Techinas: A Voice from the Heart, a Collection of Jewish Women’s Prayers, ‘As Only a Woman can Pray’

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Introduction

INCREASING WORK HAS BEEN DONE IN recent years on making accessible to a wider audience prayers written for and said predominantly by Jewish women. This work is important not only for women searching for appropriate prayers for themselves but also for those interested in learning about the spiritual lives of our predecessors. It is relevant, too, for all those interested in the notion of prayer in the vernacular, and in the varieties of personal as opposed to congregational prayer.

The three books under review are part of this recent scholarship. All are bilingual. The first two are editions of tehines, which are individual prayers that Ashkenazi women recited on different occasions.(1) Tehines in Yiddish were first printed in the 16th century, and were printed and reprinted in Western(2) and Eastern Europe(3) until this century. Indeed, editions in Yiddish are still being reprinted today in New York.(4) There were a few manuscript copies, often luxury editions commissioned for individual women, but these seem to be exceptions -- tehines were basically popular works, a printed genre aimed at a large number of women, that probably grew out of a need for a means of vernacular prayer.(5)

The third volume is an edition of a Hebrew text of an 18th century Italian manuscript of women’s prayers. A number of manuscript books of women’s prayers in Hebrew were commissioned for particular women in Italy between about 1700 and 1850. The impetus was, therefore, not a need for vernacular prayer but for prayers that related directly to a woman’s experience, for example, prayers connected with the three mitzvot for women (hallah, niddah and hadlakat nerot), and for the events surrounding pregnancy, childbirth and delivery. Indeed, the Italian captions seem to assume that the women for whom the manuscripts were written prayed regularly; they contain directions as to when certain prayers should be recited in the context of the standard prayer service.

Books Under Review

The Klirs volume, The Merit of Our Mothers, is a selection from different groups of tehines, including many early East European ones. She consciously chose these earlier editions because they are most likely to have been written by women,(6) since, by the end of the 19th century, many tehines were penned by maskilim (participants in the Jewish Enlightenment) and yeshivah students, often using female pen names, as a way of making quick money. Klirs’ book is drawn from a dissertation, and she has done a lot of work in explaining the sources of the tehines, Biblical, Midrashic, liturgical, Kabbalistic, etc., adding to our understanding of the richness of the textual and historical allusions employed. Klirs has chosen to use Yiddish names and many expressions in the English text, and then explain them in the glossary at the back, such as "riboyne shel oylem," "koyen godl," "mitsve," "toyre," "shabes," and "shoyfer." At first it seems strange to read of Jacob as "Yankev ovinu, olev hasholem," but this method succeeds in drawing the reader into the pietistic world of the text.(7)

The...

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A Jewish Woman's Prayer Book book. Read 7 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. A Jewish Womans Prayer Book by Lavie, Aliza. Published ... This is a wonderful collection of prayers by, for & about women through the various experiences and emotions of their lives (desire for a worthy spouse, birth, motherhood, feasts and festivals, doubt & fear, etc). I found myself especially touched by the recorded prayers of crypto-Jews. In printed tkhine collections, each individual prayer begins with a heading directing when and sometimes how it should be recited: “A pretty tkhine to say on the Sabbath with great devotion;” “A tkhine that the woman should pray for herself and her husband and children;” “A confession to say with devotion, not too quickly; it is good for the soul;” “When she comes. For prayer comes from the heart, and when the heart does not know what the mouth speaks, the prayer helps but little. Numerous reprints (usually entitled Seyder tkhines), expansions and additional collections followed. Weissler, Chava. "Tkhines." Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. 20 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. The Jewish Woman Spirituality & the Feminine Celebrating Jewish Womanhood. A Woman's Prayer. By Samantha Barnett. College was going to be the most exciting time in my life. Through the examples of the women I've met and studied, I too have learned to pray better and harder, and to understand why I'm doing it. Prayer helps me to remember to be grateful, and to define what I want and why. But, most importantly, it reminds me that I'm never alone. womens prayer as a woman of 54 (with two wonderful adult children Baruch HaShem, Thank G-d) and on my own (I've been divorced since 1990), I am now rediscovering all aspect of living Jewish almost as a child again. The one thing I never wavered from was my faith in G-D and prayer. I was sick, I am getting better.