



Great Moments in TBE Women's History

The Inclusion of the Matriarchs

Source Material Compiled by
Rabbi Joshua Hammerman

Miriam's Minyan
Sisterhood Shabbat
Parshat Yitro, 5767

Rites and Reasons: The Mamas and the Papas

After considerable discussion and exhaustive study of source materials, the ritual committee has endorsed a small liturgical addition to our Shabbat liturgy -- a small change that will make a big difference. As of the service of April 2, we'll be including the names of the Matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, in the Musaf Amidah. The introductory paragraph, called the Avot (Ancestors), has always included the names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This paragraph, which has seen alterations but has basically remained unchanged for centuries, will continue to be recited in its traditional form during the Amidah for the morning services on Shabbat and weekdays, and at all High Holiday services. The addition of the matriarchs will take place only at Musaf (the "additional" Amidah) on Shabbat.

WHY NOW?

Our new prayer book includes an "Interpretive" Musaf service that provides the option of adding the matriarchs (on p.282). Several on the Ritual Committee noticed this and urged us to take action. Three years ago, the Rabbinical Assembly's Law Committee endorsed this option as a means of promoting egalitarian worship and the full inclusion of women. Since Beth El has always promoted full equality in prayer and since there was no compelling argument to maintain the status quo, the Ritual Committee decided to make the addition. While comparatively few Conservative synagogues use the Matriarchs at present, many are exploring it and the number will grow rapidly with the publication soon of another new Conservative prayer book with the matriarchal option. It was felt that we should in any event be among the leaders, not the laggards, in this important matter. While this choice adds an element of inconsistency to our service (Why only in Musaf?), it promotes the Conservative ideal of evolutionary change, respecting the past but not being tied down to it.

WHY DOES THE AMIDA START WITH THE AVOT, ANYWAY?

The Talmud tells us that, when God wanted to destroy Israel in the Wilderness because of the sin of the Golden Calf, Moses pleaded to God, "Remember Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Your servants. (Ex. 32:5)" God accepted his prayers and forgave the nation. The Jewish tradition teaches that an individual's relationship with God is both personal and historical. By recalling the piety and heroism of our great role models, each of whom had a different relationship with God, we try to make our own personal connection with God and with our people's history. The Avot are our role models. Through their inspiration we seek to carve out new ways to find meaning in our very different world.

SO WHY ADD THE WOMEN?

Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel occupy positions of equal significance in the text of Genesis, a text that was, by the way, edited and interpreted over the centuries primarily by men. Women too seek God. There are many stories in the Bible and Talmud of other women who have special relationships with God and unique and

important lessons to teach us. If the Avot section is all about role models, women belong there. Since there is absolutely no impact on the structure of the service or the literary integrity of the Amidah, and given the fact that the Jewish prayer book has always been conceived as an evolving work-in-progress, we should include the Matriarchs. And since this inclusion might lead some to take prayer more seriously and some women to feel more empowered by our tradition, the reasons for inclusion become even more compelling. If you haven't noticed, more and more women are now wearing a tallit at services here. Several have read from the Torah over recent weeks, including Sisterhood members at their recent service. The final gender barriers are indeed falling. This prayer recognizes that fact and encourages it.

For those who are uncomfortable with the change, and there were some on the Ritual Committee who made excellent arguments against it, we hope that the spirit of tolerance and community will win out. Not everyone is going to be happy with all that goes on here. Although complaints are few and far between, I receive equal numbers claiming that our services are "too traditional" and "not traditional enough." I take that as a good sign. It means people are getting passionate about prayer again; it also means we are aiming right where we ought to aim, for the middle. Not everyone will be happy with everything all the time, but if we work together and respect differences of opinion, the creative tension that gives so much life to Conservative Judaism will thrive here as never before.

Rabbi Joshua Hammerman

THE LAW COMMITTEE APPROVED THIS BY A VOTE OF 9 IN FAVOR, 6
OPPOSED WITH 4 ABSTENTIONS, ON 3/31/90. CONGREGATIONS ARE THEREFORE
FREE TO ACCEPT OR REJECT THIS - EACH ACTION HAS VALIDITY

Regarding the Inclusion of the Names of the Matriarchs in the First Blessing of the *Amidah*

RABBI JOEL E. REMBAUM

SHE'ELAH

The Library Minyan of Temple Beth Am, a participatory and egalitarian congregation of observant Jews affiliated with the synagogue I serve, Temple Beth Am, has been studying and discussing the possibility of including the names of the Matriarchs in the *Avot* blessing of the *Amidah*. As *Marah D'Atrah* of the synagogue, I was asked to render an opinion. I have investigated a number of halakhic sources (noted below) and have come to the conclusion that such a change is warranted. I suggest the following additions to the blessing: after *elohei Ya'akov* add the words, *elohei Sarah, elohei Rivkah, elohei Rachel, ve'elohei Le'ah*; after the term *melekh ozer* add the word, *u-foqed*; and, in the *hatimah* of the *Avot* blessing, after *magen Avraham* add, *u-foqed Sarah*. I consider this suggestion to be valid within the context of Conservative halakhic interpretation and theology. It is my feeling, however, that since this issue deals with the text of the central prayer of our liturgy, a prayer that is transpersonal and transcongregational, the opinion of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards should be sought.

TESHUVAH

While remaining within a framework established in Talmudic times, Jewish liturgy has retained a flexibility that has allowed it to be adjusted and adapted to the spiritual needs of different generations of Jews. A survey of various versions of the *Amidah* reveals that in the early post-Talmudic period the wording of a number of the blessings of the *Amidah* was considerably different from the language that eventually became standardized in the later Geonic period. The reader is referred to a fragment from the Cairo Genizah.¹ Especially striking is the language of the thirteenth blessing, with its emphasis on the righteous converts and the absence of references to the other categories of righteous individuals found in the later texts. And, an examination of the fourteenth blessing indicates that the tradition of the Palestinian Talmud is retained, and the split of blessing into *boneh yerushalayim* and *matzmidh keren yeshuah*, reflecting the *Bavli* version, is ignored or not known. Compared to this

sample of post-Talmudic/early medieval liturgy, the subsequent versions of the *Amidah* reflect considerable change, change which corresponded to the theological needs of later generations.

