

# Liturgy in the light of Jewish-Christian dialogue

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## CONFERENCE PROCEEDING

*Liturgy in the Light of Jewish-Christian Dialogue*

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ICCJ 2009 Conference, Berlin

Meine Damen und Herren,

Ich bin sehr geehrt, dass sie mich eingeladen haben, heute vor Ihnen zu sprechen. Ich war zum ersten Mal vor zwei-und-zwanzig Jahren hier in Berlin, als es eine Insel mitten in der DDR war. Damals haben wir nicht vorstellen können, wie alles sich verändern würde. Heute versteht man wieder, dass Berlin vor hundert Jahren eine der wichtigsten Städte Europas war und warum Juden in der modernen Zeit aus dem Osten und dem Westen hierher gekommen sind, um hier zu studieren und zu wohnen.

My deepest thanks to the organizers of this conference, and especially to my friends Deborah Weissman and Philip Cunningham, for inviting me to speak today. This opportunity is meaningful, not only because I've been asked to speak about something close to my heart, but specifically because this conference takes place in Berlin.

This is my third visit to this city. The second was three years ago, when my husband and I spent five wonderful days here, appreciating especially the way that this city struggles to preserve appropriately the realities of the Nazi and communist periods while also moving forward into the future as a city that is working to regain the vibrancy and vitality that the twentieth century had largely stripped from it.

But had I not been here in 1977, when this city was still a war-scarred, walled-in island in the midst of communist East Germany, I'm not sure that I could fully appreciate that transformation. Between the revived Potsdamer Platz and Reichstag, the deliberate attention to memorializing not just German trauma but also the Holocaust, and the revival of Jewish life and learning in this



city, Berlin today is a metaphor for the work of our conference. Our statement and this city engage their memories and their pasts, both good and bad, in order to build towards a healthier future.

I have been asked to focus on Jewish liturgy and Christian-Jewish relations, on ways that the Jewish community can engage self-critically with its liturgical heritage in order to grapple with texts that shape our attitudes to other religions. But liturgy is not just words; it is also the spaces in which those words happen and the ways in which they are performed. So while my ultimate focus will be on words, I want to house those words in some images of spaces—images that I draw from Germany itself, particularly but not exclusively the experiences of Jews in Germany and in Berlin.

Spaces for Jews in Germany today are a complex mixture. One finds in the Scheunenviertel, the former Jewish quarter in what became East Berlin, the oldest Jewish cemetery, in which over 12,000 were buried from 1672 until a new cemetery was opened in 1827. Today it is empty except for a single restored marker for the great 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. Why is that cemetery empty? Because the Gestapo razed it in 1943 for use as a soccer field. This was part of the Nazi attempt to erase even memory of the Jews. The cemetery cannot be rebuilt, but the lot today stands as a memorial, empty but tended. Right outside that cemetery stood a nursing home that the Nazis used as a deportation center. The memorial on its site, shaped like a tombstone, consists of a detailed inscription that concludes *Vergesst das nie* (Never forget this). Near the entrance to the cemetery itself stands an artistic representation of the deportation.



Throughout the Scheunenviertel are memorials to the institutions and people who used to reside there, large, like this one for Regina Jonas, the first woman ever ordained a rabbi, and small, like these stumbling stones (Stolpersteine) on the street corner, each containing the name, the birth date, the date of deportation and the place of death of one of the Jews who lived here. Four of these are for the Kozower family, all deported in 1943 to Theresienstadt and then to Auschwitz, where they were, as these inscriptions read, "murdered" (ermordet). Three of these were children, born in 1932, '34, and '42.





This is a project of Gunter Demnig, who laid the first brass “stones” illegally in Berlin in 1997. The project has now extended beyond Germany, as the list of this month’s installations shows.<sup>1</sup> Why do I raise this today? Because memory needs to be one of our themes. But the fact that this is Germans, more than Jews, constructing this particular set of public memories is also extremely important to our conversation

This memory can also take on different forms.



