

Two Nineteenth Century Hebrew “Siddurim”

Kai Kjær-Hansen⁴⁵

In the 19th century the prayer book of the Anglican Church, *The Book of Common Prayer*, was translated into Hebrew. For those interested in Jewish evangelism today, this might be no more than a historic curiosity. On the other hand, the Hebrew *Siddur* written by Joseph Rabinowitz (1837-1899) might be of greater interest. Rabinowitz was the leader of The Israelites of the New Covenant and the *Siddur* he compiled was used for worship services in Kishinev, Russia for about 25 years at the end of the last century.

These two “*Siddurim*” are very different, perhaps so different that a comparison seems inappropriate. Some Jewish believers in Jesus will insist that a translation of *The Book of Common Prayer* into Hebrew is a gentile Christian phenomenon. However, when Messianic Jews distance themselves from the Christian church they sometimes forget that the liturgy of the Christian church has Jewish roots. Others will insist that Rabinowitz’ liturgy is a Jewish Christian phenomenon. But in saying so they do not realize that when Rabinowitz composed the *Siddur* and Rules of Faith for his congregation in Kishinev, he had a copy of *The Book of Common Prayer* in front of him.

Rabinowitz and those who translated *The Book of Common Prayer* into Hebrew had in common their desire to make a liturgy for their worship service. In doing so they challenge those Jewish believers in Jesus today who reject or have scant appreciation of liturgy. The use of liturgy cannot be rejected as being “un-Jewish.” The question that can and should be asked, however, is, “What kind of *Siddur* can Jewish believers in Jesus use?”

Interestingly enough, some of Rabinowitz’ gentile supporters from abroad were also surprised to see how liturgical his worship services were, an attitude which they articulated upon visiting him.⁴⁶ Although Rabinowitz did not use the Hebrew translation of *The Book of Common Prayer*, he was influenced by it; as a Jesus-believing Jew he certainly had nothing against liturgy. He showed respect for the Jewish tradition as well as for the Christian, just as he demonstrated

⁴⁵ Kai Kjær-Hansen has his Ph.D. on Studies in the Name of Jesus. He is the author of several books on Jewish evangelism and the Messianic Jewish movement. Presently he serves as International Coordinator of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE).

⁴⁶ On visitors’ reaction to Rabinowitz’s service, see K. Kjær-Hansen, *Joseph Rabinowitz and the Messianic Movement* (Edinburgh/Grand Rapids: Handsel Press/Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 149-152. John Wilkinson, leader of The Mildmay Mission, who otherwise was a strong supporter of Rabinowitz, was very surprised at Rabinowitz’s theological and liturgical viewpoints. In 1885 he wrote: “Some parts of his ‘Articles of Faith’ have a strong flavour of Sacramentarianism and Sacerdotalism which may be accounted for by his surroundings, and which Evangelical Christians may reasonably hope he will in time outgrow. In the meantime he must not be lectured out of error, but loved into truth”. Wilkinson’, “Preface” in J. Adler (ed.), *A New and Enlarged Edition of The First-ripe Fig. Articles, Creed and Form or Worship of Joseph Rabinowitch* (London, 1885), 46.

independence from the Christian tradition as well as the Jewish.

The Hebrew version of *The Book of Common Prayer*

In December 1836, the Hebrew version of *The Book of Common Prayer* was published in London⁴⁷ under the title *The Book of Common Prayer According to the Tradition of the Church of England and Ireland*. A few years later in 1841 the second fully-pointed edition appeared.

The prayer book was published by the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, established in 1809.⁴⁸ A. McCaul and J.C. Reichardt were responsible for the text while others took an active part in the translation into Hebrew; M.S. Alexander, professor of Hebrew and Rabbinical Literature at King's College, London being one.⁴⁹ Alexander, who was himself of Jewish origin, was ordained bishop in 1841 and arrived in Jerusalem in 1842 as the first protestant bishop.⁵⁰

The translation was not a completely new translation. In front of them the translators had a Hebrew copy of *The Book of Common Prayer* from as far back as 1717, done by the "proselyte" Abraham Bar Jacob⁵¹ and a later one from the beginning of the century, done by a Jewish "convert," Czerskier, in Warsaw.⁵²

The publication of the Hebrew version of *The Book of Common Prayer* was celebrated in London at the beginning of 1837. W.T. Gidney writes that "a copy ... was presented to each of the Archbishops and Bishops of the United Kingdom, as well as the other learned divines and scholars, from whom were received many important testimonies to the accuracy of the translation."⁵³

The same enthusiasm for the linguistic quality of the translation was not expressed by Franz Delitzsch in Germany.