While it could be argued that this early text represents a transitional version that is too ancient to be considered in a discussion of late twentieth-century liturgical change, I hasten to add that we commonly refer to Talmudic precedents which are even older than these traditions. Furthermore, the Conservative Movement's addition of the term *ba-olam* to the *Sim Shalom* prayer harks back to the *Amidah* of Rabbi Sa'adia's *Siddur*, itself an early text which often differs from the later "standard" versions.²

A good example of the impact of liturgy of a significant theological development is Rabbi Sa'adia's reaction to the reference to the light that shines on Zion (*or hadash al tzion ta'ir*) in the conclusion to the *Yotzer* prayer. Rabbi Sa'adia argued that since the prayer refers to the light of creation and not the light of the Messianic Age, such an allusion is unacceptable. Rabbi Sherira, in his response to Rabbi Sa'adia's comment, noted that the reference has always been accepted in the academies and is appropriate for the prayer.³ It appears as if the people's hopes for redemption overruled Rabbi Sa'adia's plea for ideological consistency. Rabbi Sa'adia's opinion did carry the day, however, in certain Sephardic communities where the phrase beginning, *or hadash al tzion ta'ir*, is still absent from the standard morning liturgy.⁴ This indicates that Jewish liturgical tradition can, indeed, tolerate variations in the basic structure of communal prayer.

Regarding the matter of deviating from the authorized wording of blessings, the reader is referred to Rambam's *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Berakhot* 1:6,⁵ where Rambam indicates that should the worshiper deviate from the fixed language of a blessing (*ha-matbe'a*) the religious obligation associated with the blessing *has been fulfilled* as long as the blessing includes reference to God's ineffable name and his kingship (*shem u-malkhut*) and its wording remains consistent with the established theme (*inyan*) of the prayer. This principle is set forth in the same paragraph in which Rambam allows for the recitation of blessings in all languages. Traditions from *BT Berakhot* 40b and *Sotah* 32a-33a serve as the foundation for Rambam's legislation in these cases.

Admittedly, Rambam is ambiguous with regard to the matter of changing the established liturgy. Although in *Hilkhot Berakhot* 1:6 he allows for the possibility of modifying the language of the prayers, in the preceding paragraph⁶ he states that one should not deviate from the versions of the blessings established by Ezra and his court, nor should one add to them or delete anything from them. One who changes the established version (*matbe'a*) is in error. He expresses an even stronger negative opinion in *Hilkhot Qri'at Shema* 1:7,⁷ where he concludes that one who deviates from the *matbe'a* must repeat the prayer. The *Keseph*

Mishneh on *Hilkhot Berakhot* 1:5-6⁸ offers the following resolution of these inconsistencies in Rambam's thinking.

The *Kesef Mishneh* (henceforth KM) distinguishes among four kinds of deviations to which Rambam alludes:

1) The clause in 1:5 beginning *ve'ein ra'ui* . . . refers to a change which fulfills the religious obligation associated with the prayer but which is not recommended because it still is an unwarranted change. KM designates two kinds of changes which fall into this category:

a) One recites a blessing according to the version established by the sages but adds to it or deletes something from it.

b) One recites a blessing that conveys the essential concept or intent (*me'ein*) of the established blessing but does so in words different from those of the authorized version.

2) When one changes a blessing to the degree that a specific reference to a divine act (e.g. *Birkat Ha-motzi*) is replaced by a general reference to God's creation and no references to *shem u-malkhut* are included in the blessing, the religious obligation has not been fulfilled.

3) When a general reference has replaced a specific reference, but *shem u-malkhut* are included, though this can be considered an error (*ta'ut*), the religious obligation is, nevertheless, fulfilled.

4) The statement in *Hilkhot Qri'at Shema* 1:7, refers to a case where one deviated from the established rules regarding when a *petihah* or a *hatimah* is used with a given blessing. In such a case, the religious obligation has not been fulfilled, and the blessing must be repeated. KM concludes his comment on *Hilkhot Berakhot* 1:6 by emphasizing that the permissive statement of the Rambam in that paragraph is in a case where one has changed the wording of the blessing while retaining the basic theme and not altering its *petihah* or *hatimah* structure. (The *Hagahot Maymoniot*, ad loc, also allows for the possibility of changing the wording of blessings. This opinion is based on the discussion in the *Yerushalmi, Berakhot* 6:2.)

From this survey, one can conclude that the notion of liturgical variation is not rejected by Talmudic tradition. The Rambam and his commentators are tolerant of liturgical change as long as it takes place within certain normative parameters. The change that is being recommended in this paper falls within these parameters. The inclusion of references to the Matriarchs in the *Avot* blessing of the *Amidah* in no way changes the inyan of the prayer (see below). Other than these additions the language of the blessing, including references to *shem u-malkhut*, remains unchanged, and the *petihah-hatimah* structure of the blessing, required by virtue of its being the first in a sequence of blessings, remain intact.

The Rabbinical Assembly has, itself, instituted changes in the liturgy that are more radical than the additions to the *Avot* prayer suggested above. Rabbi Morris Silverman's removal of the term *ve-ishei yisrael* from the *Avodah* blessing of the *Amidah* in his *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*

and the parallel shift in that *Siddur* from the future tense to the past tense in the language of *Musaf Amidah* references to sacrifices represent significant textual and ideological changes in the expression of Judaism's hopes for the messianic future.⁹ These are far more extreme than the addition of references to the Matriarchs to the *Amidah*, since the latter do not negate the intent of the prayer, but rather reinforce it. (This will be discussed in greater detail below.) It should be noted that the Silverman *Siddur* anticipates the issue under discussion in this paper with its change in the Morning Blessings to *she-asani bi-tzalmo*.¹⁰ Given these changes, it would be hard to imagine how the modifications suggested in this paper could be considered objectionable.

