by the Reform Movement.
 - *Mishkan HaNefesh* is attempting to deal with these challenges in a variety of ways.

Challenges of *Untaneh Tokef* (15 min.)

- Invite the participants to read, either individually or in pairs, Dr. Rachel Mikva’s essay “*Untaneh Tokef: Contemporary Challenges*,” from *Machzor: Challenge and Change*, CCAR Press, 2010, pp. 31–34.
- Explain the challenges of the prayer in Reform liturgy—most American Reform prayerbooks have included it in some way, but usually truncated, and sometimes only in the Yom Kippur section.
 - Why might this be? What are the merits of keeping it? What are the merits of cutting it out, in whole or in part?

Guiding questions:

- In what ways do you find the language of *Untaneh Tokef* difficult? In what ways do you find yourself struggling against it? How do you reconcile this struggle with its repetition?
- How do you relate to the words and ideas expressed in the prayer?
- What additional resources could help drive home the meaning behind the prayer?
- Which of Dr. Mikva’s ideas do you think are most important?

The Old and the New: Comparing *Gates of Repentance* and *Mishkan HaNefesh* (30 min.)

- Explain to the learners that you will now be looking at the ways in which *Gates of Repentance* attempted to elucidate the prayer for their audience, and the ways in which *Mishkan HaNefesh* has attempted to elucidate the prayer for today.
- Break into groups and have one group look at the study texts for Rosh HaShanah (*Gates of Repentance*, p 106, *Mishkan HaNefesh: Rosh HaShanah*, pp. 172–173, 175, 177, 179, 181), and one group look at the study texts for Yom Kippur (*Gates of Repentance*, p. 311, *Mishkan HaNefesh: Yom Kippur* pp. 206–207, 209, 211, 213, 215).
 - As a possible variation, have one group look at the readings for both Holy Days in *Gates of Repentance*, and one group look at the readings for both Holy Days in *Mishkan HaNefesh*, then give a presentation on the themes of the texts.
- Give the groups time to compare and contrast each reading. While reading, ask them to compare with the following questions in mind:
 - What themes are elucidated in each reading?
 - How do the *Gates of Repentance* themes compare to the *Mishkan HaNefesh*?
 - What do these texts change about your understanding of the holiday?
- Compare translations: *Gates of Repentance*, pp. 106–107, *Mishkan HaNefesh: Rosh HaShanah*, p p. 174–182.
 - What is the effect of the variation in translation?
 - What is different about the prayer? How do you relate to the two different translations?
 - What does the different translation say about the theology of the prayer?

Wrap-up (10 min.)

Guiding questions:

- What have you learned about the evolution and complexity of prayers?

- How will this help you to engage with the High Holy Days?
- How do you think *Mishkan HaNefesh* will aid in your experience during the High Holy Days?