One can *leave things just as memories, forever destroyed* – like the cemetery, or in places that live on in new unrelated ways, like the homes of the Jewish quarter. But one also can *restore*, carefully and painstakingly, what was, like the recently reopened 1904 Rykestrasse Synagogue here. This is a richer retrieval of history, even if the living community’s needs may not justify this sort of space and many such synagogues serve today as museums.

One can *rebuild in a new way within the framework of the old*. This is of course what was done with the Reichstag building itself. One could also consider the grand Oranienburgerstrasse New Synagogue a few blocks away from the cemetery. Only the grand façade and the entrance hall still stood after a combination of Kristallnacht fires and Wehrmacht usage that led to Allied bombing. The grand façade and domes of the 1866 structure added a public Jewish presence to the skyline of Berlin, dominated then only by other domes—and that remains among the modern buildings. Since 1995, the remains of the original serve as a museum, archives, and offices, with a small room set aside for services. The synagogue space itself remains an undeveloped courtyard.



Finally, one can construct *new containers* to hold and bring expression to memories, as has been done in this city with its mid-town Holocaust memorial (and particularly effectively in the visitors center underneath



it) and with both the architecture and the exhibits of the Jewish Museum designed by Daniel Libeskind, both of which are on the schedule for tomorrow.

<sup>1</sup>This date is from the project’s website, <http://www.stolpersteine.com/biographien.html> (accessed June 2009). Wikipedia’s discussion, “Stolpersteine” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stolpersteine>), gives slightly different dates, but in English.

This context, one that sought separation from the outside world, left very little room for positive interest in the religious other. Rabbinic Judaism saw no need for others to become Jews. When God chooses to forge relationships with other peoples, God does this through other means, not through Torah and mitzvot. Therefore, there is no advantage for a gentile in becoming a Jew, certainly not in this world, and not even in the world to come. Without a missionary agenda, rabbinic Jews need not pray for other peoples either. Therefore, the horizon of Jewish liturgy, for the most part, leaves gentiles on the margins, except where history has dictated otherwise. Some of the exceptions arise from the realities of religious competition, where Christians and Muslims were asserting their own religious superiority, sometimes violently.

Responses to the traumas of living as a religious minority under missionary cultures imbued Jewish liturgy with elements that were anything but affirmations of their neighbors. Medieval Jews used their liturgy as a way to address the disasters they endured, and the anthological nature of Jewish liturgy meant that these new prayers and poems ceased to be incidental responses and became permanent fixtures. Medieval European prayers thus came to include a long list of explicit negative references to Christians and Christianity.

Christians became increasingly aware of, and incensed by, this. When Nicholas Donin denounced Jews to the pope in 1238, he pointed to Jewish prayers. His denunciation led to the burning of the Talmud (and other Jewish books) throughout France four years later. In the fourteenth century, denunciations of Jews regularly included details of these prayers. By the fifteenth century, we see Jews occasionally omitting the neuralgic prayers from their books voluntarily. In the sixteenth century, when the Catholic Church decrees official censorship of all Jewish books, these passages simply disappear, at least from the books, if not from the performed liturgies.

In most of these cases, especially in the cases of local responses to local event, the liturgy was simply abandoned and lost. Scholars can sometimes retrieve it today from manuscripts, but no one recites the poetry that held the memory of a community that itself ceased to exist. Poetic elaborations on the liturgy in Europe varied town by town. The invention of printing created an economics of scale and a consolidation of local rites that coincided with Church censorship. For much of the liturgical memory of medieval Christian-Jewish interactions, there remains not even a tombstone-like marker. It has simply disappeared. Thus, the most significant cluster of Jewish liturgical texts of concern for Christian-Jewish relations were “bulldozed” like the cemetery here. There is not even a memory of them.