Siddur Sim Shalom has continued in the Conservative Movement's tradition of evolutionary liturgical change. The additions to the *Tikanta* paragraph of the Sabbath *Musaf Amidah*, for example, reinforce Judaism's historical Zionist yearnings and, at the same time, recognize the legitimacy of the worship of God wherever Jews may find themselves.¹¹ Indeed, *Siddur Sim Shalom* begins to address the issue under discussion in this paper by including references to the Matriarchs in an English alternative to the weekday *Amidah* and in the *mi she-beirakh* prayers recited while the Torah is read and with the inclusion of the term *bat horin* in the Morning Blessings.¹²

The inclusion of the names of the Matriarchs in the *Avot* blessing is consistent with the traditions of the Bible, normative Jewish theology and the theme of the first paragraph of the *Amidah*. In the Genesis accounts the Matriarchs function as significant factors in the unfolding of the covenant between God and the Israelite nation. The *Avot* blessing functions as an affirmation of the covenantal bond between God and His people, and, given the Matriarchs' role in the development of that relationship, allusion to them in this blessing is most appropriate. Jewish tradition already has recognized within the liturgy the significance of this matriarchal role in the selection of the account of God's remembering Sarah¹³ as the Torah reading for the first day of *Rosh Ha'shanah*. Continuing in this vein, the addition of the term *u-foqed Sarah* to the conclusion of the *Avot* blessing is an important reinforcement to a prayer that highlights this unique covenantal bond. (Such an addition would also be consistent with the Hebrew style of the *Avot* blessing. The term *magen Avraham* is a derivative of the use of the root *mgn* found in Genesis 14 and 15. Similarly, the term *u-foqed* is a derivative of the root *pqd* found in Genesis 21.)

Because the *Siddur*, perhaps more than any other compilation of Jewish religious expression, has embodied the ideas that have both shaped and reflected the deepest beliefs and concerns of our people, significant ideological and communal developments and trends have always been represented in our prayers. In a generation when women are assuming a more significant role in the religious life of the

Conservative Jewish community, it is appropriate that the prayer that expresses the unity, commitment and lofty aspirations of the Jewish people, the *Amidah*, be modified so that it can speak to all members of our congregations, male and female alike. This paper suggests a way that this important goal can be attained.

Notes

- 1 חיינימן. י. התפילה בתקופת התנאים והאמוראים.
Amidah from the Cairo Genizah.
- 2 Jules Harlow, *Siddur Sim Shalom*, p 120.
Assaf and Joel Davidson, *Siddur R. Saadia Gaon*, p 19.
- 3 Assaf and Joel Davidson, *Siddur R. Saadia Gaon*, p 37 and *ibid*, note to line 6.
- 4 *Siddur Or Vi-Derekh Ha-Shalem*, pp 81-82.
- 5 *Hilkhoh Berakhot* 1: 6.
- 6 *Hilkhoh Berakhot* 1: 5.
- 7 *Hilkhoh Qriat Shema* 1:7.
- 8 *Kesef Mishneh on Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhoh Berakhot* 1: 5-6.
- 9 Morris Silverman, *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*, p. 143, 141.
- 10 Morris Silverman, *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*, p. 45.
- 11 Jules Harlow, *Siddur Sim Shalom*, p. 434.
- 12 Jules Harlow, *Siddur Sim Shalom*, pp. 232, 402, 10.
- 13 Genesis 21.

עמיִדה
→

SECTION ONE: PRAISE דַּרְכוֹת


1. אָבוֹת
The Privilege of Our Ancestry



2. גְּבוּרוֹת
God is Our Hero




3. קְדוּשָׁה
From God comes Holiness



SECTION TWO: PETITION דַּרְכוֹת

18. הוֹדָאָה
We are grateful that we can Praise God



19. בְּרַכַּת הַכּוֹהֲנִים
Finally, We need PEACE.




SECTION ONE


The Praise בְּרַכּוֹת

PERSONAL REQUESTS ↓

4. בִּינָה
We need Wisdom



17. עֲבוּדָה
We are grateful that we can Serve God



RABBI HANINAH SAID:
WHILE SAYING THE FIRST THREE בְּרַכּוֹת ONE RESEMBLES A SERVANT WHO PRAISES HIS MASTER.

5. תְּשׁוּבָה
We need Repentance




SECTION THREE: דַּרְכוֹת OF THANKSGIVING

The עֲמִידָה is essentially a shopping list of favors which we hope God will provide for us (or which we hope to find the God-like strength within ourselves to make come true). The first step in asking for a favor or a gift is complimenting the gift-giver and interesting him or her in helping you. This is why Rabbi Haninah says that the beginning of The תְּפִלָּה is like a servant (us) **Praising** the Master (God).

6. קְלִיחָה
We need Forgiveness



16. שׁוֹמֵעַ תְּפִלָּה
We need our Prayers Answered



Three בְּרַכּוֹת make up the "Praise" section.

7. גְּאֻלָּה
We need Redemption



15. מַלְכוּת בֵּית דָּוִד
We need the Kingdom of David Reestablished



אָבוֹת
The אָבוֹת is the opening. It is the long-בְּרַכָּה which begins this בְּרַכָּה chain. It begins by reminding God of the long connection between God and the Jewish people. It basically says, "You know who I am. I belong to the family of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekkah...and all those people. You were really nice to them. You did some amazing things for them. You even made a promise to continue helping them and their family forever. Well, I need your help, too. I need you to keep your promise and work some of your miracles for me, too."

8. רְפוּאָה
We need Healing




14. בְּנֵי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם
We need Jerusalem rebuilt




In saying the אָבוֹת, we remind God of the covenant made with the first Jews. And, we **praise** God for many of the

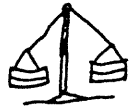
13. צְדָקִים
We need Righteous Role Models




12. בְּרַכַּת הַמֵּינִים
We need our Enemies Defeated



11. דִּין
We need Justice




10. קְבוּץ גְּלוּיֹת
We need a return from Exile

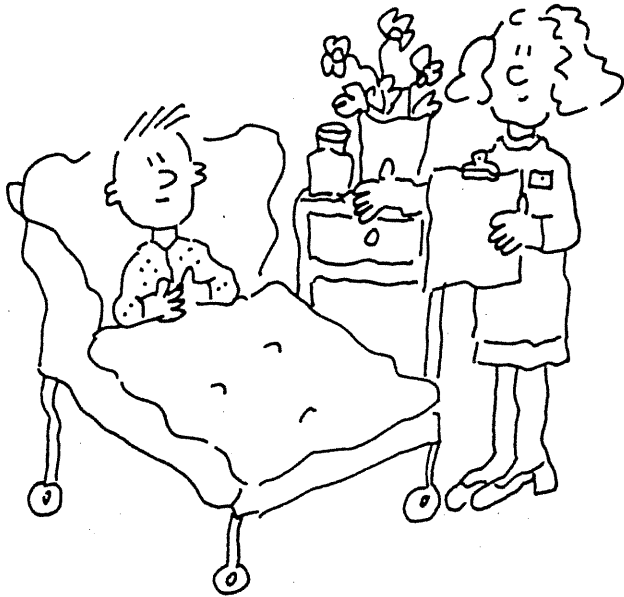


← NATIONAL REQUESTS

9. בְּרַכַּת הַשָּׁנִים
We need a Year of Blessings



wondrous things which were done for our family and our people. At the same time, we are also reminding ourselves of the kind of people God expects us to be, using the first Jews as our role models to help ourselves become better Jews.