The translators' good intentions far exceed their stylistic abilities; they are altogether lacking in the basic principles and the sensitivity to rhythm so necessary for expressing the message of the New Testament in Hebrew forms.⁵⁴

Pinchas E. Lapidé looks at the Hebrew version from a modern Jewish perspective. In doing so he notes the following:

⁴⁷ W.T. Gidney, *Sites and Scenes (= Mission to Jews)*, part II (London: Operative Jewish Converts' Institution, 2nd ed., 1899), 68.

⁴⁸ W.T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews. From 1809 to 1908* (London: London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, 1908), 100, 152f, 179.

⁴⁹ Gidney, *Sites and Scenes*, 72.

⁵⁰ Gidney, *History*, 209; a popular biography on Alexander is found in M.W. Corey, *From Rabbi to Bishop. The Biography of the Right Reverend Michael Solomon Alexander, Bishop in Jerusalem* (London: The Olive Press, no date); see also K. Crombie, "Michael Solomon Alexander and The Controversial Jerusalem Bishopric", *Mishkan* 15 (1991), 1-12.

⁵¹ J.F.A. de le Roi, *Geschichte der Evangelischen Judenmission seit Entstehung des Neueren Judentums*, part II (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, vol. 3, 1899), 16.

⁵² Gidney, *History*, 100.

⁵³ Gidney, *History*, 152.

⁵⁴ F. Delitzsch, *Wissenschaft, Kunst, Judentum* (Grimma: Verlag von Julius Moritz Gebhardt, 1838), 308.

- (a) The many anglicisms.
- (b) The technical terms of the Church that are not translated.
- (c) The artificial hebraizing of many theological terms.⁵⁵

Lapide acknowledges the fact that parts of the prayer book are full of Biblical quotes. Despite linguistic deficiencies

the Israeli who thinks in Hebrew can agree with the London Society's *Report* 31 (1839): "The ministrations and liturgy of our Church are peculiarly suited to the mind and habits of the Jews." Actually, there are whole pages which sound like excerpts from the Psalms or the synagogue *Siddur*.
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When it comes to large parts of the Hebrew version Lapide shares F. Delitzsch's critique concerning the linguistic quality. Although we shall not judge the linguistic quality of the translation, two questions do concern us: (1) Who was the translation intended for? (2) What does it indicate?

Lapide does ask the relevant question: For whom was this text actually produced? He maintains that the majority of Jews in England at the time did not understand enough Hebrew to read the book, much less use it devotionally. Furthermore, he thinks that rabbis and those familiar with the Torah would have had difficulty suppressing amusement at the awkward attempts to Judaize Christian terminology. Lapide is convinced that the fringe Jews, who according to him were most susceptible to the Jewish mission, would have preferred to use the texts in their original English form. Left then is the group of clergy of the Anglican church, who could use the Hebrew version to stimulate their interest in the study of the biblical language!

This last comment might be amusing. That the London Society had intentions other than providing a study book in Hebrew for the clergy of the church is, however, quite clear; Lapide's comments only demonstrate how facetious is his answer.

By taking a look at the primary sources one will realize that the Hebrew version of *The Book of Common Prayer* is part of a greater vision which the London Society had in the 1830's and onward. A quote from 1835 holds:

It is well known that for ages the various branches of the Christian Church have had their convents and their places of worship in Jerusalem. The Greek, the Roman Catholic, the Armenian, can each find brethren to receive him, and a house of prayer in which to worship. In Jerusalem also the Turk has his mosque, and the Jew his synagogue. The pure Christianity of the Reformation alone appears as a stranger ... The prejudice of the Jews is against Christianity as a system, as a form of worship; and the only way whereby this prejudice can be overcome generally is by exhibiting Christian worship in its purity. The Liturgy in Hebrew would tend to remove the other part of the prejudice, that Christianity is a Gentile system, and as such be at once rejected.⁵⁷

Or, as it was said in 1839,

Its deep and tender devotion, the evangelical simplicity of its ritual will form in the mind of the Jew an inviting contrast to the idolatry and superstition of the Latin and Eastern Churches; its enlarged

⁵⁵ P.E. Lapide, *Hebrew in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1984), 81.

