

Empowerment, Not Police

WHAT ARE WE TO DO WITH PROBLEMATIC LITURGICAL PASSAGES?

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Avinu Malkeinu is one of the most beloved liturgical pieces of the High Holy Days, the very symbol of the Days of Awe and the spirit of the Jewish New Year. Its tune evokes ancient memories from long before we were born. The emotion in the synagogue mounts as the cantor sings the poem or chants it responsively with the congregation; and then the entire

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congregation joins together in the final verse, singing as one, expressing their collective yearning, apprehension, and profound hope.

Carried along by the wave of the haunting melody, we sometimes forget that *Avinu Malkeinu* contains some difficult challenges. Rabbi David A. Teutsch, PhD, writes:

Perhaps more than any other prayer, *Avinu Malkeinu* invokes the image of a long-bearded king sitting in judgment upon his throne. How many are the ways that this image can trouble us! Some Jews are struggling to recover from the harsh judgment of parents or peers, or from harsh self-judgments. Some are struggling to escape from the transcendent imagery of God and replace it with the divine within. Some have trouble with the maleness in the image.¹

In addition to this, *Avinu Malkeinu* is very long.² Yet, as Teutsch himself recognizes, “There is a powerful core of truth in the *Avinu Malkeinu* that transcends the trouble of [its] imagery.”³ Even liberal prayer books include it,⁴ usually altering the text to make it more acceptable for their communities.

How are we to react to discomforting, annoying, or troubling passages in our prayers? The need to confront difficult liturgical texts is fundamental to contemporary liberal Judaism. As it turns out, however, even though the challenges are contemporary, the solutions are frequently not modern at all.

Traditional Ways of Coping with Troubling Sacred Texts

Not only the liturgy but the Bible itself is the result of many centuries of creation and redaction, most of it so hidden from our eyes that we can only guess at the issues faced by its editors. For example, the stories about King David reveal indirect criticism of him, but only if we read between the lines. Rabbinic literature preserves controversies regarding certain biblical books that gained entry into the canon (e.g., Ecclesiastes and Esther) only with great difficulty, while other candidates for inclusion were passed over.⁵

Once the canon was in place, however, the Rabbis faced the further challenge of how to use it liturgically. Their approach is difficult to

discern because there were still no written prayer books and the wording of prayers was not yet completely fixed. Instead, we will try to learn from the manner in which our ancestors dealt with another sacred text, the most sacred one, the Bible. Many of its parts—the five books of Torah, the Five Scrolls, many psalms and prophetic passages—are recited as part of our liturgy. Some of them contain parts that the Rabbis deemed difficult, and they were reluctant to include certain passages in public synagogue worship. They seem to have applied various approaches to dealing with troubling biblical texts when used liturgically. Below I list six of them:

1. *They replaced them:* The Rabbis could not change the actual text in the written Bible, but they could replace problematic phrases with laundered euphemisms when they were read aloud, as we see from a comment preserved by the Tosefta (third century CE):

All offensive texts written in the Torah are to be read as praise: for example, “You shall betroth a wife, and another man shall ravish her [*yishgalenah*]” (Deuteronomy 28:30) is to be read aloud as “Shall lie with her [*yishkavenah*].” (Tosefta, Megillah 3:39)

This bold approach records two versions of a text: the written one and an oral alternative. In most editions of the Hebrew Bible both versions appear: the “tainted” word—*k’tiv* (“as written”)—appears within the text but without vowels; while a replacement that is to be read aloud—*k’rei* (“as read”)—appears in the margin. The offensive word is retained in the text but is not said aloud in public.⁶

2. *They did not translate it:* During the Torah service in the ancient synagogue the weekly portion was read aloud first in Hebrew, the language of the Torah, and then in Aramaic translation, the spoken language of the time (this custom continued until the High Middle Ages, and is still practiced in some Yemenite synagogues). Again, the Tosefta provides the relevant rule:

Some [biblical passages] are read and translated, [some are] read and not translated, [some are] neither read nor translated. (Tosefta, Megillah 3:31)

One of the examples given for a text that is read but not translated is the story about Reuven, who slept with Bilhah, his father Jacob's concubine (Genesis 35:22). This troubling story was heard in the sacred tongue that only educated members of the community understood. Its content remained unavailable for everyone else.

3. *They did not read it at all*: Sometimes the Rabbis specify texts that are “neither read nor translated.” This was not possible with the Torah, the entirety of which had to be publicly read in the course of the regular cycle.⁷ The haftarah (prophetic) readings, however, were negotiable, and the Rabbis specified some passages that were not to be selected, such as the embarrassing story of King David and Bathsheba, the married woman he watched bathing and took for himself while her husband was off in battle, fighting for him (2 Samuel 11–12). The Rabbis were embarrassed by the utterly immoral conduct of the king of Israel and probably were uncomfortable with the sexual ethics expressed in it, so they ordered this story not to be read in the synagogue at all. The change here goes beyond being read differently. The text is so discomfoting that it is removed from the public sphere completely.
4. *They explained it differently*: Another method employed by the Sages is reinterpretation, a strategy designed to remedy a portrait of biblical figures as flawed. A lengthy Gemara passage addresses several such cases, including Reuven and David:

Said Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani in the name of Rabbi Yonatan...: Whoever claims that Reuven sinned is mistaken ... [he just] disordered his father's bed and the Torah imputes [blame] to him as though he had slept with her [Bilhah].... Whoever claims that David sinned is mistaken ... David thought about doing the sinful act but didn't actually do it. (Talmud, Shabbat 55b–56b)

As we saw, the latter would never have arisen in synagogue services at all, but the former would have—at least for those who understood the Hebrew, but the same learned people who followed the reading in Hebrew might also know the Gemara's exonerating explanation of how to understand it.

5. *They juxtaposed it with other texts:* We have already seen how the Torah is read liturgically “cover to cover,” while the haftarah were chosen selectively due to many considerations, generally because of their textual or thematic connection to the Torah reading they accompany. Alternatively, the haftarah elaborates on something that was mentioned in the Torah portion, or it provides a different perspective to the Torah reading. But sometimes the haftarah challenges the Torah portion that it follows! The traditional Torah reading for Yom Kippur, for example, is a detailed description of the high priest’s service in the Tabernacle, including the slaughtering of the sacrificial offering and the sprinkling of the blood, and so forth (Leviticus 16).⁸ The Rabbis chose a prophetic reading in which Isaiah harshly criticizes the people’s precise performance of these commandments as devoid of meaning, stressing the superiority of moral conduct over empty ritual (Isaiah 57:14–58:14). The haftarah may also deflect our attention away from a difficult text by concentrating on an altogether different aspect of the Torah portion in question. In any case, the haftarah creates a stimulating dialogue with the Torah, and each teaches something about the other.
6. *They dramatized the reading to make their discomfort clear to the listeners:* Some Torah passages promise blessing in return for meritorious conduct but also curses for going astray. Two portions in particular are known, therefore, as *B’rakhot uk’lalot* (“Blessings and Curses”): *B’chukotai* (Leviticus 26:14–43) and *Ki Tavo* (Deuteronomy 28:15–68). As part of Torah, they could not be skipped, but the Rabbis cringed at reading these threats in all their horrid detail. They therefore ruled that the curses be recited rapidly and in a whisper—a clear acknowledgment that the text is problematic.

A parallel tactic utilizes the musical tropes that are employed; these too influence the way the readings are heard and understood. Special musical tropes accompany the reading of the Five Scrolls that are read on fasts and festivals. All five of them have their own melodic style: a festive chant for Ruth (on Shavuot), Ecclesiastes (on Sukkot), and Song of Songs (on Pesach); a particularly joyous sound for Esther on Purim; a mournful trope for Lamentations (on Tisha B’av, the anniversary of the Temple’s destruction). Interestingly, some verses in the scroll of Esther are recited in the

sad trope of Lamentations—for example, the listing of the vessels used in the king’s feast (Esther 1:7)—because traditionally they were believed to have been taken from the Jerusalem Temple.