דְּבִדְרוֹת

The **גְּבוּרוֹת** is the second **בְּרָכָה**. Having already established the connection between Jews and God, and having gotten God's attention by using the family name, we now show how much respect we have for all that God does. The **גְּבוּרוֹת** explains to God why God is our hero. It lists the ways we would like to be just like God: freeing captives, healing the sick, lifting up the fallen, etc.

In the **גְּבוּרוֹת** we admit that we need God's help, that God does things that no one else can, but that with a little help, we too, can be a lot like God.

קְדוּשָׁה

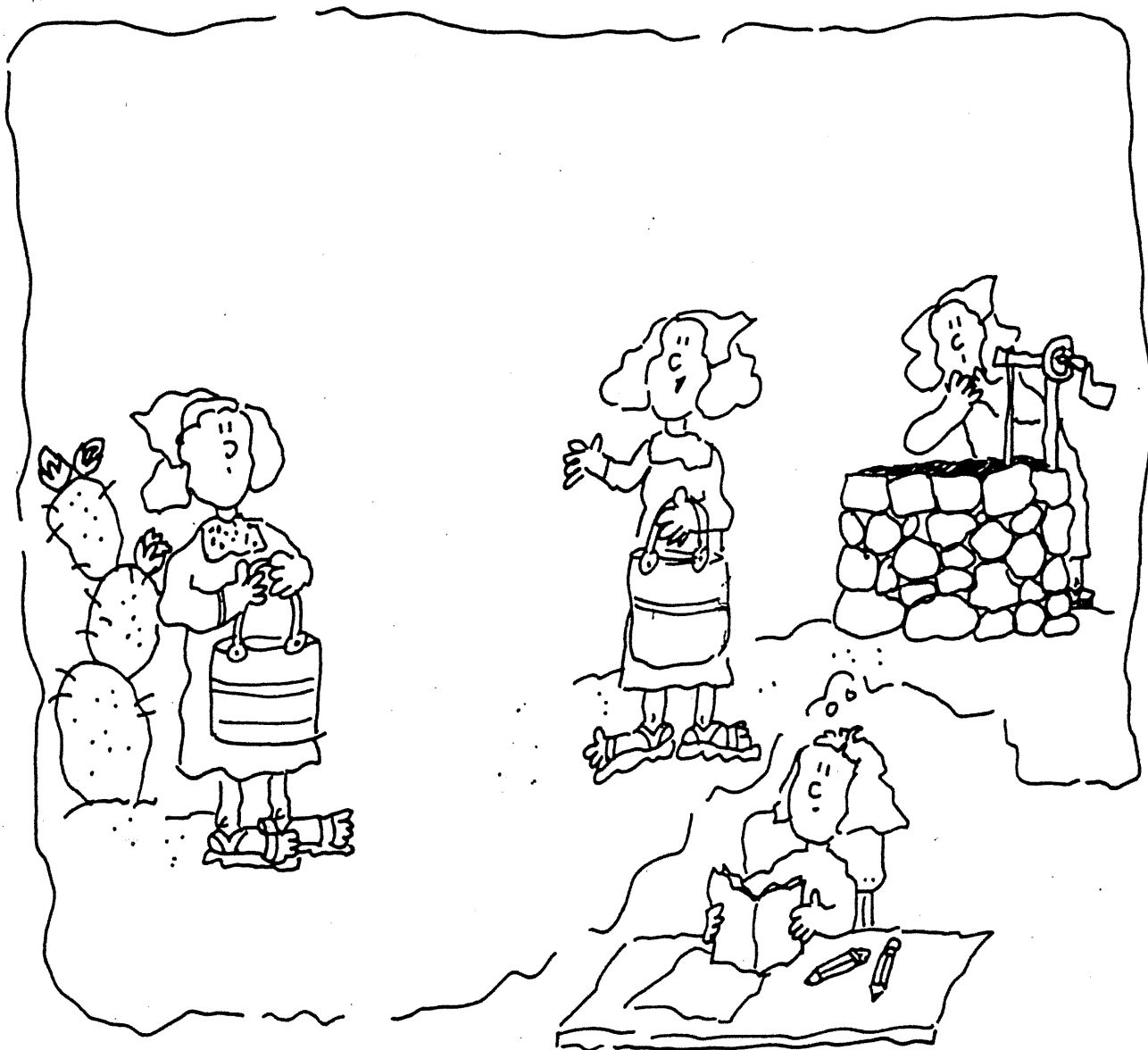
The **קְדוּשָׁה** is the third **בְּרָכָה** and it is different from every other prayer in the **עֲמִידָה**. The **קְדוּשָׁה** is a kind of mini-drama which is acted out during the repetition of the **עֲמִידָה**. The leader of the service plays the part of some special prophets who had the unique opportunity to have an experience of being close to God, and the congregation plays the part of the ministering angels who spend their lives singing the background songs of praise which are always heard in God's throne room.

The **קְדוּשָׁה** is really a prayer about wonderful feelings. It simply says, "God, it feels good to be close to You, to see the artistry and wonder in the stuff You create and teach, and to be part of Your Holy team doing Your Holy work." Sharing the ways in which our relationship with God is important is also a kind of **praise**. At the same time, it helps us focus on our quest for more holy experiences.