In contrast, a few censored prayers persisted, mostly because of their centrality and the authority behind them. In these cases, the response to censorship was either to restore the prayer or to rebuild the texts so that they would be functional. Today, with religious freedom, a lifting of censorship, and Jewish autonomy in Israel, liturgical *restoration* has become a real trend in the traditional Jewish world, one that requires our attention.

We need to ask, is restoring censored texts, liturgical or not, analogous to restoring historic synagogue buildings? In the case of rabbinic texts, and especially the Talmud, the analogy is pretty good, as the vast majority of these texts are more or less “museum pieces,” without real influence on Jewish life and thought – like the synagogues in the Prague Jewish Museum. Just as Christian history must maintain its anti-Jewish literature to be honest, so too the Jewish library must retain and own up to its anti-Christian texts. At issue is how and when they are studied and whether we read them within their historical contexts or as religiously authoritative.

But liturgical texts are living texts, not books for dispassionate study. Thus, our analogy has to be to restoring buildings for active use. Such buildings may not fit well with the actual needs of today's community, with its theology, its musical style, or with the size of the community that actually gathers for services. The huge main sanctuary of the Rykestrasse Synagogue is used primarily for festivals. A restored prayer may also not fit perfectly. But it embeds memory and historical authenticity that go beyond its words' denotative meaning. Ritual communicates in its performance, not just through its details. Thus, our discussion demands some significant nuance.

This will be better illustrated if we turn to a specific prayer – the most obvious one for those who know it, the *aleynu*. This poetic composition entered rabbinic liturgy as an introduction to one set of *shofar* (ram's horn) blasts on Rosh Hashanah. Its literary characteristics place its composition in the Land of Israel in the rabbinic period, before the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. The prayer speaks of Israel's obligation to praise God for differentiating us from other peoples and bringing us to worship God alone. Why? (And this is the continuation of the text, not what I'm showing you), because God is the Creator of all and the All-Powerful Sovereign. God's sovereignty is the theme of this liturgical moment.

**TABLE I: Aleynu – Traditional Ashkenazi Text**

Uns liegt es ob, zu verherrlichen den Herrn des Alls, die Ehre zu geben dem Schöpfer der Welt	It is incumbent upon us to praise the Master of all, to ascribe greatness to the Creator	עלינו לשבח לאדון הכל לתת גדולה ליוצר בראשית
Daß er uns nicht hat sein lassen wie die Völker der Erde und uns nicht gleichgestellt den Geschlechtern des Erdbodens	Who did not make us like the nations of the world and did not place us like the families of the earth	שלא עשנו כגויי הארצות ולא שמנו כמשפחות האדמה
Daß er unser Teil nicht gleich gemacht dem ihren und unser Los dem ihrer Scharen	Who did not make our portion like theirs or our fate like their multitudes	שלא שם חלקינו כהם וגורלנו ככל המונם
Daß sie bücken sich zur Leere und Nichtigkeit und beten zu einem Gott der nicht lösen werde.	For they bow down to emptiness and nothingness and pray to a god who will not save	שהם משתחוים
Aber wir beugen das Knie und bücken uns und bekennen vor dem Könige, dem Weltenkönige, dem Heiligen, gelobt sei er...	But we bow and prostrate and give thanks to the King of kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He...	ואנחנו כורעים ומשתחוים ומודים לפני מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא.

This prayer's statement of Jewish particularism contains one line that created problems. In comparing Israel to other nations, it describes the nations' error saying, "for they bow down to nothingness and emptiness and pray to a god who will not save." How we interpret this depends on many factors. Those who understand it as benign aver that it refers to polytheists and that it was written before Christianity became a factor—which might indeed be true. Some medievals ascribed the composition to the biblical Joshua—and his description of the Canaanites.