These six traditional strategies deal with the public performance of difficult biblical texts. They call attention to problematic texts by replacing them or by not translating them, by refraining even from publicly reading them and by providing them with less difficult interpretations, by juxtaposing them with other texts and thus coloring their perception, or by using performative means to convey the challenges they contain. It seems that worshipers could not help but ask such things as why a particular verse was not translated, why the reader read rapidly through a section, in a whisper, and why a mournful trope was used.

It is enlightening to see that our ancestors did not seek easy solutions to the problems involved with reading the Bible publicly. Quite the contrary, they preserved the tension that they saw in the text, so that their reservations (and even their outright objections) were duly noted alongside the text within their worship.⁹ In short, all these devices are used not only to present us with a more acceptable text but also to cause us to struggle with it, to reflect on it, and to engage with it.

All the above deal with the use of the Bible in services, not in prayer books themselves. Prayer books are different, since the Bible is considered a sacred and unchangeable writ that even the most radical reformers treated it as a closed canon beyond the possibility of actual modification. The Rabbis could experiment with what and how much of it to read in services, using the strategies reviewed above, but they could not change the text they had inherited. The liturgy, however, had never been completely canonized and closed to change. It emerged in authoritative forms only in the ninth century and, indeed in many circles, is still evolving. Prayer books are much more fluid and open than the Bible. Still, we can learn from the Rabbinic devices for dealing with difficult biblical language and apply them to the liturgy as well. Keeping them in mind, let us see how some contemporary liturgists have dealt with the *Avinu Malkeinu*.

Modern Liturgical Sensitivities

In the 1960s, Jakob Petuchowski created a list of the major concerns that have animated liturgical reform through the years:

1. Abbreviation of the traditional service
2. Use of the vernacular
3. Omission of angelology
4. Toning down of particularism
5. Omission of prayers for the ingathering of the exiles and the return to Zion
6. Omission of the prayers for the restoration of the sacrificial cult
7. Substitution of the “Messianic Age” and “Redemption” for a personal messiah
8. Substitution of spiritual immortality for physical resurrection
9. Provision of variety—psalms and prayers used in the traditional liturgy on a single occasion are distributed over various occasions
10. Addition of new prayers voicing contemporary concerns¹⁰

It is obvious even from a quick glance at this list that some of the issues are still relevant today in liberal liturgy, while others have become less so. Most striking perhaps is the fact that gender-related concerns are altogether absent from Petuchowski’s list. Despite their ubiquitous presence today, the feminist critique entered liturgical discourse only in the late 1970s or early 1980s and became central only in the mid- to late 1990s.

To be sure, liberal Jewish theology already manifested some gender-related interest as early as nineteenth-century Germany, when the benediction thanking God “for not making me a woman” was omitted from the morning benedictions. Still, the search for gender-balanced language and for equal liturgical participation of women did not gain prominence until the last decades of the twentieth century. Only in the late 1970s and ’80s did women gradually appear as religious leaders and equal prayer participants in non-Orthodox synagogues of North America, and later on in Israel.

Feminists were increasingly concerned that women’s sensibility and experience be reflected in Jewish life. They hoped that women would be allowed to reshape the rabbinate and the cantorate rather than simply follow traditional male models. Most importantly, they sought to incorporate women’s voices and thoughts into Jewish liturgy and into the interpretation of classical Jewish texts.¹¹

This feminist critique generated its own list of concerns. Examples might easily come from North America, the United Kingdom, or elsewhere, but where possible I will make a point of drawing on illustrations from the exclusively Hebrew-language liturgies of Israel.

Inclusive Language When Referring to Worshipers

A Hebrew example appears in the early morning prayer that thanks God for restoring our souls: “I gratefully acknowledge...” The feminine form (*modah ani*) is juxtaposed to the male form (*modeh ani*).¹²

The Addition of Representative Female Characters

Liberal prayer books regularly began adding the names of the matriarchs (Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel) to the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) in the first blessing of the *Amidah*. Here is the version that appears in the 1991 Israeli edition of *Ha'avodah Shebalev* (my English translation in parentheses):

(Blessed are You, Adonai our God
and God of our fathers and mothers

God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,

God of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel

and Leah ...

Blessed are You, Adonai, shield of
Abraham and the One who remembers
Sarah.)¹³

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי
אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ, אֱלֹהֵי
אֲבֹרָהִם, יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב אֱלֹהֵי שָׂרָה
רַבֵּקָה, רָחֵל וְלֵאָה...
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', מְגִן אֲבֹרָהִם וּפּוֹקֵד
שָׂרָה.

In the blessing for redemption (*G'ulah*), following the *Sh'ma*, Miriam's name is often added to the name of Moses:

(Moses, Miriam and the children of
Israel exclaimed a song to You with
great joy, and they all said:

“Who is like You among the
might.”)¹⁴

מֹשֶׁה, מִרְיָם וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָךְ עָנוּ
שִׂירָה בְּשִׂמְחָה רַבָּה, וְאָמְרוּ כָלֶם:
”מִי כַמֶּכָּה בְּאֵלִים ה', מִי כַמֶּכָּה
נִאֲדָר בְּקֹדֶשׁ נוֹרָא תְהִלּוֹת
עֲשֵׂה פְלֵא”

Reclaiming and Adapting Old Rituals or Creating Altogether New Rituals and New Ritual Opportunities

At stake here is the celebration of women's experience, something more or less absent altogether in traditional liturgies composed by men, for men.¹⁵ Compared to the United States, Israeli liberal women have been

somewhat slower to adopt rituals, prayers, and services created by and for women alone, but in recent years we have witnessed several. Some reclaim old female precedents; some adapt existing rituals to female experience; some innovate completely to address women's life events.¹⁶

Among the reclaimed rituals lost in the course of history and rediscovered now are Rosh Chodesh ("new moon") ceremonies, which premodern Judaism knew as a women's holiday. Among the adapted ceremonies are egalitarian weddings, baby-girl naming celebrations, and adult bat mitzvah ceremonies. Included in the newly created rituals are practices marking life passages such as first menstruation, the beginning of a spousal relationship, becoming pregnant, experiencing a miscarriage or an abortion, undergoing fertility treatments, recovering from illness, suffering abuse, going through a divorce, reaching menopause, and many more.¹⁷

Gender-Inclusive and Gender-Balanced Metaphors of God

The most radical and controversial issue involves changes related to addressing and describing God.¹⁸ Despite the commonly accepted principle in the Jewish tradition that God has no body or physical image, we have no option but to draw on human imagination when referring to the divine. If all God's images are masculine (e.g., king, father, warrior, shepherd, judge), women are forced to approach God only from the perspective of being the excluded "other."¹⁹ Feminists have therefore called for creative reformulation of the male-centered "God-language." In English (and to a lesser extent in other European languages) it is relatively easy to avoid referring to God in gendered language, since the pronoun *He* can be easily changed to *God* without any further syntactical changes in the sentence, but in Hebrew the task is far more difficult, because all nouns, verbs, and adjectives are gendered.²⁰

Avinu Malkeinu typifies the problems feminists face. It is the quintessential High Holy Day statement of God as loving parent (with whom we may be intimate) and just ruler (who evokes awe and wonder). But it employs decidedly male-centered metaphors. No wonder, then, that *Avinu Malkeinu* has become a center of attention for contemporary liturgists and worshipers alike. Evidence of the growing interest in gender issues in the last few decades can be discerned from *Gates of Forgiveness*, a collection of meditations and *Selichot*, the penitential service in preparation for the Days of Awe, created by the North American Reform Movement. The 1980 edition reads:

Our Father, our King, be gracious
and answer us...²¹

... אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ, חַיָּנוּ וְעֲנֵנוּ

The later edition, from 1993, changes both the Hebrew and the translation to gender-balanced language

Our Father, our *Mother*, be gracious
and answer us...²²

... אָבִינוּ אִמֵּינוּ [!], חַיָּנוּ וְעֲנֵנוּ

The revised version sacrifices the king imagery (*malkeinu*) in favor of addressing both “our father” and “our mother.” The Hebrew, however, proved more difficult to reconstruct. Given the need to have gendered grammar throughout the sentence, it retains masculine grammatical forms in what follows. University of Worcester professor Luke Devine explains, “Masculine imagery is tolerated [in Reform liturgy], but only (it seems) when it is immediately counterbalanced by feminine language.”²³

Let us now survey different approaches to *Avinu Malkeinu* in liberal liturgies as a test case for dealing with challenging texts.

