



# Carnegie Shul Chatter

February 7, 2019



Light Candles 5:37pm    Shabbat Services 9:20am

## Considdur This...

The siddur is something that I had always taken for granted. I grew up with one siddur and I assumed everyone used the same siddur. It was, after all, my Jewish prayer book.

I never even gave a second thought to the meaning of the word "siddur." I guess I always thought it was a Hebrew word for prayer book. I never recognized the similarity between the word "siddur" and the word "seder."

But, lo and behold, "seder" means "order" and describes the order of the Passover observance. An "siddur" has the same root as "seder" and contains the order of the prayers in our services.

Who knew? Well, as my wife often says, "Probably everybody but you."

## However You Do It

So, where once there were few, now there are many – prayer books that is.

I prefer the Birnbaum, probably because I grew up with it and am most familiar with it. I love the translations, but again, that may be based upon familiarity.

I love the style, but others, like my wife, prefer the Artscroll, which has modern translations, clearly delineates the portions of prayers for specific holiday and tells you when to stand and bow.

But regardless of which siddur you prefer, the important thing is, whether with a siddur or without, to pray, through tefillahs (prayers) or bruchas (blessings), to recognize God, and to thank him for the blessings he bestows upon us daily.

Traditionally, we have three services a day, just as there were three times for sacrificial offerings back in the days of the Temple. But if you can't pray three times a day, I expect God will settle for one. Or at least say the Shema when you lie down at night and when you rise up in the morning.

Give it a try. Prayer is good.

But do we all use the same siddur? At one time we did, but now there is the Birnbaum that we still use in Carnegie, the Art Scroll, and many more.

The order of the service is still pretty much the same, but the presentation and the English translations differ greatly.

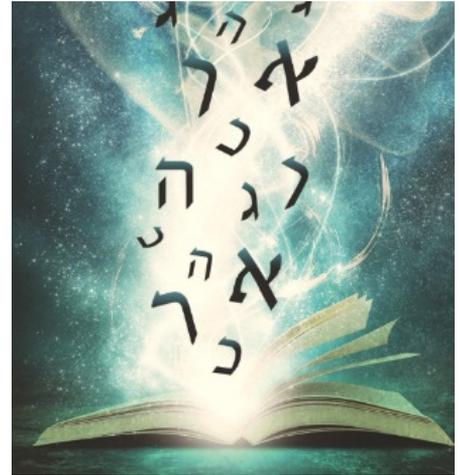
Here are two articles from myjewishlearning.com that discuss the siddur.

# Siddur: Jewish Prayer Book

*Is the siddur a holy text or crib notes for a conversation with God?*

Rabbi Eliezer said, "One who makes one's prayers fixed, that person's prayers are not sincere petitions." (Mishnah Berakhot 4:4)

Heedless of Rabbi Eliezer's comments, or perhaps chastened by the difficulty of regularly drafting new prayers, Jews created fixed texts and structures for prayer that were ultimately drawn together in the siddur, or Jewish prayer book. The word siddur means order and comes from the same root as seder, the special Passover meal. The particular order of Jewish worship was established largely during the first four or five centuries CE, although the components of that worship were drawn from earlier periods and have continued to develop until modern times.



## Structure Dates to Talmudic Period

The structure for Jewish worship was developed during the Talmudic period. The morning service (Shachrit), which is the most complex of the three daily services, has two main foci:

- 1) The Shema, a selection of three paragraphs from the Bible (from Deuteronomy 6 and 11 and Numbers 15) affirming God's unity and surrounded by thematically associated blessings before and after, and
- 2) The Amidah, a series of seven blessings (on the Sabbath) or 19 blessings (on weekdays) dealing with themes of repentance, sustenance, and the restoration of a messianic, Israelite kingship. Extra blessings are added when celebrating the beginning of a new month and other holidays.



Most of the other materials fit into structures that emulate these two central pieces; either they are passages from the Bible surrounded by blessings (like the Shema), or series of blessings (like the Amidah). In the first category is the Torah service, the verses of song (P'sukei d'Zimrah), and the Hallel (psalms recited on holidays). The second category includes the morning blessings. Other materials in different forms serve to punctuate and supplement the various services, but these two formats cover most of the structure of the prayer services included in the siddur.

