



## “Innovation and Continuity in Liturgical Texts”

Rabbi Yoel Kahn

IJS Yom Iyun on Prayer – June 1, 2015

1301 Oxford Street - Berkeley 94709 ■ 510-848-3988 ■ [www.bethelberkeley.org](http://www.bethelberkeley.org)

### 1. Psalm 150:8

כָּל הַנְּשָׂמָה תְהַלֵּל יְהוָה הַלְלוּיָהּ

### 2. Micah Yosef Berdichevski (Ukraine and Germany, 1865-1921).

It is not you alone, or we, or those others who pray; all things pray, all things pour forth their souls. The heavens pray, the earth prays, every creature and every living thing prays. In all life, there is longing. Creation is itself but a longing, a kind of prayer to the Almighty. What are the clouds, the rising and setting of the sun, the soft radiance of the moon, and the gentleness of the night? What are the flashes of the human mind and the storms of the human heart? They are all prayers--the outpouring of the boundless longing for God.

### 3. Genesis 25:21 – 22 (Parshat Toldot)

וַיַּעֲתֶר יִצְחָק לַיהוָה לְנֹכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָהּ הוּא וַיַּעֲתֶר לוֹ יְהוָה וַתֵּהָרַר רַבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ: כִּב וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקַרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אָנֹכִי וַתֵּלֶךְ לְדָרֵשׁ אֶת־יְהוָה:

### 4. Pirkei Avot 2:18

רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן אוֹמֵר, הָיוּ זְהִיר בְּקַרְיַאת שְׁמַע (וּבַתְּפִלָּה). וּכְשֶׁאֲתָה מִתְּפִלָּל, אַל תַּעַשׂ תְּפִלָּתְךָ קִבֵּעַ, אֲלֵא רַחֲמִים וְתַחֲנוּנִים לְפָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שְׁנֵאמַר (יואל ב, יב) כִּי חֲנוּן וְרַחוּם הוּא אֲרָךְ אַפִּים וְרַב חֶסֶד וְנָחָם עַל הָרָעָה. וְאַל תְּהִי רָשָׁע בְּפָנֵי עַצְמְךָ

### 5. Isaiah 45:7

יוֹצֵר אֹר וּבוֹרֵא חֹשֶׁךְ עֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם וּבוֹרֵא רָע אֲנִי יְהוָה עֹשֶׂה כָּל אֵלֵּהּ.

### 6. יוצר אור

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךְ הָעוֹלָם, יוֹצֵר אֹר וּבוֹרֵא חֹשֶׁךְ, עֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם וּבוֹרֵא אֶת הַכֹּל.



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**7. Berakhot 11a**

מאי מברך אמר ר' יעקב א"ר אושעיא (ישעיהו מה) יוצר אור ובורא חשך  
לימא יוצר אור ובורא נוגה כדכתיב קאמרינן אלא מעתה (ישעיהו מה)  
עושה שלום ובורא רע מי קא אמרינן כדכתיב אלא כתיב רע וקרינן הכל  
לישנא מעליא

**8. Exodus 34:6-7**

יַעֲבֹר ה' עַל פְּנֵיו וַיִּקְרָא ה' ה' אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אֶרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חֶסֶד  
וְאֱמֶת: נִצֵּר חֶסֶד לְאֱלֹפִים נִשְׂא עֶז וּפִשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנָּקֶה -  
פִּקֵּד עֶז אָבוֹת עַל בְּנֵי וְעַל בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל רְבָעִים.

<sup>6</sup>The ETERNAL passed before him, and proclaimed, “The ETERNAL, the ETERNAL, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup>keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

**9. Genizah fragment Halper 174 (Center for Advanced Jewish Studies, Philadelphia)**

**10. Renaissance Italian manuscript (Biblioteca Palatina, Parma) \**



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### Early GLBTQ Texts and Their Messages

#### 11, CSZ, *Mahzor Uvarchata Bachaiyim* (1983) *God loves you*

*Hinei ma tov!* How good it is to gather, in a rainbow of affections and sexual preferences, in the house of a God who loves each of us as we are created, who loves without limit and forever. How sweet it is to gather, women and men together, in the house of a God who transcends human limits and categories.