⁵⁶ Lapide, 81.

⁵⁷ Gidney, *Sites and Scenes*, 67-68.

charity will affect his heart, and its Scriptural character demand his homage.⁵⁸

The London Society had a vision to have worship service in Hebrew wherever its missionaries were — including Jerusalem. At the time the Hebrew version of *The Book of Common Prayer* was celebrated, John Nicolayson was visiting London. He brought with him his plans for building the first Protestant church in Jerusalem. This is how it was expressed by the Society:

It was felt that a well-established Mission at Jerusalem with a church, Anglican Liturgy in Hebrew, Hebrew Christian congregation and the pastoral care of converts, would be the means of great good to Palestine, and of incalculable benefit to all missionary enterprise among Jews of the East.⁵⁹

Nicolayson returned to Jerusalem in 1838 as an ordained minister, and “Services were commenced in the temporary chapel in Hebrew daily.”⁶⁰ In 1849 Christ Church was completed and the building dedicated. At that time there was a congregation of Jews worshipping in Hebrew.⁶¹ From 1837 the liturgy was used in London in the chapel of the London Society at Palestine Place.⁶²

In other words, with the Hebrew translation of *The Book of Common Prayer* the London Society was giving a clear message. They wanted to work towards a Hebrew-speaking church with a liturgy in Hebrew. Although we should commend the society one may ask if it would not have been better to publish a revised version of the prayer book more suitable in a Jewish context. This critique does not change the fact that the London Society had taken some important steps in the right direction. In a historic evaluation one needs to be careful not to let the standards of the present time influence the judgement of the past.

The Effects of the Translation

Compared to the important signals the Hebrew translation of *The Book of Common Prayer* gave, one can live with Lapide’s comments concerning the reactions to it at the time of its publication. Furthermore, Christian mission and Messianic Jews have not so far let their use of terminology be dependent on what others thought of it.

But other aspects which Lapide does not consider deserve mentioning; the effects the Hebrew version of *The Book of Common Prayer* might have had. This brings us to Joseph Rabinowitz.

It can be shown for certain that Rabinowitz not only knew the Hebrew translation but also kept it at hand and used it when he wrote his articles of faith for *The Israelites of the New Covenant* in Kishinev.

The Book of Common Prayer contains 39 articles of faith. Rabinowitz’ *Tefilah* contains 24 articles placed in the prayer book after the actual *Siddur*. Elsewhere I have shown that not only was Rabinowitz inspired by, but even took over words and phrases from the original 39

⁵⁸ Gidney, *History*, 153.

⁵⁹ Corey, 46f.

⁶⁰ Corey, 47.

⁶¹ See Crombie, Michael Solomon *Alexander*, 6-10; cf. K. Crombie, *For the Love of Zion* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 47-56.

⁶² Gidney, *History*, 161; le Roi, 16 and 46.

articles.⁶³ He must have had the Hebrew translation in front of him when he wrote down his own articles of faith for The Israelites of the New Covenant.

Rabinowitz' leading principle is that when he comes across material inspired by Greek thinking and philosophy rather than by the Bible he tries to express himself biblically. But he still uses words and expressions from the 39 articles and preserves the main biblical content of them.⁶⁴

In other words, the effects of the Hebrew version of *The Book of Common Prayer* can be found in the terminology used by Rabinowitz, the Jesus-believing Jew. This makes one less likely to view the Hebrew version as only a curiosity. Nor have we even considered another question: To what extent have Rabinowitz' expressions of faith been taken over by other Messianic Jews who knew nothing of Rabinowitz' reliance on *The Book of Common Prayer*? Here we don't have sufficient material to answer this question and will have to leave it to others.

On the basis of this, it seems more than an understatement that the main effects of the Hebrew version should have been — as Lapide suggested — its use as a study book in Hebrew for the clergy of the Anglican church.

Rabinowitz's *Siddur*.