## Changes and Developments

Although the basic format for the prayer services was worked out during the Talmudic period, the siddur continued to grow incrementally as new materials were added into the earlier structure. This conservatism begins with the one, overwhelmingly consistent stylistic aspect of Jewish prayer: the use and adaptation of biblical language. Another aspect of this conservatism is the reliance on precedents for opportunities to change the established structure.



For example, the Talmud records at the end of the second chapter of Tractate Berakhot (Blessings) the personal prayers of different rabbis upon concluding the Amidah. That precedent opened up the opportunity for all kinds of additions to the service to be tacked on after the recitation of the Amidah. Similarly, a list of morning blessings that the rabbis originally thought should be recited in the home before joining with the community was eventually, due to popular demand, inserted at the beginning of the service. Following this addition, other later materials were also inserted. Many of these later materials include some of the best-loved medieval poetry found in the siddur like Adon Olam (Eternal Lord) and Yigdal (a poetic adaptation of Maimonides' principles of faith).

## Mystical Influences

The mystical developments did not add too much original content to the liturgy found in the prayer book. But the mystical emphasis on the perfection of the text of the siddur and the mystical meanings found in the numbers of words or letters in the various prayers led, on the one hand, to an even greater textual conservatism, and, on the other hand, the beginning of elaborate commentaries on the prayer book that explained the mystical significance of the texts. The genre of siddur commentary has grown since those early, mystical works. Since the prayer book is among the most accessible and widely known Jewish texts, many scholars realized that siddur commentary would be a very effective educational tool.

Although the forms of the prayer services were laid out during the time of the Talmud, the first real siddur was not written until the ninth century, when various Babylonian geonim (Jewish leaders) worked out the actual "canon" of the synagogue service. Even so, differences remained and continued to develop between different communities, especially between Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities. In modern times, different denominations of Judaism have developed their own prayer books, and different individuals have published their own siddurim. Modern prayer books frequently include translations, new commentaries, and the texts for home rituals and observances.

# How to Choose a Siddur

By Julie Wiener and Rabbi Peretz Rodman

Whether you're buying a prayerbook for yourself or for a synagogue or other group, it helps to know what lies behind the muted bindings and the denominational labels of today's wide array of possibilities.

Choosing a siddur (prayerbook) requires balancing several considerations. How traditional or radical a text do you want? How literal a translation? How much transliteration? Do you want a siddur that offers commentary to study, or one with devotional texts to deepen the basic prayer experience? How important will it be for sections to be labeled and the contents clearly arranged and indexed? While many buyers will be guided in large part by ideological considerations, it pays to consider just what you get with each alternative.

## Digital Prayer Books

In recent years, numerous digital versions of prayer books have become available for free on the Internet and can be accessed on mobile devices. While those who observe Shabbat

and holiday restrictions on electricity use will need to avoid these high-tech prayer books on those days, they may want them for weekday prayer services.

Among the options:

- Sefaria, an online repository of public-domain Jewish texts in Hebrew and translation, offers Hebrew and English text of three Orthodox prayerbooks: Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Mizrahi.
- OnlineSiddur (Orthodox) has the Hebrew text for weekday morning, afternoon and evening services.
- Chabad's online prayerbook (Orthodox) contains Hebrew, English and commentary.
- Chai Lifeline's online prayerbooks (Orthodox) contain Hebrew, English and commentary. The format is similar to a print version: Users click an arrow to move from page to page.
- The Open Siddur Project enables users to search for prayers that are in the public domain and then combine them to create "print-ready prayer books."
- A wide array of siddur apps — some free and some for sale — are available for iOS and Android devices. However, most are traditional or Orthodox and do not have transliteration or English.

In addition to the free options, some printed prayer books also are available as e-books, such as Mishkan T'fila (Reform) and OneShul Community Siddur (nondenominational, but "gender-inclusive" and "LGBT-friendly").