No More *Avinu*?! No More *Malkeinu*?! Contemporary Treatments of the Poem

As mentioned above, *Avinu Malkeinu* is problematic in at least four aspects: length, gender, penitential rhetoric, and the images of God.

The North American Reform *machzor Gates of Repentance* (1978) contains a shortened version of *Avinu Malkeinu* and moves the penitential verse “We have sinned before You” from the beginning to a later point in the prayer, where it may not be quite as noticeable; but it does not seem to be disturbed either by the idea of kingship or by the masculine imagery—it simply translates, “Our Father, our King.”²⁴ It thereby represents, along with the 1980 edition of *Gates of Forgiveness* (mentioned above), the era just before gender-related issues became central for editors of progressive liturgies. I will turn below to contemporary American Reform liturgy.

The editors of *Kavanat Halev*, the Israeli Reform *machzor* (1989), chose a multifaceted approach: they kept *Avinu Malkeinu* but coupled it with two more poems (reproduced in appendix B). The first is a short version of the Sephardi hymn *Eloheinu Shebashamayim* (“Our God in Heaven”), referring to God in a gender-neutral voice. The second is an

offering composed especially for the *machzor* by Rabbi Yehoram Mazor, *Shekhinah M'kor Chayeinu* (“*Shekhinah*, Source of Our Lives”), which addresses God in feminine language and refers to God’s caring and nurturing aspects. Prayer leaders can choose among the options. In addition, the alternatives are available for congregations who follow tradition in omitting *Avinu Malkeinu* on Shabbat.²⁵

More recent progressive *machzorim*—those published after the era of *Gates of Repentance*—address the gender aspects of *Avinu Malkeinu*. The *machzor* of British Liberal Jews, *Machzor Ruach Chadashah* (2003), maintains the traditional Hebrew but provides a translation that tones down both the masculine and the royal imagery: “Our Creator, our Sovereign.” In addition, it provides a supplication about the *Shekhinah*, the presence of God that is feminine both in nature and in grammar.²⁶ The draft of the new British Reform *machzor Forms of Prayer* (2014) includes four versions of the text. Two are shorter forms of the traditional text, and the third is the Sephardic penitential hymn *Eloheinu Shebashamayim* (“Our God in Heaven”), a gender-neutral text that appears in a shorter version in the Israeli Reform *machzor* (see appendix B). The last, and most innovative, version contains an alphabetic acrostic of God’s many attributes. The author, Rabbi Paul Freedman, explains:

In order to emphasize that “*avinu*” and “*malkeinu*” are but two of the varied images that we may use in speaking to and of God, the version offers a wider range of epithets based on biblical and rabbinic sources.

The alphabetical acrostic reminds us that even this remains a limited selection. The acrostic structure begins with the two familiar masculine images but centers on the *Sh'khinah*, the feminine divine presence, dwelling, hidden in our midst.²⁷

And indeed the line “God [= *Shekhinah*] who dwells among us, our Everpresent Hope, renew this year for us as a good year” is located in the middle of the poem and serves as an axis from which the entire text expands (see the entire poem in appendix B).

Let us now explore contemporary North American liturgies. The American Reconstructionist *machzor Kol Haneshamah* (1999) provides a commentary (cited above) by Rabbi David A. Teutsch, PhD, specifying the problematic nature of the poem. He concludes, however:

Despite these very real difficulties, there is a powerful core of truth in the *Avinu Malkeinu* that transcends the trouble many of us have with its imagery [...] chanting the *Avinu Malkeinu* reminds us of the standards by which we ought to judge ourselves.²⁸

Kol Haneshamah then provides four alternatives. The first is the traditional Hebrew text with a gender-neutral translation:

Our creator, our sovereign, we have done wrong in your presence. ²⁹	אָבִינוּ מְלֻכְנוּ חָטְאָנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ
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The second is *A Woman's Meditation* by Ruth Brin, which acknowledges the limitations of any image of God: “But I am a woman, not a slave, not a subject, not a child who longs for God as a father or mother.... God is far beyond what we can comprehend.”³⁰ The third is an alternative version, which changes the first words in every stanza—for example:

Our Source, our God, we have done wrong in your presence. ³¹	מְקוּרְנוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ חָטְאָנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ
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Finally, *Kol Haneshamah* concedes, “Many other versions can be constructed to reflect different theological outlooks and ethical concerns.”³² It encourages the worshipers to create their own version by selecting a word from each column to create their own introductory phrase:

I	
Our mother	אִמָּנוּ
Our God	אֱלֹהֵינוּ
Our source	מְקוּרְנוּ
Our creator (literally, father)	אָבִינוּ
Our presence	שְׂכִינָתֵנוּ
II	
Our queen	מְלַכְתָּנוּ
In heaven	שְׁבַשְׁמַיִם
Our crown	עֲטֻרָתֵנוּ
Our presence	שְׂכִינָתֵנוּ
Our sovereign ³³	מְלֻכְנוּ

The creators of this *machzor* aimed to provide a rich liturgical language for a diverse audience with a spectrum of needs.

The American Conservative *Mahzor Lev Shalem* (2010) cites the entire traditional poem both in Hebrew and in English, but instead of an English translation, it simply transliterates the Hebrew *Avinu Malkeinu*. An accompanying commentary emphasizes the liturgical centrality of the poem and the paradox of describing God as close and caring on one hand and distant and transcendent on the other. The commentary acknowledges that the images of “father” and “sovereign” that were so central to our ancestors “may not have the same resonance for us” and offers an alternative version “featuring a variety of imagery” along with the idea that “its alphabetical listing conveys the idea that we grasp the ineffable God through an infinite number of images.”³⁴

Interestingly, *Mahzor Lev Shalem*’s Israeli Conservative (Masorti) counterpart, *Machzor Pote’ach Sha’ar* (2013), offers no special treatment of *Avinu Malkeinu* and settles for the traditional text alone.