#### 12, CBST, *Siddur B'chol Levacha* (ca. 1979) : *Hiding/visibility/liberation*

**We have left the office the store, the plant and the university, and we have eagerly prepared ourselves to greet the Shabbat, to begin our moment of rest.** (source: Rabbi Jack Reimer or similar?)

*We have come here for Shabbat, for rest not only from bread-winning, but also, for some of us, from the effort of appearing straight in a straight world, to rest from the effort of pretending to be what we are not.*<sup>1</sup>

#### 13, CBST, *Siddur B'chol Levacha* (ca. 1979) (original from a Yom Kippur reading – Rabbi Jack Reimer?)

0 God of truth and justice, the evasions and deceits we practice upon others and upon ourselves are many.

We long only to speak and to hear the truth, yet time and again, from fear of loss or hope of gain, from dull habit or from cruel deliberation, we speak half-truths, we twist facts, we are silent when others lie, and we lie to ourselves.

*As gays, we often feel forced to pretend to be that which we are not, to present ourselves in ways which are not truthful, and sometimes with outright lies.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Italic text = material which was added to make the original reading gay-specific. No one thought twice about copyright.*

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But as we stand before You, our words and our thoughts speed to One who knows them before we utter them. We do not have to tell untruths to You as we are often forced to do in the straight world. We know we cannot lie in Your presence.

May our worship help us to practice truth in speech and in thought before You, to ourselves, and before one another; *and may we finally complete our liberation so that we no longer feel the need to practice evasions and deceptions.*

### **14, CBST, *Siddur B’chol Levacha* (1979) – Mapping the gay story onto the Jewish story**

#### ***“Prayer For the Congregation and The Community”***

*Bless all gay people with liberation—men and women, young and old, those fully open as well as those deeply in hiding. May we all be granted Your blessings of freedom, liberation and equality.*

..

Bless the household of Israel wherever they dwell. Be with us here, where we worship You in freedom and liberation. May those who live under oppressive rule find release and liberty speedily, in our own day.<sup>3</sup>

As we cherish the freedom that is ours, so do we pray that those of our brothers who live in oppression find release and liberty speedily, in our own day.

### **15, Alenu variations CSZ *Kabbalat Shabbat* (1979?) : *inclusive, unspoken, God-talk, not so “Jewish”***

We are called to praise the Ruler of all things, and to magnify the Creator of all beginnings, who has made all people different, and has given us each a special destiny; who has led our souls to worship the one God of all creation, and who has formed our hearts to love in our own unique way.

It is before the God who created us, who transcends human power and human judgments, that we bow down, worship and praise.. .

And so our hope . . . is that all peoples abandon their empty worship of human bigotry, and cease the blasphemy of calling on Your Name to justify oppression and hatred. Speedily turn all hearts to you . . .

### **16, COMPARE Siddur Ha-Makom version \*Rabbi Dan Medwin)**

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<sup>3</sup> Surely a reference to Russian Jewry.



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### **17, *Mi shebeirach*, Sha’ar Zahav, ca. 1988 (Rabbi Yoel Kahn and Ritual Committee)**

May the One who blessed our ancestors, Sarah and Abraham, Rebecca and Isaac, Leah, Rachel and Jacob, bless [..... along with] all who are touched by AIDS and related illnesses. Grant insight to those who bring healing, courage and faith to those who are sick, love and strength to us and all who love them. God, let your spirit rest upon all who are ill and comfort them. May they and we soon know a time of complete healing, a healing of the body and a healing of the spirit, and let us say: Amen. [Changed to “AIDS and all life-threatening illness” (ca. 1990); “AIDS, cancer, and all life-threatening...” (after 1996)]/

### **Contemporary creativity**

#### **18, *Ma’ariv Aravim: Twilight People* (Rabbi Reuben Zellman, ca. 2004)**

As the sun sinks and the colors of the day turn, we offer a blessing for the twilight, for twilight is neither day nor night, but in-between. We are all twilight people. We can never be fully labeled or defined. We are many identities and loves, many genders and none. We are in between roles, at the intersection of histories, or between place and place. We are crisscrossed paths of memory and destination, streaks of light and swirled together. We are neither day nor night. We are both, neither, and all.

May the sacred in-between of this evening suspend our certainties, soften our judgments, and widen our vision. May this in-between light illuminate our way to the God who transcends all categories and definitions. May the in-between people who have come to pray be lifted up into this twilight. We cannot always define; we can always say a blessing. Blessed are You, God of all, who brings on the twilight.