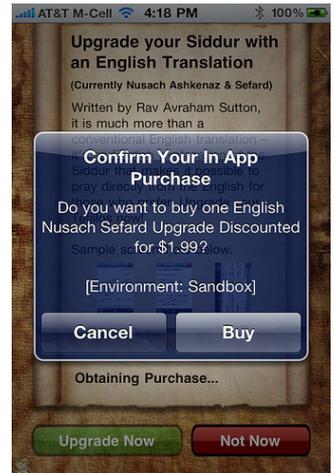
## The ArtScroll Phenomenon

A person looking for the traditional received text of the liturgy without adjustment to modern ideologies will enjoy the ArtScroll siddurim (plural of siddur). ArtScroll is a publisher whose siddurim are closest to ubiquitous in North America, found even outside their natural home in the Orthodox world. They are available in many editions that vary by size, binding, and rite.

ArtScroll siddurim are characterized by their sharply-defined layouts which manage to maintain remarkable readability, despite the crowding of each page with directions and extensive comments. The name of God is translated always as "HASHEM" ("the Name," a substitute epithet for the ineffable divine name). No apologies are made for such linguistic archaisms as calling God "King" or "father," and the extensive commentary to the liturgy is unabashedly supernaturalist, messianist, and in every way the work of an unreconstructed traditionalist.

The Artscroll is an Orthodox publication, and proudly so, but it has quite a few fans outside the Orthodox world. A full-service siddur with clear directions, brief explanations, and complete and direct translations, the Artscroll is a mighty learning tool for anyone looking to expand his or her knowledge of traditional Judaism.

One common siddur largely displaced by the ArtScroll siddurim is Philip Birnbaum's Daily Prayer Book (Hasiddur Hashalem), still in print. It is comprehensive, with a straightforward translation, useful annotation, and copious additional readings. [For a review of the Koren Siddur, a recent addition to Orthodox siddur publications, [click here](#)].





earlier 1985 edition, Rabbi Jules Harlow. Another literary treat is the occasional appearance of interpretive translations of the Amidah blessings and other benedictions, by Rabbi Andre Ungar. They are far from literal and their language borders on the florid, but they go a long way toward capturing the spirit of those classical Hebrew texts.

As in every Conservative prayerbook, the traditional Hebrew text is retained, with a few key passages emended for ideological reasons. Here, too, for example, there is no prayer for the restoration of sacrifices. References to resurrection are retained in the Hebrew text, but they are reinterpreted in English: “[He] who revives the dead” becomes in English “Master of life and death.” Two parallel openings of the Amidah prayer appear, one with the traditional reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and another featuring the matriarchs as well.

The editors of *Sim Shalom* do not believe their readers need transliteration, and only a few key prayers are transliterated anywhere in these volumes. A further indication of the expectation of a high level of comfort in Hebrew is that the name of God is consistently rendered by a transliteration of the standard Hebrew term, “Adonai.”

This siddur also includes many Conservative liturgical innovations, such as updating the *Nahem* prayer on the Ninth of Av to refer to a rebuilt city of Jerusalem, or expanding the list of holidays on which one says the *Al Ha-nisim* prayer of thanks for miracles to include not only Hanukkah and Purim but also *Yom Ha’atzmaut*. This siddur also includes a *Nahem* prayer for Holocaust Memorial Day (*Yom Ha-sho’ah*) and offers a ceremony for the anniversary of Jerusalem’s 1967 reunification (*Yom Yerushalayim*).

Worshippers or students looking for a siddur with extensive commentary might consider Rabbi Reuven Hammer’s sensitive and erudite *Or Hadash*. Each page includes a page of *Sim Shalom* with wrap-around commentary in the fashion of classic rabbinic texts. The first of two volumes is now available.

Vying with *Sim Shalom* for the Conservative market is *Siddur Hadash*, which features a less challenging translation, numerous additional readings, and similar ideological adjustments.

## **Kol Haneshamah: Reconstructionism**

The Reconstructionist movement’s prayerbooks for weekdays, Shabbat and holidays form a matched set under one title, *Kol Haneshamah* (“every creature” or “all that breathes,” from the last verse of *Psalms*). These siddurim showcase the Reconstructionist movement’s innovative approach to liturgy—traditionalist in form, but radical in ideology. Far more is rewritten than in the Conservative siddur, though a full Hebrew text is given for every standard prayer. These siddurim are rather bulky.

The beauty of this siddur is in the translation by Dr. Joel Rosenberg, which draws out nuances of meaning that often lie dormant in these ancient texts. This siddur is worthy of repeated close reading.