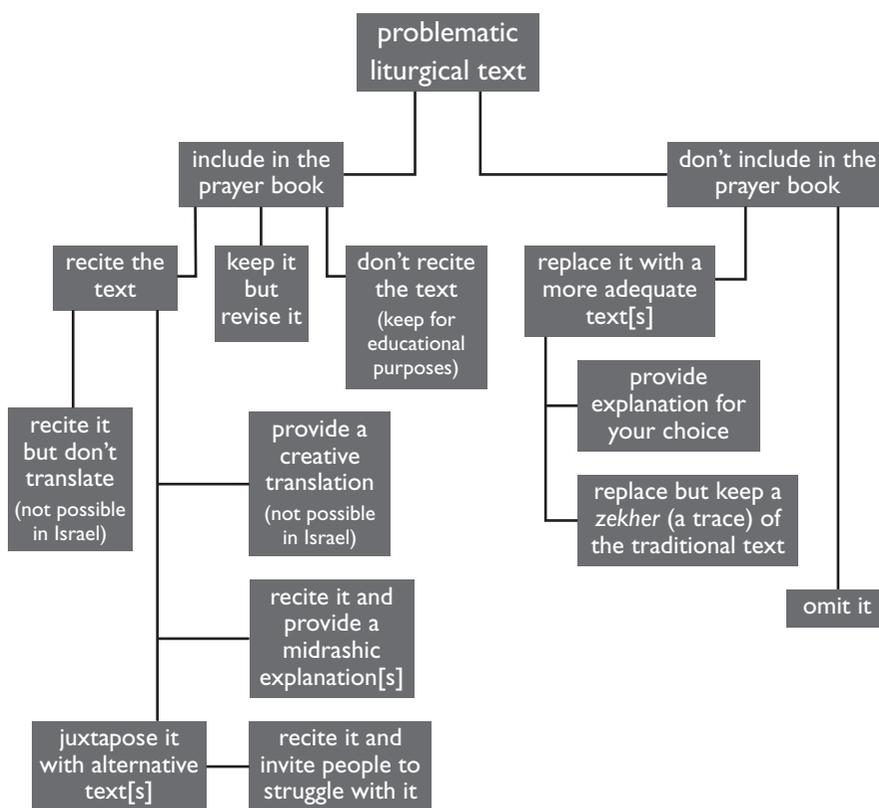
Mishkan HaNefesh, the new North American Reform *machzor* (still in process), provides a shorter version of the traditional *Avinu Malkeinu* and (like the Conservative *machzor*) transliterates the terms *avinu* and *malkeinu* rather than translates them. The translation appears only in a footnote.³⁵ Additionally, the Reform *machzor* provides a wide variety of alternative readings and meditations addressing God with various metaphors. The concluding service of Yom Kippur, for example, suggests a prayer called “Soul Sustainer, Source of Our Life.” Other prayers use the transliterated terms *avinu* and *malkeinu* with altogether novel content (see an example in appendix B).

The Jewish Renewal Movement is known for its openness to creating new liturgies and to reshaping old ones. Unlike the Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Movements, Renewal is not an organized movement with a single official liturgy; nonetheless, the Renewal *machzor* published in 2014 by Rabbi Burt Jacobson of Kehilla Community Synagogue (Oakland, California) can serve as one example of many. It provides four sets of repeating metaphors that are used throughout the text. After the traditional address (making it the only contemporary liberal version that explicitly translates *Avinu Malkeinu* as “Our Father, our King”), it adds, “Our Mother, our Queen,” “Our Source and our Destiny,” and “Our Guide and our Truth.” In addition, the entire content of the prayer is recomposed primarily as requests for wisdom (see the full text in appendix B).

The liturgy of the only Israeli congregation affiliated with Jewish Renewal, Jerusalem’s Nava Tehila, led by Rabbi Ruth Gan Kagan, provides the entire traditional text, but the address to the divine alternates between the traditional masculine *avinu malkeinu* and the feminine *imeinu shekhinateinu* (“our mother, our *Shekhinah*”).³⁶

In short, progressive liturgies today all recognize *Avinu Malkeinu* as necessary but offer a variety of solutions to the challenges it presents. Some offer commentaries, some prefer multiple versions or euphemistic translations that tone down the male-centered language of the text, some expand the liturgical imagery to include diverse addresses to God. Most provide several options—especially the Reconstructionist *Kol Haneshamah*, which is most explicit regarding the “do-it-yourself” opportunity for worshipers to create their own personal versions.

If we were to generalize from the specific question of *Avinu Malkeinu* to an overall understanding of the ways progressive Jews deal with difficult liturgical texts, we would find the various options captured in the following flow chart.



My preference is to be both as faithful to the traditional text and as creative as possible when it comes to our liturgy—I turn to this next.

A Balanced Approach to Difficult Liturgical Texts

The great Rabbinic revolution of the first centuries of the Common Era transformed sacrificial worship into prayer—in effect, in the absence of the Jerusalem Temple, a personal offering made directly to God without the mediation of priests and Levites. There was this further difference as well: sacrificial worship required precision in its performance but no intentionality of the mind (*kavanah*), whereas prayer demanded it. The ancients considered the heart as the organ of understanding and moral judgment—like our “mind”—and the Talmud ruled, *Rachmana liba ba’ei*, “The merciful One desires the heart” (Sanhedrin 106b). Praying as a mere behavioral act is not without worth, but it is a far cry from experiencing the profound depths prayer and all that praying has to offer.

The nineteenth century initiated a second liturgical revolution that is still under way: the reformation of Judaism in light of Enlightenment ideals. This second revolution stressed the role of understanding even more than the first one. Its originators, the rabbis we now call the classical Reformers, maintained that Judaism is a rational set of concepts that Jewish liturgy formulated into a proclamation of faith.³⁷ Its prayers must, therefore, speak the truth!

Worshippers today are not as doctrinaire as the classical Reformers. They do not demand that the liturgy conform to strict theological concepts or have a quest for ultimate truths. Many yearn to find meaningful and touching prayer, prayer that provides a cozy sense of comfort and a sense of *meaning*.

There is something to be said for both claims. We hardly want to recite a liturgy that strains credulity, and it is not too much to expect that prayer should comfort us and not tax us further than the world already does. But taken to its extreme, the notion that we may do anything we like to the liturgy may be the epitome of self-indulgence; it retards the demand that human beings struggle with challenge. What we call creativity can sometimes actually be laziness of mind or an unwillingness to grapple with ideas that we find unpalatable.

Liturgical innovation may entail creating new texts and deleting old ones, but it should not deprive us of the opportunity to encounter

ancient texts with fresh eyes. To be sure, there are offensive elements in our liturgy that we should not tolerate (blessing God for not creating the worshiper a woman or a gentile, for example). But sometimes we need to have more patience, to read our prayers as the Midrash reads the Torah, by questioning it but then enlarging its possibilities, deepening our understanding of what it says to us and living with the problematic aspects of it.

It is no easy matter deciding which of these two alternatives best fits any given case of liturgical concern. But that is precisely the task of liturgical editing: trying one's best to make that distinction and to make liturgical choices cognizant of the great responsibility inherent in this task for contemporary as well as past and future generations of Jews.

We Are Called *Israel* for a Reason—We Struggle!

Sometimes revealing the difficult aspects of our tradition is much more authentic, educational, stimulating, and engaging than suppressing them or covering them over with new words or a laundered translation. The “cleansed” text may be momentarily gratifying but lack the gravity and richness of a liturgy that is necessarily messy and unruly, given its centuries-long evolution. We can, of course, simply eliminate our difficult texts. But we might also include them for educational purposes (but not recite them aloud), add short explanations of the context in which they were composed, add substitutes side by side from which people may choose, or append an empowering commentary that adds new meaning to old words. As we saw above, all these methods were employed at one time or another by our ancestors.

True creativity is the skillful and artistic combination of old and new produced by trying to breathe new meaning into challenging texts instead of always dispensing with them. When it comes to gender questions, we should avoid the temptation to become gender police, who automatically replace every difficult image with an acceptable alternative. Sometimes acknowledging a difficulty and facing it is more honest, useful, and transformative than merely covering it over.

Now that we have become aware of the harsh inequities faced by women throughout the generations, we inevitably see the world through gender glasses. Politics, economics, family life, and religion—none of these will ever look the same again. In day-to-day affairs we remain

wholeheartedly committed to uproot inequality and discrimination based on gender (and, of course, race, religion, class, and age as well). But the issue of gendered liturgical language, which is in and of itself symbolic speech, is more nuanced. Hebrew speakers are particularly aware of this because the Hebrew language of the prayer book is also the language of the street, and in Hebrew (as we saw) every noun, pronoun, verb, and adjective comes gendered as either masculine or feminine; Hebrew speakers know better than to think that we can aspire to total linguistic equality.³⁸ This is true, at least to some extent, of many European languages as well.