בְּרַכָּה (The First בְּרַכַּת אָבוֹת)

1. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה,
2. אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ,
3. אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם, אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק, וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב,
4. הָאֵל הַגָּדוֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא,
5. אֵל עֲלִיוֹן,
6. גּוֹמֵל חֲסָדִים טוֹבִים,
7. וְקוֹנֵה הַכֹּל,
8. וְזוֹכֵר חֲסָדֵי אָבוֹת
9. וּמְבִיא גּוֹאֵל לְבָנָי בְּנֵיהֶם
10. לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ בְּאַהֲבָה.
11. מְלַךְ עוֹזֵר וּמוֹשִׁיעַ וּמַגֵּן.
12. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, מַגֵּן אַבְרָהָם.



The **אָבוֹת** is the first **בְּרָכָה** in the **עֲמִידָה**. In the traditional text of the **אָבוֹת**, thanks are given for the favors which God has done for Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their family. In some modern versions, Sarah, Rebekkah, Leah, and Rachel are added to the list. The **אָבוֹת** then asks God to continue and to expand these blessings.

At the core of this **בְּרָכָה** is a concept which the rabbis call **זְכוּת אָבוֹת**, the "merit of the ancestors." It suggests that, even though we may not be good enough to "merit" favors from God, as the children of God's **chosen** family, we have a special "merit" we have inherited from our ancestors.

When we say the **אָבוֹת**, we bow twice. Once during the **פְּתִיחָה**, the opening "**בְּרוּךְ**-formula" and once during the **חֲתִימָה**, the "**בְּרוּךְ**-formula" which seals the prayer.

Why does the עמידה start with the אבות?

In the Talmud, **Shabbat 30a**, we find this story. It gives us one clue why the rabbis chose to begin the עמידה with a prayer about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.



When Israel sinned with the Golden Calf in the wilderness, God was ready to destroy them. Moses stood before the Holy-One-Who-is-to-Be-Blessed and prayed many prayers. Over and over he asked God to forgive the Jewish people. His prayers didn't make a difference. God's mind was made up.

Finally, when Moses said to God, "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants," (Ex. 32.5) God accepted his prayers and forgave them.

a. In this Talmudic midrash, why was God angry at the Jewish people?

b. Moses prayed and prayed, but nothing changed God's mind. What words finally made a difference?

c. Why do you think that remembering Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob changed God's mind about destroying the Jewish people after the sin of the Golden Calf?

d. Why do you think the rabbis who wrote the עמידה chose to begin with the אבות, a prayer about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

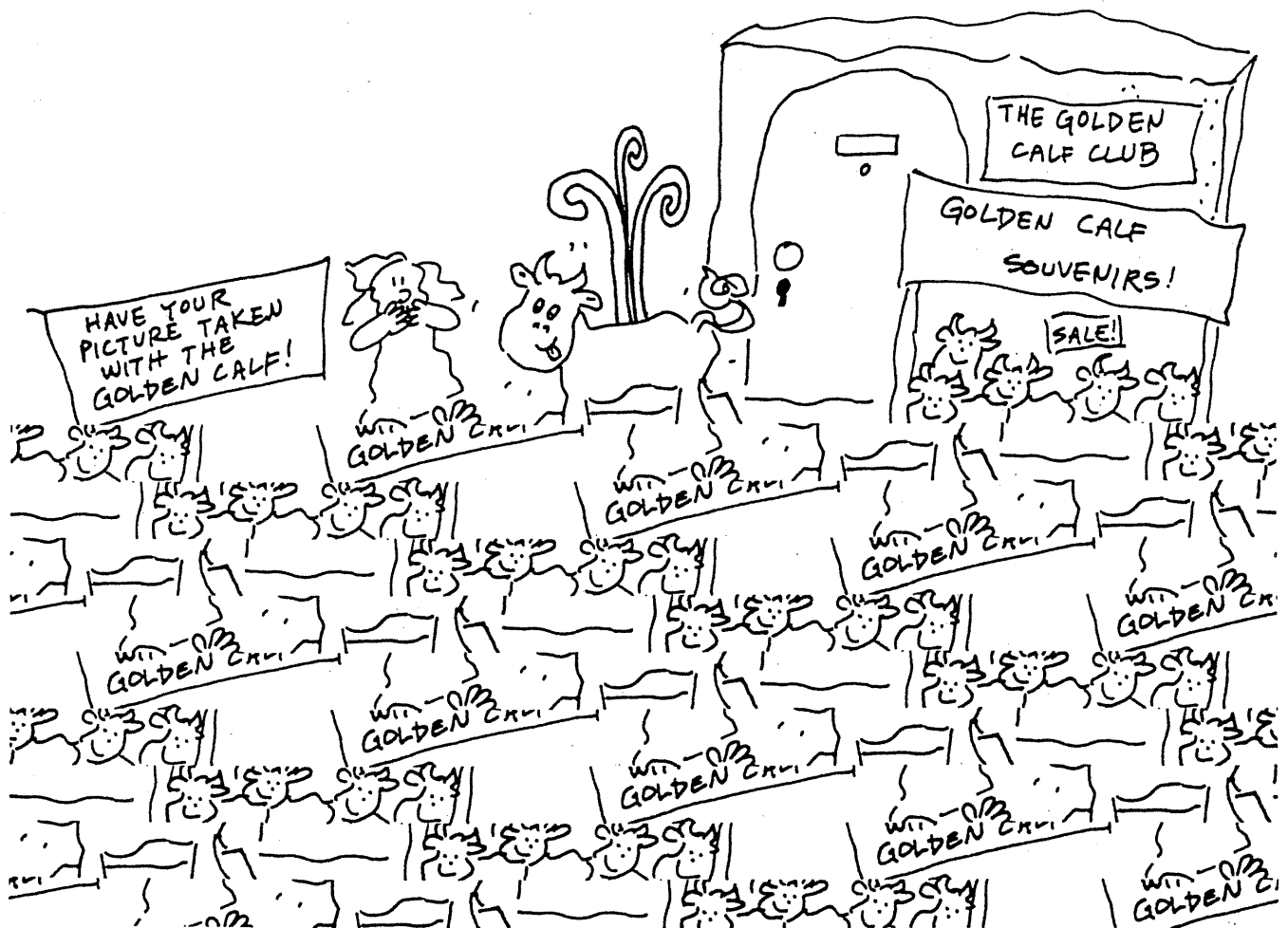
CONCEPT: זְכוּת אֲבוֹת

The Jewish tradition teaches that an individual's relationship to God is both personal and historic. Every individual has his/her own unique relationship with God, and the Jewish people have a unique relationship which is rooted in the covenant between God and Abraham. In a real sense, God is an old family friend. When we try to use prayer to make a connection with God, our heritage as children of great Jews of previous generations is an important advantage.