But there is ample evidence that Jews in medieval Europe understood this line to refer to their immediate neighbors. The Rhineland mystics loved finding meanings behind the numerical values of Hebrew letters. They realized that the numerical value of the word *variq*, "and emptiness" is 316, the same as *Yeshu*, Jesus. Thus, they understood this line to mean "for Christians bow down and pray to Jesus who will (or can)not save." Indeed, in twelfth and thirteenth century France and England, some Jews elaborated on this phrase liturgically in ways that made explicit and graphic the application to Jesus, suggesting in addition that his flesh had rotted in the grave like anyone else's. These same Jews were the ones who first began reciting this prayer daily, eventually at the end of every single service. Not only that, but because this word "*riq*" puns with the verb "*roq*" "to spit," there developed a custom of spitting at this point in the service. Our modern sensibilities are definitely offended.

But we need to remember that the Jews who popularized this interpretation, who apparently instituted the regular recitation of the prayer were also the same Jews who saw the rampages of the Crusaders, the first local expulsions and confiscations of Jewish property, and the first blood libels. I think we may excuse them for their verbal retaliation.

Christian offence at this line led some Jews to remove it from their prayer books themselves. After the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century when Catholic censorship became official (and most Hebrew books were printed in Italy), almost all printed texts removed it, but many included some sort of small mark in the prayer book to indicate that something had been omitted. Did they continue to say the words? We can't know, but the marks hint that there was an oral tradition of continuing to recite this line – that censorship probably backfired and only enhanced the sense of the line's anti-Christian meaning. Indeed, we know that in 18<sup>th</sup> century Prussia, the government required Jews to recite *aleynu* out loud and stationed monitors in synagogues to ensure that the offending line was not recited. Jews who did not live in Christian lands, which in this period included most Jews of Spanish and Portuguese descent (and those who came to follow their Sephardi rite), probably never removed the line from their actual liturgies, and as soon as they began printing their own books, they restored it. Did Jews in Muslim lands direct this sentiment to Islam? The numerology doesn't work cleanly, so I discount suggestions that they did. Orthodox Jews of Ashkenazi/European descent, especially in Israel and America are similarly restoring this line today.

Most other censored prayers were never restored, so we need to ask why here? The censored line is the first half of a couplet, and the second half, which remained, is that to which the liturgy gives special emphasis by acting out its postures. But without the first line, the second line no longer makes sense. It begins with a conjunctive that now has no referent.

It is not entirely surprising, then, that given the opportunity, traditional Jews would *restore* the censored line. One finds it quite commonly in contemporary Israeli prayer books. In America, the orthodox ArtScroll publishers were the first to include it, but with an *apologia* suggesting that the criticisms of this line were slander and pointing out that leading contemporary rabbis were calling



for its restoration.<sup>2</sup> Of course, this only draws attention to the medieval meaning. The new (2009) Koren-Sacks siddur includes the line but no discussion of it because the 2006 British Sacks siddur omits it. So this line is becoming standard, taught to school children. But is it anti-Christian today? It need not be and I hope it is not.

While the first paragraph of *aleynu* looks back to the God of creation, the second paragraph, also drawn from the Rosh Hashanah liturgy and probably originally linked to the first one, turns to visions of the future. It asks for the destruction of idolatry and the establishment of God's rule over all the earth, marked by universal worship of God. Where the first paragraph is particular, the second paragraph is universal in focus. Some, most publicly Jacob Neusner, understand it as a parallel to Catholic prayers for the conversion of Jews, as a prayer that all gentiles will become Jews in the end of time. But his is not a necessary reading of the text. The prayer anticipates the day when all will worship God, but it does not specify that this will be in a Jewish manner. This leaves ample room for other faiths in their own integrity. So here too, Jews need to address their interpretations of the prayer, but not necessarily the prayer itself.

So far, I have been speaking about traditional or orthodox liturgy—where there is freedom to *restore* but beyond that, little freedom to change received texts. But when we move into the world of liberal forms of Judaism, we find other dynamics. Reform and Reconstructionist Jews were not comfortable with the particularist messages of the first part of *aleynu*, even in its censored form. So they maintained its basic structure, even sometimes the received melodies, and filled them with altered content.