English, of course, is different. There we can indeed be more thorough in rendering language more egalitarian, but not without a cost, since English syntax does require the pronouns “him” or “his” when referring back to a gender-indefinite subject, and the various ways of circumventing that rule are not very satisfying. It is commonplace nowadays, for example, to substitute the plural third-person pronoun “their” even for a single subject, as in “A teacher should keep order in *their* classroom.” But the practice is jarring. In some essays authors alternate “his” with “her,” but that strategy is not easily applied to liturgy.

Consider the traditional sentence “May God quickly bring about his kingdom.” We can change “kingdom” to “rule,” but what do we do with “his”? We cannot say “their” obviously, nor can we easily render it “her” just because a few lines back we said “his.” Many editors settle for repeating “God”—“May God quickly bring about God’s kingdom”; but that is clumsy, at best. There are other solutions, too—I do not mean to exhaust them all—but I hope my point is clear. Even English does not easily allow complete eradication of non-egalitarian linguistic formulas, simply because it, too, is gendered to some extent.

For me, the mere fact that we acknowledge gender liturgical inequality is often sufficient. We hardly have to rewrite our entire prayer book, in a Soviet *Pravda* style that demands wholesale excision of every image we do not like. Do we really need (and can we really even achieve) systematic deletion of any use of the pronoun “He” or every reference to God as “father” or “king” in order to pledge allegiance to gender equality?

By analogy, I am reminded of my experience with some hostile Israeli interviewers who do not want to recognize me, a woman, as a rabbi and a scholarly authority. I insist that they publicly introduce me as “rabbi” and “professor” (much harder with the former than the latter),

but once they have done so, they may just call me Dalia—I do not need them to repeat the titles again and again. So too, with liturgy: once we demonstrate allegiance to gender inclusivity we need not exercise it every time we encounter a noun or an adjective that might prove troubling. Retaining the traditional language does not necessarily vitiate our commitment to egalitarianism, and it may add depth to our liturgy by paying homage to our liturgical roots as well.

Our liturgy presents us with a rich and complicated literary world but only if we are open to a flexible understanding of liturgical metaphors. *Avinu Malkeinu* is the quintessential example. Although it is a difficult text for many (for all the reasons specified above), preserving it and struggling with it may take us to a palpable world of vivid imagery. It invites us to be symbolically present on that day in the drought-stricken Galilee when the usual liturgy did not produce rain and Rabbi Akiva arose to cry out, “*Avinu malkeinu*, we have sinned before You. *Avinu malkeinu*, we have no king other than You” (Talmud, Ta’anit 25b). It invites us to encounter countless generations of Jews turning brokenhearted to their heavenly father and king in times of trouble and despair, pleading for mercy. Its very familiarity opens a window onto a small rural community in Yemen, the first synagogues in the “New World,” or an old Jewish community in the Old City of Jerusalem; it takes us by the hand to our own early childhood and our first shul experiences.

Our liturgy is like a precious and somewhat cryptic letter delivered to us from generations past. It is ours to own, to rework, to expand, or to change but, in any case, to cherish and to pass on with great care to our children.

The desire to impose theological consistency on our prayer books is not only inappropriate; it is also impossible. Liturgy is, by definition, an unruly and unsystematic construction, created over the course of two millennia and still being renewed by numerous people in various countries and cultures. We must not ignore or dissolve the liturgy’s inconsistencies. Its very messiness is its strength; we must celebrate its diversity!

We must always move in two directions simultaneously: from and toward our tradition. In order to do so and to make truly informed choices,

however, we need to be informed. Liberal Jews do not have the privilege of hiding behind statements like “This is what my grandfather always did,” “This is what the rabbi says,” or “This is what the *Shulchan Arukh* demands.” We need to be learned enough to make reasonable choices and not run away from religious freedom; the freedom to deviate from such authorities forces us to confront responsibility. It defines the very Jewishness we treasure!

The liturgy is one of the important arenas in which Jews struggle to find meaning in their lives. We will not and cannot be gender blind. We cannot hope to achieve total gender balance or inclusion in the liturgy, but we must remain gender conscious and promote greater equality.

We are called “the people of Israel” after Jacob, our ancestor, who wrestled with an angel and was told, “Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed” (Genesis 32:29).

Our very name teaches us that our tradition values struggle—not easy accommodation or acceptance, and certainly not a desire simply to *feel good*. The Jewish way is to grab on to difficult issues and deal with them; to avoid dogmatic thinking and to realize that if reality itself is messy and unruly, so too is our liturgy!

Feel-good Judaism may be pleasant and cozy, but when it is the primary consideration, it can also be boring and unengaging. Sometimes we want our prayer to be like our old worn slippers, comfortable and shaped to our feet. But occasionally we need to change into sneakers and run breathlessly for the extra mile. Sometimes, too, we want to wear our fancy and a-little-too-tight ballroom shoes and pray with elegance. And at other times still, we have to approach prayer in just our bare feet, willing to experience the liturgy just as it is with all that it has to offer, without barriers.³⁹



Appendix B

*Alternatives to Avinu Malkeinu**

Rabbi Dalia Marx, PhD

From Israel: *Kavanat Halev*, Reform, 1989

After the traditional *Avinu Malkeinu*, the following two poems appear.¹

**Eloheinu Shebashamayim:
Our God in Heaven (Selections
from a Sephardic Piyyut)**

Our God in heaven, hear our voice
and willingly accept our prayer.

Our God in heaven, remember
your covenant and do not
forget us.

Our God in heaven, we seek You,
reveal Yourself to us.

אלהינו שבשמים

אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמַיִם שְׁמַע קוֹלֵנוּ
וְקַבֵּל תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ בְּרִצּוֹן.

אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמַיִם בְּרִיתְךָ זְכוֹר
וְאַל תִּשְׁכַּחֵנוּ.

אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמַיִם דַּרְשָׁנוּךָ
הַמְצֵא לָנוּ.

* We cited the following works as they appear in their original sources. This concerns text, spelling, and punctuation.

1. *Kavanat Halev* contains another poetic alternative version for *Avinu Malkeinu* by Rabbi Motti Rotem.

Our God in heaven, have mercy upon us and our infants and children.

Our God in heaven, purify us from our sins.

Our God in heaven, inscribe us in a book of sustenance and good providence.

Our God in heaven, fulfill the desires of our heart for good.

Our God in heaven, redeem us from our foes.

Our God in heaven, justify us in your judgments.

Our God in heaven, bring the day of redemption near to us.

Our God in heaven, bring us near to your service.

Our God in heaven, see the affliction of your people Israel.

Our God in heaven, heal the sick among your people Israel.

Our God in heaven, grant peace on earth.

Our God in heaven, we call and You shall answer.

אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים חֲמַל עָלֵינוּ וְעַל
עוֹלָלֵנוּ וְטִפְנוֹ.
אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים טַהַרְנוּ מֵעוֹנֵינוּ.
אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים פְּתַבְנוּ בְּסֶפֶר
מְזוֹנוֹת וּפְרִנְסָה טוֹבָה.
אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים מְלֵא מִשְׁאָלוֹת
לְבָנוּ לְטוֹבָה.
אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים פְּדוּנוּ מִיַּדִּי
אִיְבָיִנוּ.
אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים צַדִּיקְנוּ
בְּמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ.
אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים קָרַב לָנוּ יוֹם
הַיְשׁוּעָה.
אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים קָרְבָנוּ
לְעִבּוֹדְתֶךָ.
אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים רְאֵה בְּעֵינֵי
עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל.
אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים רַפָּא חוֹלֵי
עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל.
אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים תֵּן שְׁלוֹם
בְּאָרֶץ.
אֱלֹהֵינוּ שְׁבַשְׁמִים נִקְרָא וְאַתָּה
תַּעֲנֵה.