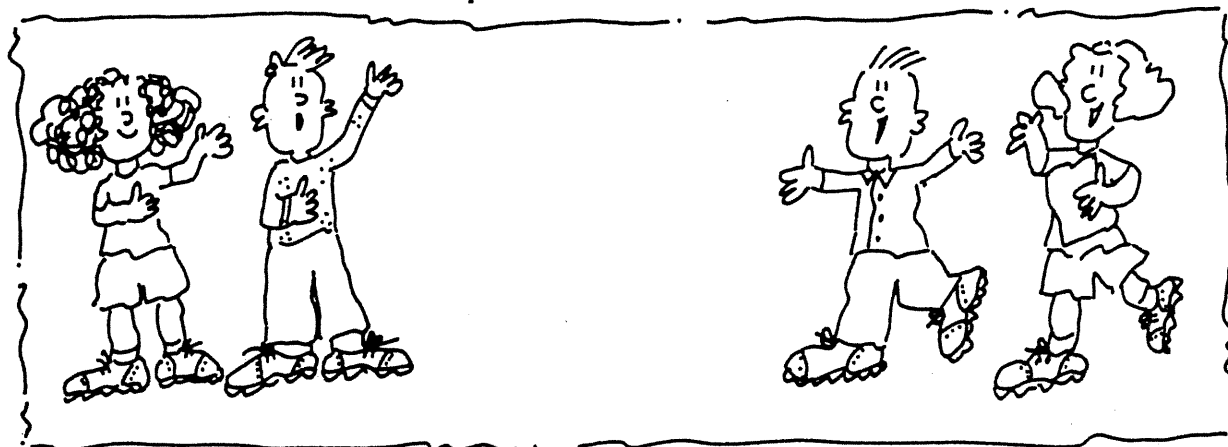
זְכוּת אֲבוֹת teaches us that who we are is rooted in (but not limited to) our family heritage.

CONCEPT: זְכוּת אִמָּהוֹת

The Jewish tradition teaches that men and women are both equal and different. There are many stories both in the Bible and in the Talmud which teach that, especially when it comes to prayer, women have a special relationship with God. זְכוּת אִמָּהוֹת means the "Merit of the Mothers," and it suggests that Sarah, Rebekkah, Leah, Rachel and other Mothers of Israel have unique and important lessons to teach us.



אֲמֵהוֹת and אָבוֹת



The text of the אָבוֹת on page 22 is the traditional text which Jews have used for almost 2,000 years. It only mentions אֲבֵרָהִם, יִצְחָק, and יַעֲקֹב. None of the אֲמֵהוֹת are mentioned by name.

Today, many synagogues are changing the text of the אָבוֹת and adding the אֲמֵהוֹת to the בְּרִכָּה.

- What are some of the reasons that many synagogues are making this change?
- What are some of the reasons that many Jews object to this change?
- What does your synagogue do? Why?
- What do you think is correct?

There is not yet an "official" way of changing the אָבוֹת to include the אֲמֵהוֹת. There are three* basic approaches:

אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֵרָהִם וְשָׂרָה, אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְרֵבֶקָה, אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב, לֵאמֹר וְרַחֵל

אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֵרָהִם, אֱלֹהֵי שָׂרָה, אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק, אֱלֹהֵי רֵבֶקָה,

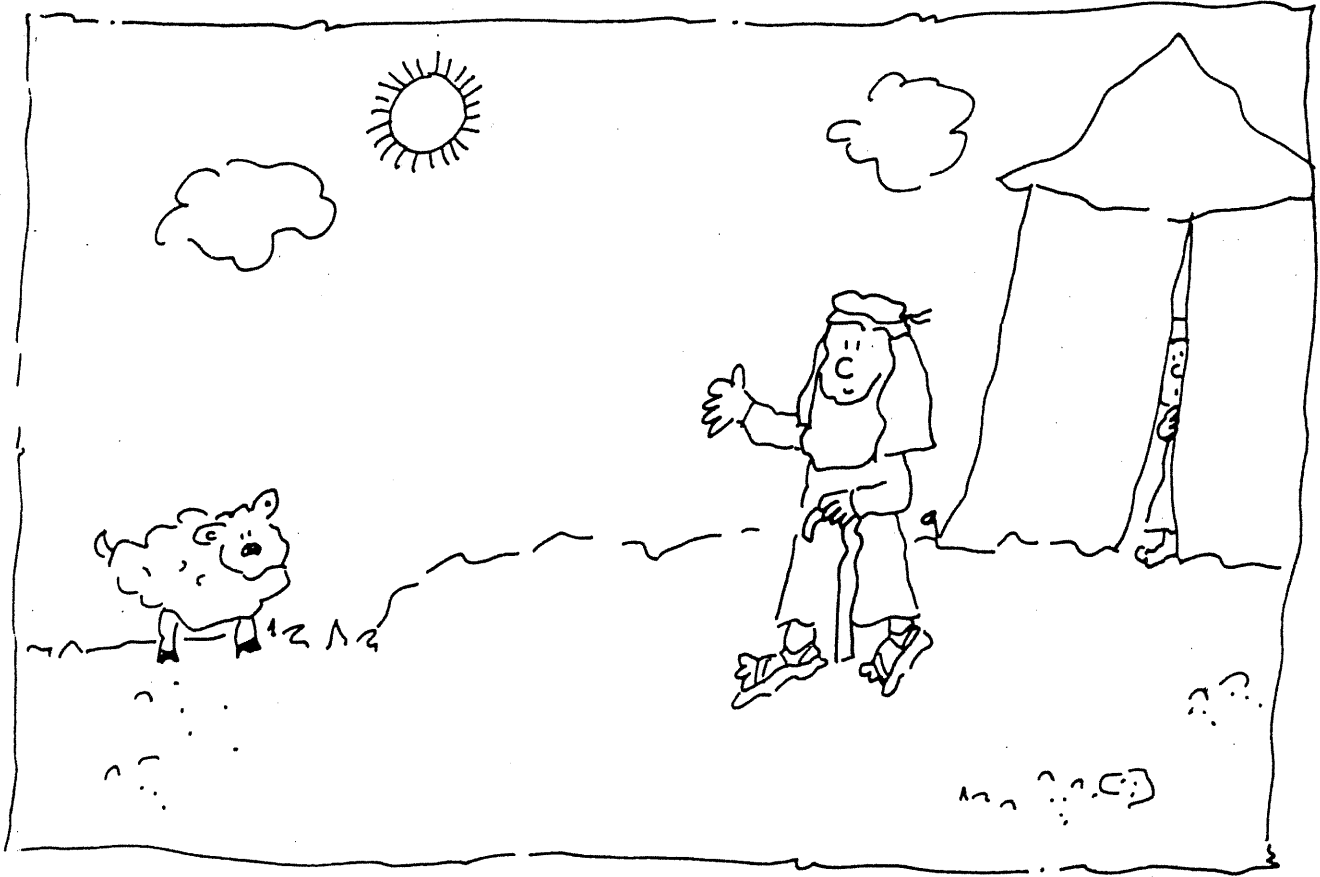
אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב, אֱלֹהֵי לֵאמֹר, וְאֱלֹהֵי רַחֵל

אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֵרָהִם, אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק, וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב,

אֱלֹהֵי שָׂרָה, אֱלֹהֵי רֵבֶקָה, אֱלֹהֵי לֵאמֹר, וְאֱלֹהֵי רַחֵל

- What is the difference between these three versions?
- What is good about each one?
- (If there is to be a new version) which one do you think should become the official new version?

* There are several other variations



A: In Genesis 14.19 Malki-Tzedek says*:

בְּרוּךְ אֲבָרָם לֵאלֹהֵי עֲלִיוֹן קִנְהַ שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ:

Blessed be Abram of אֱלֹהֵי עֲלִיוֹן
Owner of Heaven and Earth

- b. When we say the אַבּוֹת, we want to be like Abraham whom Malki Tzedek saw as an agent of אֱלֹהֵי עֲלִיוֹן. In what ways can we be like Abraham and be worthy of blessing?
-
-

✓ **CONCEPT: ROLE MODELS**

When we use the names of the אַבּוֹת and אֲמָהוֹת to motivate God to listen to our prayers (זְכוּת אַבּוֹת), we should also be using their examples to motivate ourselves. Abraham and Moses stand as examples of two Jews who knew how to live up to God's expectations, and of two Jews whose prayers made a difference.

* The Bible story which includes Malki Tzedek is not one usually taught in Hebrew school. It is called the War of the Kings and is found in chapter 14 of Genesis. While it may be a little hard to understand, if you look at it, it will teach you some surprising things about Abraham.

Commentary

Why does the אבות mention "our God," before the mention of our family's connection to God?

אֱלֹהֵינוּ goes ahead of אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ to teach us that one should not believe in God merely because his family did so, but as a result of one's own search and one's own study of the Torah.

Otzer Ha-Tfillot

Why does it repeat אֱלֹהֵי for each אָב?

We can perhaps guess that the סֹדֵר learned this pattern from Exodus 3.15 where God says to Moses:

THIS IS WHAT YOU SHOULD SAY TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL: 'THE LORD, GOD OF YOUR FATHERS, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB, HAS SENT ME TO YOU.'

We can perhaps learn from this that each of the different אבות had a different relationship with God. Each had a different faith.

Rabbi Zev Ya'avetz

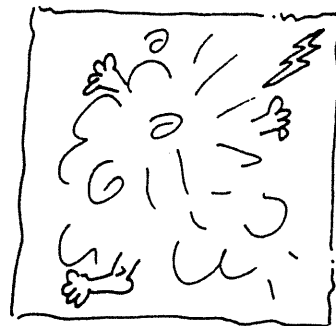
אֲבִרָהָם was the first person to discover faith in one God. He did it through his independent intellectual powers.



יִצְחָק was prepared to sacrifice his life for the sake of God.



יַעֲקֹב wrestled with God and found the strength in his faith which allowed him to create a nation.



CONCEPT: UNITY AND DIVERSITY

Unity means "being together." Diversity means "being different." Jews are part of a unified people—a single family which grew into a nation. Jews are also diverse. There are many different ways of being Jewish, there are many different ways Jews experience God and many different ways they communicate with God.

MID

1990's

2. The Triumph of Egalitarianism

Ruth M., an artist in her 40s and a mother of teenagers: *"One of the reasons I had the courage and the confidence to try to read Torah and Haftorah was that I had been observing many women Torah readers at Beth El. I was thrilled and very aware that they didn't race through it as fast [as men], and they are more musical about the way they approached it. Listening to one of the women Torah readers in the congregation was a definite incentive."*

Perhaps the most dramatic and visible changes in Conservative synagogues during the past quarter century have been the introduction of egalitarian practices in virtually every aspect of congregational life. Women have assumed new leadership roles on congregational boards and serve as rabbis, cantors, ritual directors, and administrators of educational programs. They also share responsibility with men for leading the religious service by reading Torah, chanting the Haftorah, delivering sermons, leading study sessions, and serving as prayer leaders. Bat mitzvah celebrants generally are treated no differently than their male counterparts.

The introduction of these egalitarian practices often prompted heated debates within congregations. These sometimes dragged on for years and, in some instances, provoked dissatisfied members to leave their congregations because the pace of change was either too fast or too slow. On the national level, battles over women's equality focused on the advisability of admitting women to the Rabbinical School of the Jewish Theological Seminary, a question that was resolved affirmatively in 1983. Since the early 1970s, local congregations debated similar questions concerning the expansion of women's roles. Our surveys indicate that, by the mid-1990s, most of these conflicts have been resolved in favor of women's equality.

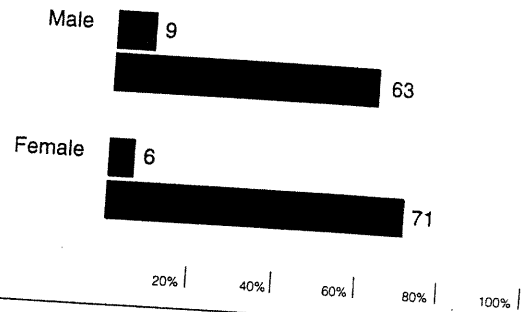
Attitudes Toward Equal Rights for Women in the Synagogue

When synagogue members were asked about their attitudes regarding women's equality in the sanctuary, a remarkably high percentage expressed their acceptance of women's equal status in the synagogue. For example, 84 percent agreed that women should have the same rights as men have in the synagogue; and 70 percent were willing to hire a woman as a rabbi. Significantly, men and women answered in much the same way: 84 percent of men and 85 percent of women favored women's equality in the synagogue. The gender gap is greater when respondents were asked their attitudes about hiring a woman rabbi: 65 percent of the men were in favor as compared to 74 percent of the women.