**TABLE II: “Reforming” the *Aleynu***

<b>Einhorn, German 1858</b>	<b>Einhorn, English 1896</b>	<b>Union Prayer Book 1946</b>
Es ziehmt uns, zu preisen den Herrn des Weltalls, zu verherrlichen den Schöpfer der Welt	It is meet for us to praise the Lord of the universe, to glorify the Creator of the world,	Let us adore the ever-living God, and render praise unto Him who spread out the heavens and established the earth, whose glory is revealed in the heavens above and whose greatness is manifest throughout the world.
Daß Er uns befreit hat von der Finsterniß des Irrglaubens, und us gesendet hat das reine Licht der Offenbarung.	who hath delivered us from the gloom of error and sent us the pure light of his truth.	He is our God; there is none else.
Wir beugen uns vor Ihm, dem König aller Könige, dem Allerheiligsten,...	We bow before him, the King of kings, the Most holy,...	We bow the head in reverence and worship the King of kings, the Holy One, praised be He.

<sup>2</sup> p.159.



We see these changes even in the transitions from David Einhorn's 1858 German, where he barely deviates from the traditional text to his daughter's English translation 40 years later, where his "Irrglauben"—false belief or heresy—becomes "error," and "Offenbarung" – revelation – becomes "truth." The American Reform *Union Prayer Book*, from its 1895 edition, omits even this line and simply "adores" God whose created world continues to reveal the divine greatness, themes moved from a later universalist part of the traditional text.

**TABLE III: "Reconstructing" the Aleynu<sup>3</sup>**

It is up to us to offer praises to the Source of all, to declare the greatness of the author of Creation —		
1945	1990's	Traditional 1990's
who gave to us teachings [Torah] of truth and planted eternal life within us.	Who created heaven's heights and spread out its expanse, who laid the earth's foundation and brought forth its offspring, giving life to all peoples, the breath of life to all who walk about.	Who has made us different from the other nations of the earth, and situated us in quite a different spot, and made our daily lot another kind from theirs, and give us a destiny uncommon in this world.
And so we bend the knee and bow, acknowledging the sovereign who rules above all those who rule, the blessed Holy One...		

Jumping to more recent liberal liturgies, we find two overlapping trends: a sort of restorationist move, to reaccess the traditional text, but without the censored line; and a move to present a multitude of options that give only positive statements of Jewish identity. For instance, the recent Reconstructionist prayer book series offers three versions of the opening, the first from Mordecai Kaplan's 1945 revision which substituted God's giving Israel the Torah for other forms of Jewish particularism; the second a newer text which raises only universal creation themes but does fit the traditional melody; and the third, placed among the commentaries, which restores the traditional Hebrew but gives it a rather interpretative translation, nuancing chosenness as "difference." American Reform liturgies, since the 1970's, have taken similar directions.

What we see then, is that in the Jewish world, deliberate, thoughtful liturgical change can happen in those communities who understand themselves free and even theologically obligated to alter their texts. These communities have taken the existing structures and renovated them, giving them new language and revised theologies, but rarely an entirely new purpose. It is in these contexts that problematic prayers can and even must be "re-interpreted, changed or

<sup>3</sup> *Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim*, 1994, p. 120-1.

omitted,” in the language of our statement. And, I am glad to say, for the most part they have, though not always as consistently or deliberately as one might like. But—even communities who understand their Hebrew prayers to be unchangeable have an obligation to pay attention to the interpretations taught in classrooms and through the prayers’ translations and commentaries. This has been done less consistently.

