

LIBERATING PRAYER (from the Bimah and from the Clergy)

Rabbis Billy Dreskin and Jeffrey Sirkman

Cantors Ellen Dreskin and Rosalie Boxt

Thursday Morning Shacharit • 7:15-8:30 am

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VISUAL WORSHIP

Placing projected images onto a screen during Jewish worship can be controversial. Some have difficulty giving up their siddurim. Others say it feels Christian. Clearly, we are in the beginning, experimental stages of this project.

Here are some thoughts for you to consider about visual worship and, if you like, some suggestions and resources for bringing it into your sanctuary.

WHAT IS VISUAL WORSHIP?

Visual Worship is an ongoing exploration of worship-without-a-siddur-in-hand. All the prayers (in Hebrew and English lettering), all the songs and more, are projected onto one or two screens on the *bimah*.

WHY VISUAL WORSHIP?

Reform Jewish Worship has been undergoing a sea-change in recent years and that's presented tremendous opportunity for experimentation as we strive to bring deeper meaning and increased joyfulness to our communities. For Reform Jewish worship to truly reach out and draw in participants, we must touch both the heart and the mind. Visual imagery during *t'fillah* offers additional opportunities for achieving this goal.

WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF VISUAL WORSHIP?

- 1) For congregants to lift their faces up and out of the siddur so that they can look at their worship leaders, look at each other, have their hands free to clap along or, if the spirit moves them, to put their arms around each other. These screens may just allow us to be more present as part of a worshipping community in ways we might not often be afforded.
- 2) To explore the use of color and imagery through these projections and, hopefully, to enhance the worship experience by bringing in some powerful reminders of the greatness and the beauty of God's created world.
- 3) Visual worship offers us the ability to bring an additional dimension to any themes that we establish during a service (e.g., Israel Shabbat, Holocaust Remembrance Shabbat, Volunteer Shabbat). Visual worship provides the ability to change the way our sanctuary looks to match a moment or an event taking place there.

Note: Some of our congregants may still prefer to use the printed liturgy. In our work, we've placed page numbers in the lower right-hand corner of each screen.

WHAT OTHER USES ARE THERE FOR VISUAL WORSHIP?

The list is probably endless, but some of the services we've created include: Kidz

Shabbat (with special youth-oriented, non-reader images for the little ones, and even a sermon-games that use projections to provoke thoughtful dialogue), Purim (*megillah* texts, as well as Purim silliness on the screens), and Simkhat Torah (imagine projecting Torah verses for the congregation to follow while the Torah is being read from the *bimah*).

WHY ELSE “VISUAL WORSHIP”?

Saves paper! No longer any need to necessarily print up creative services. Place them onscreen instead. This is especially important to teens (and members of the Finance Committee like it too)!

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Again, the possibilities are endless. But to get started, all you really need is: a screen, an LCD projector, and a computer. Place the screen high enough so it can be seen from the very last row, and tape down your cables so no one trips over them. The computer can go just about anywhere – in the front row, on the *bimah*, at the side of your worship space, or in the rear.

WHAT SOFTWARE SHOULD WE USE?

Currently we use a Windows-based program called SongShow Plus (*songshowplus.com*). There are many other packages, developed by the Christian church community in response to Microsoft PowerPoint’s less than impressive ability to support non-business, more spiritual image projection. We’ve seen very successful use of Keynote (for the Mac) – contact HUC student Dan Medwin (dan.medwin@gmail.com ... or visit his website: visualtefillah.com) who’s a wiz at using Keynote for what he calls *visual tefillah*.

If you decide to use SongShow Plus, you are more than welcome to use download the services I’ve already created. They’re available to you at dreskin.us/html/visual_worship.html.

WHO ENJOYS VISUAL WORSHIP?

We’re finding that congregants of all ages benefit from projected images. Kids think it’s cool. Older members appreciate not having to hold a prayerbook and often think the screens are easier to look at. High school students don’t come because of it, but once there, they react wonderfully to it.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW?

- 1) Preparation is extremely time-consuming. We think it best to gather a team of folks interested in making this happen. Spread the work around so nobody has to do it all.
- 2) Experiment with how much text fits on a screen and remains legible throughout the congregation. This is extremely important! We use eight lines as our working number – four lines of Hebrew with four lines of transliteration beneath. We sacrifice translation for these services, suggesting folks pick up a siddur if they want that too.
- 3) Get Hebrew letters onto the screen. Visual worship can feel Christian to people who have only seen it in that venue (e.g., on televised church services). But once you’ve got

Hebrew up there, it becomes a Jewish experience.

That's about it. We hope you'll give visual worship a try. Don't hesitate to be in touch with Rabbi Billy Dreskin (rabbi@wct.org) or Dan Medwin (dan.medwin@gmail.com). They'd love to help you get going!