**Shekhinah M'kor Chayeinu:
Shekhinah, Source of Our Lives
(Rabbi Yehoram Mazor)**

Shekhinah, source of our lives—
hear our voice, have mercy and
compassion upon us.

Shekhinah, source of our lives—
remember that we are your
sons and daughters.

Shekhinah, source of our lives—
help us to acknowledge our
limitations.

Shekhinah, source of our lives—
guide us on pleasant paths.

Shekhinah, source of our lives—
teach us compassion and
righteousness.

Shekhinah, source of our lives—
act for those who struggle for
peace and justice.

Shekhinah, source of our lives—
turn our sorrow to joy and our
grief to gladness.

Shekhinah, source of our lives—
bless our soil and all the works
of our hands.

Shekhinah, source of our lives—
gather your children from the
four corners of the land to their
borders.

Shekhinah, source of our lives—
complete the restoration of
Jerusalem, our Holy City.

**שכינה מקור חיינו
(הרב יהורם מזור)**

שְׂכִינָה מְקוֹר חַיֵּינוּ —

שְׁמָעֵי קוֹלֵנוּ חוֹסֵי וְרַחֲמֵי עָלֵינוּ.

שְׂכִינָה מְקוֹר חַיֵּינוּ —

זְכְרֵי פִי בְּנִיךָ וּבְנוֹתֶיךָ אֲנַחְנוּ.

שְׂכִינָה מְקוֹר חַיֵּינוּ —

חַנּוּכֵי אוֹתָנוּ לְהַפִּיר בְּמַגְבְּלוֹתֵינוּ.

שְׂכִינָה מְקוֹר חַיֵּינוּ —

הַדְרִיכֵי אוֹתָנוּ בְּדַרְכֵי נְעָם.

שְׂכִינָה מְקוֹר חַיֵּינוּ —

לְמַדֵּי אוֹתָנוּ רַחֲמִים וְצַדִּיקָה.

שְׂכִינָה מְקוֹר חַיֵּינוּ —

עֲשֵׂי לְמַעַן הַנְּאֻבְקִים לְשָׁלוֹם וּלְצַדִּיק.

שְׂכִינָה מְקוֹר חַיֵּינוּ —

הַפְּכֵי אֲבָלֵנוּ לְשִׂשׁוֹן וּיְגוּנָנוּ לְשִׂמְחָה.

שְׂכִינָה מְקוֹר חַיֵּינוּ —

בְּרַכֵּי אֲדָמָתָנוּ וְכֹל מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵינוּ.

שְׂכִינָה מְקוֹר חַיֵּינוּ —

קַבְּצֵי בְּנִיךָ וּבְנוֹתֶיךָ מֵאַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת

הָאָרֶץ לְגְבוּלָם.

שְׂכִינָה מְקוֹר חַיֵּינוּ —

הַשְׁלִימֵי בְּנֵינָ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר קְדְשֵׁנוּ

From the UK: *Forms of Prayer* (Draft Edition), Reform, 2014

Avinu Malkeinu

Rabbi Paul Freedman, *Forms of Prayer: Erev Rosh Hashanah Machzor*, Draft Edition (London: 2014), 81–82.

מִלְּפָנֶיךָ חָטְאָנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ.	אָבִינוּ
סוּמְכָנוּ, הִחְזִירָנוּ בְּתִשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה לְפָנֶיךָ.	גּוֹאֲלָנוּ
פְּאָרְנוּ, הָרֵם קֶרֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמָּךְ.	הוֹדְנוּ
קוֹנְנוּ, מְחֹק בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ כָּל־שְׂטָרֵי חוּבוֹתֵינוּ.	זוֹכְרָנוּ
שׁוֹמְרָנוּ, סֵלַח וּמַחֵל לְכָל־עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ.	טְהוֹרָנוּ
תִּקְוֹתֵנוּ, חֲדָשִׁי עָלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה.	שְׂכִינָתֵנוּ
רוֹפְאָנוּ, שְׁלַח רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה לְחוּלֵי עַמָּךְ.	יוֹצְרָנוּ
צוֹרְנוּ, זְכוֹר כִּי עָפַר אָנַחְנוּ.	חוֹסְנוּ
עֲזָרְנוּ, אֵל תְּשִׁיבֵנוּ רִיקָם מִלְּפָנֶיךָ.	וְתִקְנוּ
נוֹטְרָנוּ, כָּל־צָר וּמִשְׁטֵיִן מֵעָלֵינוּ.	דוֹרְשָׁנוּ
לְבוּבָנוּ, עֲשֵׂה לְמַעַנְךָ אִם לֹא לְמַעַנְנוּ.	בוֹרְאָנוּ
אָבִינוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ חָנְנוּ וְעַנְנוּ, כִּי אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים, עֲשֵׂה עִמָּנוּ צְדָקָה וַחֲסֵד	וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ.

א"מ Our Father, our King, we have sinned before You.

ג"ס Our Redeemer who supports us, help us to return to You in complete repentance.

ה"פ Our Crown and Glory, raise the honour of Your people Israel.

ז"ק You who remember us, having created us, in Your abundant mercy, wipe out all records of our sins.

ט"ש Perfect One who watches over us, pardon us and forgive all our iniquities.

כ"ת God who dwells among us, our Everpresent Hope, renew this year for us as a good year.

י"ר You who formed and heal us, bring true healing to our sick.

ה"צ Our Strength, our Rock, remember that we are but dust.

ו"ע Ancient One who continues to be our Help, do not send us away empty from Your presence.

ד"נ You who seek us out and protect us, keep us safe from all trouble and persecution.

ב"ל Our Creator, our Beloved, act for Your sake if not for ours.

Avinu Malkeinu, answer us with Your grace, for we lack good deeds; deal with us in charity and love, and save us.

**From North America: *Mahzor Lev Shalem*,
Conservative, 2010**

Avinu Malkeinu: Alternate Version

Rabbi Edward Feld, reprinted with the permission of The Rabbinical Assembly from *Mahzor Lev Shalem* (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2010), 93–94.

Avinu Malkeinu, we have sinned in Your presence.

Our creator, who blesses us, we have no sovereign but You.

Our redeemer, who guards us, act kindly toward us in accord with Your name.

You who seek us out and sustain us, make this new year a good one for us.

You who are our glory, our savior, annul every harsh decree against us.

Ancient One, our rescuer, nullify the designs of our foes.

Provider, our refuge, rid Your covenanted people of disease, war, hunger, captivity, and destruction.

You who are our strength, who gives us life, rid us of every oppressor and adversary.

You who purify us and have mercy on us, forgive and pardon all our sins.

אָבִינוּ מִלְּפָנֶינוּ! חָטְאָנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ.

בּוֹרְאֵנוּ מְבָרְכֵנוּ,

אֵין לָנוּ מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹהֵי אֶתְּךָ.

גּוֹאֲלֵנוּ מִשְׁמֵרְנוּ,

עֲשֵׂה עִמָּנוּ לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ.

דּוֹרְשָׁנוּ מִפְּרִנְסָנוּ,

חֲדַשׁ עֲלֵינוּ שָׁנָה טוֹבָה.

הוֹדִינוּ מוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ,

בְּטֵל מֵעֲלֵינוּ כָּל־גְּזֵרוֹת קָשׁוֹת.

וְתִיקְנוּ מִפְּלִטָנוּ,

בְּטֵל מִחֲשָׁבוֹת שׁוֹנְאֵינוּ.