Liturgical renovation was also forced upon the traditional liturgy. Some prayers could not be skipped, but were censored in such a way that the prayer texts were left unusable. The most important example of this is the *birkat haminim* (Ketzersegen), the twelfth benediction of the daily *amidah* (*Achtzehngebet*), a mandatory, unchangeable prayer, recited at every weekday service as part of the central prayer of the daily liturgy. The European rites never explicitly named Christians, but manuscripts from the Arab world did regularly. Whether or not cursing Christians was an original intent of the prayer, it definitely became part of its history. Jews in medieval Europe understood the *birkat haminim* to petition that God destroy and deny afterlife to Jewish apostates to Christianity, to Christians in general, to Jews’ enemies, and to the governing powers, obviously also Christian. Beginning in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, there were regular Christian accusations that Jews reciting this prayer were undermining Christendom.

**TABLE IV: Birkat Haminim – Uncensored Ashkenazi Version**

למשומדים אל תהי תקוה	Den Apostaten, gib kein Erfolg	May there be no hope for apostates
וכל המינים כרגע יאבדו	Und alle Ketzer lass in Fluge dahinschwinden	And may all the heretics immediately be lost
וכל אויבי עמך מהרה יכרתו	Und alle Feinde des deinen Volk mögen schnell dahin sein	And may all the enemies of Your people immediately be cut off
ומלכות זדון מהרה תעקר ותשבר ותמגר ותכניע כל אויבינו במהרה בימינו	Und das Reich von Übermüt mögst du eilends vernichten, zerbrechen, und überwindet unsere Feinde bald in unseren Tagen.	And may the arrogant empire quickly be uprooted and smashed and defeated and may all our enemies be brought low speedily in our day.
בא"י שובר אויבים ומכניע זדים	Gelobt seist Du, Ewiger, der bricht des Feindes macht und die frechen Übermütigen beugt.	Blessed are You, Eternal, who breaks enemies and brings low the arrogant.

Some early printers avoided printing the text, simply indicating that it was to be said. Most surviving manuscripts were censored, with the nouns of each of the four lines of the body of the text blacked out. What to do? The prayer could not be abandoned. Printers substituted other words for those now forbidden. At least by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when we find non-apologetic commentaries explaining these words, this revised text was fully accepted. The result was a renovation of this prayer and its transformation into an inoffensive text that denigrates evil and evildoers in general. I know of no community that truly remembered its original wording or sought to restore it.

**TABLE V: Birkat Haminim: Censored**

למשומדים ולמלשינים אל תהי תקוה	Den Apostaten Verleumder gib kein Erfolg	May there be no hope for apostates informers.
וכל המינים הרשעה כרגע יאבדו	Und alle Ketzer Übel lass in Fluge dahinschwinden	And may all heretics evil im- mediately be lost
וכל איבי עמך אויבך מהרה יכרתו	Und alle deine Feinde des deinen Volk mögen schnell da- hin sein	And may all Your enemies of Your people immediately be cut off
והזדים וזלכות זדון מהרה תעקר ותשבר ותמגר ותכניע כל איבינו במהרה בימינו	Und die in Übermüte Dir Trötzenden das Reich von Übermüt mögst du eilends ver- nichten, zerbrechen, und über- winden überwindet unsere Feinde bald in unseren Tagen.	And may the arrogant empire quickly be uprooted and smashed and defeated and may all our enemies be brought low speedily in our day.
בא"י שובר אויבים ומכניע זדים	Gelobt seist Du, Ewiger, der bricht des Feindes macht und die frechen Übermütigen beugt.	Blessed are You, Eternal, who breaks enemies and brings low the arrogant.

Even this renovation was not sufficient for many liberal Jews, and they dropped this prayer, i.e., abandoned it, in Reform, Reconstructionist, and even some predecessors to Conservative prayer books. Reform prayer books only restored it the 1990's but with a renovation that verged on a new construction, petitioning for the end of wickedness, evil, violence and terror, and in the US version, restoring an ancient theme that calls for these errant people to repent. Thus, a prayer that in its origins may have been explicitly anti-Christian, that in its medieval European incarnation was understood by both Jews and Christians to be anti-Christian, was defanged by Christian censors to the point that the nature of the prayer changed. No one is restoring the original, and those retrieving it are transforming it into a prayer about an element of our eschatological vision that Jews and Christians could probably recite together without blinking.