Chart 7

Attitudes Toward Equal Rights by Gender

Percentages



Key: Traditional Egalitarian

Source: Membership Survey

On the basis of these two questions, we classified respondents as egalitarians (if they favored both equal rights and women rabbis) and as traditionalists (if they opposed equal rights for women and the hiring of a woman as their rabbi) (see chart 7). One might expect relatively more egalitarians and fewer traditionalists among women, younger people, and the less observant. Yet our analysis shows that broad support for egalitarianism cuts across all key population groups and characterizes even those who are considered more traditional (men, older people, the more observant).

Women's Participation in Synagogue Life

These changes in attitudes have led to new synagogue practices. In more than four out of five congregations in the Conservative movement, women share the same ritual honors as men and bat mitzvah celebrants are treated in the same way as b'nai mitzvah. Similarly large percentages of congregations report having elected a woman as president within the past fifteen years. From the perspective of Jewish religious law as understood by the Conservative rabbinate, these practices vary greatly in their halakhic ramifications. A woman who serves as the president of a congregation, for example, raises far fewer halakhic issues than do women leading the religious services or participating as one of the required ten in the prayer quorum. These complex question have been debated by Conservative rabbis since the middle of the 20th century.

Synagogue practices also reflect changes in the Jewish educational attainments of women. Within the population of members, younger women have received far higher levels of formal Jewish education than have older women. When we compare the educational attainments of men and women, among those 25 years and older, men were more likely than women to have received six or more years of Jewish education. (These differences were especially sharp among the oldest group.) But among younger members between the ages of 18-24, there are no differences in the Jewish education attained by women and men.

Table 1

Synagogue Policies Regarding Women's Participation

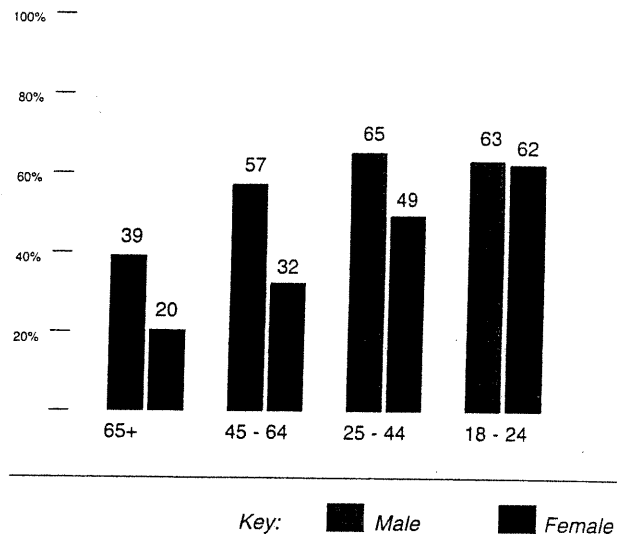
Women's Roles	% of Synagogues
Women are counted in the minyan	83%
Women may lead the services	78%
Women may read Torah in the synagogue	82%
Women may open and close the ark	93%
A woman has served as a president of the congregation during the past 15 years	79%
Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrants are treated the same way	80%

Source: Congregational Survey

Chart 8

Jewish Educational Attainments for Different Age Groups

(six or more years)



Numbers are expressed as percentages

Source: NJPS, 1990

2007 SURVEY (ONLINE)

CJLS members who voted to keep the previous stance on gays were strongly influenced by family, friends and congregants	Agree	20%	16%	17%	19%
	Disagree	39%	26%	23%	19%
Homosexuality is in-born, not chosen voluntarily	Agree	77%	82%	78%	80%
	Disagree	7%	4%	7%	6%
With reparative therapy, many homosexuals can change their sexual orientation	Agree	5%	2%	3%	3%
	Disagree	82%	89%	86%	88%
The legal reasoning in the permissive paper that was approved by the CJLS was outside the pale of acceptability of halakhic reasoning	Agree	35%	25%	29%	28%
	Disagree	50%	42%	41%	35%
Those who walk to shul on Shabbat are really orthodox	Agree	4%	7%	8%	10%
	Disagree	94%	88%	87%	83%
It was a mistake for the CJLS, years ago, to have legitimated driving to shul on Shabbat	Agree	41%	22%	13%	27%
	Disagree	50%	70%	81%	61%
Conservative Judaism would be better served if there were no centralized Law Committee	Agree	15%	8%	7%	8%
	Disagree	68%	65%	69%	60%
Conservative Judaism is a halakhic movement	Agree	65%	64%	67%	59%
	Disagree	20%	16%	12%	16%
Conservative Judaism should stop pretending it is a halakhic movement	Agree	24%	20%	14%	19%
	Disagree	62%	60%	65%	55%
The torah was written by people and not by God or by Divine inspiration	Agree	36%	39%	42%	36%
	Disagree	53%	42%	38%	41%
I would not want a women to serve as rabbi of my congregation	Agree	8%	9%	8%	14%
	Disagree	89%	86%	87%	80%
I would not want a women to serve as cantor of my congregation	Agree	10%	9%	8%	14%
	Disagree	87%	86%	88%	81%
Conservative congregations that are not fully gender egalitarian should leave the movement	Agree	18%	25%	19%	24%
	Disagree	75%	64%	72%	60%
Conservative congregations that won't hire gay rabbis or cantors should leave the movement	Agree	11%	17%	11%	17%
	Disagree	80%	69%	77%	66%
Conservative Judaism should adopt "patrilineal descent"	Agree	15%	27%	27%	24%
	Disagree	76%	56%	54%	58%
Conservative rabbis ought to be allowed to officiate at marriages between Jews and non-Jews	Agree	6%	17%	21%	21%
	Disagree	89%	70%	66%	63%