זַנְנוּ מְנוּסָנוּ,

כִּלְהַ דְּבַר וְחָרַב וְרָעַב וְשָׁבִי

וּמִשְׁחִית עוֹן וּשְׂמֵד מִבְּנֵי בְרִיתְךָ.

חוֹסְנוּ מִחַיֵּינוּ,

הַפֵּר עֲצַת אוֹיְבֵינוּ.

טְהוֹרְנוּ מִרַחֲמָנוּ,

סְלַח וּמַחֵל לְכָל־עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ.

*You who form us and instruct us,
return us to Your presence, fully
penitent.*

You who establish us and provide
for us, send complete healing to
the sick among Your people.

*You, our beloved, who raised us,
remember us favorably.*

Avinu Malkeinu, inscribe us for
good in the Book of Life.

*Avinu Malkeinu, inscribe us in the
Book of Redemption.*

Avinu Malkeinu, inscribe us in
the Book of Sustenance.

*Avinu Malkeinu, inscribe us in the
Book of Merit.*

Avinu Malkeinu, inscribe us in
the Book of Forgiveness.

Our protector and savior, cause
our salvation to flourish soon.

*Our support and rescuer, cause
Your people Israel to be exalted.*

Our helper, who listens to us, hear
our voice, be kind, sympathize
with us.

*Our redeemer, who watches over
us, accept our prayer, willingly and
lovingly.*

Our fortress, who is our refuge, do
not send us away empty-handed.

*Holy One, who justifies us,
remember that we are but dust.*

Merciful One, who gives us life,
have compassion for us, our infants,
and our children.

יוֹצְרֵנוּ מִלְּמַדְנוּ,
הַחֲזִירְנוּ בְּתִשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה לְפָנֶיךָ.
כּוֹנְנֵנוּ מִכְּלַפְלָנוּ,
שְׁלַח רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה לְחוּלֵי עַמֶּךָ.
לְבוֹבֵנוּ מִגְּדִלְנוּ,
זְכְּרֵנוּ בְּזִכְרוֹן טוֹב לְפָנֶיךָ.
אָבִינוּ מִלְּכָנוּ,
כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים טוֹבִים.
אָבִינוּ מִלְּכָנוּ,
כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר גְּאֻלָּה וְיִשׁוּעָה.
אָבִינוּ מִלְּכָנוּ,
כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר פְּרִנְסָה וְכִלְכָּלָה.
אָבִינוּ מִלְּכָנוּ,
כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר זְכוּיִת.
אָבִינוּ מִלְּכָנוּ,
כְּתִבְנוּ בְּסֵפֶר סְלִיחָה וּמְחִילָה.
נוֹטְרֵנוּ מִפְּלִטָנוּ,
הִצְמַח לָנוּ יְשׁוּעָה בְּקִרְוֵב.
סוּמְכָנוּ מִצִּילָנוּ,
הֵרֵם קֶרֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמָּךָ.
עֲזְרֵנוּ מִקְּשִׁיבֵנוּ שְׂמֵעַ קוֹלָנוּ,
חוֹס וְרַחֵם עָלֵינוּ.
פּוֹדְנוּ מִשְׁמַרְנוּ,
קַבֵּל בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְרָצוֹן אֶת־תְּפִלָּתָנוּ.
צוּרֵנוּ מִנוֹסָנוּ,
נָא אַל תִּשְׁיִבֵנוּ רִיקָם מִלְּפָנֶיךָ.

Guardian, who grants us victory,
do this for the sake of those who
were martyred for Your holy
name.

Benefactor, who provides for our
welfare, do this for Your sake if not
for ours.

*Avinu Malkeinu, have mercy on
us, answer us, for our deeds are
insufficient; deal with us charitably
and lovingly, and redeem us.*

קְדוֹשָׁנוּ מְצַדִּיקֵנוּ,
זְכוֹר כִּי עָפָר אֲנַחְנוּ.
רַחֲמֵנוּ מְחַיֵּינוּ,
חֲמוּל עֲלֵינוּ וְעַל עוֹלָלֵינוּ וְטַפֵּינוּ.
שׁוּמְרֵנוּ מוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ,
עֲשֵׂה לְמַעַן הַרוּגִים עַל שֵׁם קְדֻשָּׁךְ.
תּוֹמְכֵנוּ מְסַעְדֵנוּ,
עֲשֵׂה לְמַעַן אֵם לֹא לְמַעַנֵנוּ.
אָבִינוּ מְלַכֵנוּ, חַנּוּן וְעֵנּוּן,
כִּי אֵין בְּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים,
עֲשֵׂה עִמָּנוּ צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד
וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ.

From North America: *Mishkan HaNefesh*, Reform, 2015

Avinu Malkeinu—Almighty and Merciful

Rabbi Janet Marder and Rabbi Shelly Marder, *Mishkan HaNefesh: Machzor for the Days of Awe* (New York: CCAR Press, forthcoming), 220, introduction to *Avinu Malkeinu* (can serve also as an alternative version).

Loving father
Infinite Power
Gentle, forgiving
Lofty, inscrutable
Avinu
Malkeinu
Compassionate Mother
Omnipotent Lord
Comforting presence
Fathomless mystery
Avinu
Malkeinu

Our Rock and Redeemer

Life of the Universe

Close to us always

Impossibly far

Avinu

Malkeinu

Embracing

Confounding

Accepting our frailty

Decreeing our end

Avinu

Malkeinu

None of these are true

None of these are You

Yet we stand as those before us have stood

Summoned to judgment, longing for love

Avinu, Malkeinu

May these words be a bridge

They come from our hearts

May they lead us to You

From North America: *Kehilla Community Machzor, Renewal, 2014*

Avinu Malkeinu

Rabbi Burt Jacobson, *Kehilla Community Machzor* (2014; originally published in the High Holy Day supplement of Congregation Mishkan Shalom, Philadelphia).

Our Father, our King, teach us how to make this year a new beginning.
Our Mother, our Queen, teach us how to grow from the harshness of life.
Our Source and our Destiny, teach us how to accept what we must accept.
Our Guide and our Truth, teach us to change what must be changed.
Our Father, our King, teach us how to face disease and death.
Our Mother, our Queen, teach us how to enjoy the gifts of life.
Our Source and our Destiny, teach us how to make peace with our enemies.
Our Guide and our Truth, teach us how we can best help our people Israel.

Our Father, our King, teach us how we can best help all humanity.
 Our Mother, our Queen, let us find pardon for our wrongdoings.
 Our Source and our Destiny, let us return to You, wholly and completely.
 Our Guide and our Truth, teach us how to help those who are ill.
 Our Father, our King, let us write our names in the Book of Life.
 Our Mother, our Queen, help us to find meaningful work.
 Our Source and our Destiny, help us to find inner freedom.
 Our Guide and our Truth, help us to learn how to love.
 Our Father, our King, receive our prayers.
 Our Mother, our Queen, teach us how to be good lovers.
 Our Source and our Destiny, teach us how to be good parents.
 Our Guide and our Truth, teach us how to be good children.
 Our Father, our King, teach us how to be good friends.
 Our Mother, our Queen, teach us how to be good Jews.
 Our Source and our Destiny, teach us how to be good people.
 Our Guide and our Truth, teach us how to be one with Your universe.

Avinu malkeinu, chaneinu va'aneinu ki ein banu ma'asim

Asai imanu tzedakah va'chesed, Ve'hoshi'einu

*Avinu malkeinu, grant us justice and
 bring us salvation,
 Grant us justice and loving kindness
 and bring us salvation.*

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ, חַנּוּנוּ וְעֲנָנוּ,
 כִּי אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים,
 עֲשֵׂה עִמָּנוּ צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד
 וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ.