TABLE VI: “Renovations” of the Birkat Haminim

<p>US Reform: 2007 <i>Mishkan Tefilah</i>:  ולרשעה אל תהי תקוה, והתועים אליך ישובו, ומלכות זדון מהרה תשבר. בא"י שובר רשע מן הארץ.</p> <p>And for wickedness, let there be no hope, and may all the errant return to You, and may the realm of wickedness be shattered. Blessed are You, Adonai, whose will it is that the wicked vanish from the earth.</p>
<p>British Reform: 2008 <i>Forms of Prayer</i>  ולמלשינות אל תהי תקוה וכל הרשעה הפר. ומלכות זדון תעביר במהרה בימינו. בא"י המעביר רשעה מן הארץ.</p> <p>And for slander let there be no hope, and may all evil come to nothing, and remove the reign of violence and terror speedily in our days. Blessed are You God, who makes evil pass away from the earth.</p>

We can apply this dialectic between abandonment, restoration, and renovation to other prayers as well. Various prayers for divine vengeance on enemies of the Jews accumulated in the prayer book, some added after the Crusades, others prior to that. Many were constructed from biblical verses and as a result were rarely censored. Few of these prayers were abandoned, except in the liturgical reforms of the liberal movements beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For Jews involved in Christian-Jewish relations whose communities use traditional liturgies, these are some of the most difficult texts today, ones requiring reinterpretation.

TABLE VII: Prayers for Divine Vengeance

<p><i>Haftarah</i> benediction - censored</p> <p>ולעלובת נפש תנקהם נקמה תושיע</p> <p>May You take vengeance for <del>save</del> the humbled soul (Jerusalem)</p>
<p><i>Avinu Malkeinu</i> (High Holy Day liturgy) ~ restored</p> <p>... נקום לעינינו נקמת דם עבדך השפוך</p> <p>...take vengeance before our eyes for the blood spilled out by your servants.</p>
<p><i>Harav et riveinu</i> (Blessing following Megillat Esther) – uncensored</p>
<p><i>Av HaRahamim</i> (Memorial prayer for victims of Crusades) – rarely censored</p>
<p><i>Shfokh Hamatekha</i> (Passover Seder) – rarely censored</p> <p>שפוך חמתך על הגוים אשר לא ידעוך...</p> <p>Pour out Your wrath upon the nations who do not know You</p>



Here, a few strategies are helpful. First, every single one of these texts leaves the actual acts of vengeance to God. While this may have arisen from historical situations of Jewish powerlessness, it remains, in my opinion, a morally compelling reading of these texts in a period when Jews are no longer powerless. And second, we also have the freedom to lift up individual elements in these texts and to de-emphasize others. Thus, the Passover seder's (biblical) "Pour out Your wrath on the nations" needs to be qualified by the next phrase, "who do not know you." Once one accepts that our dialogue partners do know God and act accordingly, then the "nations" of this passage become impossible to identify with our friends. In some cases, there can be additions to the liturgy, so one Passover *haggadah* adds a parallel "Pour out your love on the nations..."

So much for received texts. How do we respond liturgically to new situations and especially to the Holocaust? How do we construct a responsible memory for the future, how do we express the pain, anger and grief at the history we memorialize, how do we bring younger generations to share this memory, while also recognizing the deep repentance of our Christian and German dialogue partners? Holocaust memory will necessarily transform in coming years because we will no longer have survivors among us to tell their stories. As we take responsibility for transmitting this memory, how do we do it?

Forgetting, abandoning the memory, is not a morally acceptable option regarding the Shoah. Restoration is not a sufficient option. Pilgrimages to Holocaust sites tend to ignore the contemporary inhabitants of those lands, marking them incorrectly as the perpetrators and bystanders of 65 years ago. And these sites, or even local memorials and museums, are too far from the daily lives of most Jews to shape their consciousness. Films slip into entertainment. Liturgies that gruesomely reenact aspects of the Holocaust by symbolically burning the Torah, removing everyone's shoes and jewelry and separating children from their parents probably go too far—few would attend them as a yearly *seder*.