Empowerment, Not Police: What Are We to Do with Problematic Liturgical Passages?, by Rabbi Dalia Marx, PhD

1. *Kol Haneshamah: Prayerbook for the Days of Awe*, ed. David A. Teutsch (Wyncote, PA: Reconstructionist Press, 1999), 453.
2. See “The History, Meaning, and Varieties of *Avinu Malkeinu*,” by Rabbi Lawrence A. Phoffman, PhD, in this volume.
3. *Kol Haneshamah*, 453.
4. An exception to this rule is Marcia Falk’s new *machzor*: *The Days Between: Blessings, Poems, and Directions of the Heart for the Jewish High Holiday Season* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2014).
5. The generative phase of the Hebrew Bible—its creation and redaction—for the most part is hidden from our eyes. It has undergone a long editing process, and we know little about its canonization. For example, the numerous stories about King David reveal indirect criticism of our most important king. Rabbinic literature preserves controversies regarding the inclusion of some biblical books—e.g., Ecclesiastes and Esther (see Mishnan Yadayim 3:5–6; Talmud, Shabbat 30a; Megillah 7a)—and the exclusion of others—e.g., Ben Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), a Jewish wisdom book, similar in style to Job and Proverbs (c. second or third century BCE). The Rabbis occasionally refer to Ben Sirach (they even cite it) but maintain that it is not canonical (Tosefta, Yadahim 2:5). It is part of the “external” books, known also as the Apocrypha. See Joel M. Hoffman, *The Bible’s Cutting Room Floor* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2014).
6. This is only one use of *k’rei* and *k’tiv*; in most cases the changes deal with spelling of words.
7. According to the Babylonian custom, the entire Torah was read every year; in the old *Eretz Yisrael* Rite, it was read in the course of about three and a half years.
8. Many Reform *machzorim* replaced this reading with the more edifying text of Deuteronomy 29:9–30. But then the thought-provoking tension between the ritual-oriented Torah reading and the moral invocation of the prophet is lost.
9. For more on some of these methods, see Moshe Zipor, “The Blessing of the Priests Is Not Read and Not Translated?,” *Textus* 24 (2009): 221–38.
10. Jakob J. Petuchowski, *Guide to the Prayerbook* (Cincinnati, OH: HUC Press, 1967), 54–55.
11. P. Hyman, “Changing from the Inside,” in *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. P. Hyman and D. Dash Moore (New York: Routledge, 1997), vol. 2, xxxi.
12. See, e.g., *Mishkan T’filah* (New York: CCAR Press, 2007), 24.
13. *Poked sarah* (“the One who remembers Sarah”) was chosen over the wording from the North American Reform *ezrat sarah* (“the help of Sarah”) because it echoed Genesis 21:1, “And God remembered [*pakad et*] Sarah.”
14. In this case the liturgy just follows the biblical text, where both Moses and Miriam led the people in the “Song of the Sea.”

15. Vanessa Ochs, *Inventing Jewish Ritual* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2007), 47–56.
16. For the term “innovative” as applied to such rituals, see Elyse Goldstein, “My Pink Tallit,” in *New Jewish Feminism*, ed. Elyse Goldstein (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2009), 81–89.
17. See, e.g., Debra Orenstein, ed., *Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Life Passages & Personal Milestones* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1994).
18. Chava Weissler, “Meanings of Shekhinah in the ‘Jewish Renewal’ Movement,” *Nashim*, 10 (2005): 53–83.
19. Judith Plaskow, “The Right Question Is Theological,” in *On Being a Jewish Feminist*, ed. S. Heschel (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 228.
20. For detailed discussion of these four levels of engendered liturgical language, see Dalia Marx, “Gender Language in Liberal Israeli Liturgy,” in *New Jewish Feminism: Probing the Past, Forging the Future*, ed. Elyse Goldstein (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2008), 206–17.
21. *Gates of Forgiveness: The Union Selichot Service; A Service of Preparation for the Days of Awe*, ed. Chaim Stern (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1980), 45.
22. *Ibid.*, 39. I highlighted the changed words.
23. Matthew Berke, “God and Gender in Judaism,” *First Things*, June 1996, www.firstthings.com/article/1996/06/003-god-and-gender-in-judaism.
24. *Gates of Repentance*, ed. Chaim Stern (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1978), 189–90, 121–22.
25. On *Avinu Malkeinu* on Shabbat, see Asher Lopatin, pp. 231–234.
26. *Machzor Ruach Chadashah*, ed. Andrew Goldstein and Charles H. Middleburgh (London: Liberal Judaism, 2003), xi, 73, 137.
27. *Avinu Malkeinu*, Paul Freedman, ed., in *Forms of Prayer: Erev Rosh Hashanah Machzor*, draft ed. (London: 2014), 82.
28. *Kol Haneshamah*, 453.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, 456.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Mahzor Lev Shalem*, ed. Edward Feld (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2010), 94.
35. *Mishkan HaNefesh: Machzor for the Days of Awe*, ed. Edwin Goldberg, Janet Marder, Sheldon Marder, and Leon Morris (New York: CCAR Press, forthcoming).
36. Additional sheets for High Holy Day prayers, Navah Tehila (2014).
37. Jakob J. Petuchowski, *Prayerbook Reform in Europe* (New York: UAHC Press, 1968), 128–213.
38. Interestingly, some Israelis are experimenting lately with a combined-gender speech. For example, instead of saying *chaverim v'chaverot* (“friends,” in both

genders), they would say *chaverotim*. Time will tell whether these tentative initiatives will find wider resonance in the Israeli realm.

39. I thank Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, the editor of this book, and Rabbi Shelton Donnell for their many helpful comments while I was writing this essay. I also thank the following rabbis for allowing me to cite their work and for making it accessible: Edward Feld, Paul Freedman, Burt Jacobson, Ruth Gan-Kagan, Carol Levithan, Yehoram Mazor, and Hara Person. Every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge the copyright holders for the material included in this chapter and Appendix B. I apologize for any errors or omissions that may remain and ask that any omissions be brought to my attention so that they may be corrected in future editions.

Why We Say Things We Don't Believe, by Rabbi Karyn D. Kedar

1. This article is a revision of "The Metaphor of God," in *New Jewish Feminism: Probing the Past, Forging the Future*, ed. Rabbi Elyse Goldstein (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2009).

A British Father and a British King?, by Rabbi Paul Freedman

1. Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 80.
2. *Siddur Lev Chadash* (London: Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, 1995), xx.
3. See Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed., *My People's Prayer Book*, vol. 10, *Shabbat Morning* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2007), 177–93.
4. Israel Abrahams, *A Companion to the Authorised Daily Prayerbook: Historical and Explanatory Notes* (New York: Hermon Press, 1966), 171.
5. *Forms of Prayer*, vol. 1, *Daily and Sabbath Prayers* (London: J. Wertheimer & Co., 1841), introduction, ix.

***Avinu Malkeinu* and the New Reform *Machzor* (*Mishkan HaNefesh*), by Rabbi Edwin Goldberg, DHL**

1. The members of the core editorial team of the *machzor* are Rabbi Edwin Goldberg, Rabbi Janet Marder, Rabbi Sheldon Marder, and Rabbi Leon Morris. Rabbi Hara Person is the managing editor.
2. The editors are also aware that when it comes to petitionary prayer, repetition can be a valuable rhetorical device. Petition does more than merely ask God to act; it also encourages self-reflection on even our hidden hopes.
3. The version in the current Reconstructionist *machzor* has nineteen lines, for instance, compared with the traditional forty-four-line version found in many traditional *machzorim*. At one point we thought about creating a set of approximately twelve verses for each service—some consistent in each and every service, and others specific to the service in question and drawn from the "treasury" of the classic *machzor*. We eventually abandoned that plan, seeing that it would not actually work.