More importantly, liturgical memory is a memory to be brought with us into the present as a key to unlocking the future. Human evil needs to be remembered in such a way that we can indeed say "Never again." But especially in light of the difficult work done by German society to confront and repent for its own history, and by many parts of Christian society to repent for its traditions of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, specific Jewish memory of past persecutions needs to carefully blend memory with recognition that our contemporaries are not their ancestors. To do otherwise is to generate a Jewish equivalent of the Christian error of blaming all Jews of all time for the death of Jesus. It is also to refuse to honor a genuine repentance and to learn from it.

How then to construct this memory? For new liturgies to "work," for them to feel sufficiently familiar that the participants can focus on their content rather than on their own self-conscious discomfort, they need to draw on the past. They need to include some element of *renovation* of what was. Thus, some of the Holocaust Memorial liturgies present themselves as a *seder*—an ordered retelling—or a *megillah*,<sup>4</sup> a scroll with ghastly, gripping images like those of Lamentations. More well-known versions take rituals from regular memorial traditions, like Jahrzeit candles, prayers from the normal *Yizkor* (Memorial) service, etc. But here we have opportunities to *construct from scratch* as well, in poetry, in music, and, given that the official observance is never on the Sabbath, in the use of media as well. Nowhere in the Jewish world is there a set, unchangeable model for these observances.

<sup>4</sup> Article about this on Beliefnet <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Judaism/2005/05/A-Day-Without-Ritual.aspx?p=1>.

Such observances necessarily refer to the realities of the Holocaust. But how should they do it? I flinch when I hear memorial prayers for the victims of the Shoah that elaborate on the cruelties and name “the German murderers and their helpers from other nations.”<sup>5</sup> The words that echo are “murderers” attached to the name “Germans” rather than to a historical subset, the Nazis. In addition, it is rare for Jewish liturgical texts to name perpetrators so explicitly, even in commemorative poetry.<sup>6</sup> This freezes the reference and denies the possibility of repentance. So here too, care is needed.

Those formulating the recent British and American Reform liturgies for Yom Hashoah understood this. Neither names “Germans” or even “Nazis” at all. Both rely heavily on poetic and philosophical reflections written during and after the war, more than on existing liturgical models. And in their memorial prayers, the Americans refer to the six million “murdered because they were Jews” and the British ask that the victims “find the safety and rest denied them on earth.” Both meditate on themes relevant to constructing a positive identity today, like faith, courage, and resistance to evil, rather than on suffering and revenge. The same cannot be said for an earlier generation of Holocaust readings in English-language prayer books. We can hope that this represents a process of maturation.

For this process of maturation to continue, the Jewish world must struggle with its heritage, liturgical and otherwise, in light of the changed and changing circumstances of the twenty-first century. The new relation with our Christian neighbors is only one of many factors requiring thoughtful response, but it is a critical one. To respond adequately requires reflection and, above all, self-criticism. The available options for response will vary with one’s acceptance of the authority of tradition, but there are real options across the spectrum. While liberal Jews may experiment freely, construct new rituals and abandon inherited ones, traditional Jews can employ their strong emphasis on study to restore and renovate their received texts from within, through new interpretations. While the methods available may be different, the goal in terms of Christian-Jewish relations should be the same: to find an intellectually honest liturgical expression of our new relationship to our fellow human beings.

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<sup>5</sup> A particularly egregious example is in the Yizkor service in the *Rinat Yisrael Mahzor* which includes a call for God to avenge Israel seventy times over.

<sup>6</sup> The *kinot* of the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, because of the poetic norms underlying them, and the *selihot* of other occasions, rarely name people directly.