Rabinowitz could have chosen to use *The Book of Common Prayer* as his order of service. He did not do that. He felt that too much of its content was un-Jewish. Let us now take a look at his own *Siddur*.

The first edition of his *Tefilah* seems to have been printed in 1885, but written already in 1884. This we know from a visitor to Kishinev in 1884 who mentions that Rabinowitz had drawn up "a Christian *Siddur*." At any rate, G.A. Krøger was able to give a French translation of it in 1885. Rabinowitz's *Tefilah* was republished in Kishinev in 1892 under the title *Tefilah veIakrei Emunah leBenei Israel Benei Brit Hadasha* (Book of Prayer and Principles of Faith for the Israelites of the New Covenant). Elsewhere I have explained the *Tefilah* and also underlined the smaller differences in the liturgy which the sources indicate.⁶⁵ No changes were made to the main elements in the approximately 25 years Rabinowitz conducted his service. Looking at the 1892 edition, it can be said that Rabinowitz' *Siddur* is characterized by its simplicity, brevity, and clarity.

Already the introduction words were worth noticing. They resound the words of Jesus at the beginning of his ministry.

The different parts are as follows:

The Cantor says in a loud voice: Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (Matt 3:2)

Confession of sin: Come, and let us return unto the Lord ... (Hos 6:1-3, followed by a confession of sin).

The Lord's Prayer

The Cantor: Bless the Lord, the only (God)!

⁶³ Kjær-Hansen, 97-103.

⁶⁴ An English translation of the 24 articles in James Adler's translation can be found in Kjær-Hansen, 103-107. Some earlier versions of these articles have 25 articles, cf. Kjær-Hansen, 91.

⁶⁵ Kjær-Hansen, 153-155.

Congregation: Blessed be the Lord, the blessed one!

Recitation of Psalm 33: Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous.

The (expanded) Shema (Deut 6:4-5 and Lev 19:18).

On weekdays, Psalm 103 is recited: Bless the Lord, my soul.

On Sabbath days, Psalm 92 is recited: It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord.

The Cantor is handed the Holy Scriptures and says: Out of Zion shall go forth the law (Torah), and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa 2:3c). This is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel (Deut 4:44).

The reading from the Old Testament and the New Testament follows

Prayer for the Czar (in Russian)

Sermon

Recitation of Psalm 40:4-6: Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust.

On Sabbath day follows singing of the hymn Lekhah Dodi

Seven Articles of Faith (Creed)

The Aaronic Blessing

By looking at Rabinowitz's Creed and his rewriting of the Sabbath hymn *Lekhah Dodi* one gets a good impression of his independence towards and respect for both the Christian and the Jewish traditions.

Rabinowitz' Creed and *Lekhah Dodi*

When he was baptized in Berlin in 1885, Rabinowitz confessed to be in agreement with the Apostolic Creed. However, he still wrote his own creed consisting of Seven Articles of Faith to be used at his baptism. A comparison between the Apostolic Creed and Rabinowitz' creed shows his respect for the main articles of faith and his independence when it comes to expression. The Seven Articles of Faith in James Adler's translation are as follows:

§ 1 I believe, with a perfect faith, that our heavenly Father is the living, and true and eternal God, who created heaven and earth and everything visible and invisible through His Word and His Holy Spirit. All things are from Him, all things in Him and all things to Him.

§ 2 I believe, with a perfect faith, that our heavenly Father has, according to His promise made to our forefathers, to our prophets, and to our king David, the son of Jesse, raised unto Israel a redeemer, Jesus, who was born of the virgin Mary, in Bethlehem the city of David, who suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried for our salvation, rose again from the dead and liveth and sitteth at the right hand of our heavenly Father, from thence He shall come to judge the world, the living and the dead. He is the appointed King over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His dominion there shall be no end.

§ 3 I believe, with a perfect faith, that by the counsel of God and His foreknowledge, our fathers have been smitten with hardness of heart for sin and for rebellion against our Messiah, the Lord Jesus, in order to provoke the other nations of the earth unto jealousy, and to reconcile all through faith in Christ by the word of His Evangelists, in order that knowledge of Jehovah should cover the earth, and Jehovah be king over the whole world.

§ 4 I believe, with a perfect faith, that through faith in Jesus, the Messiah alone, without the works of the law, a man may be justified, that there is but one God, who justifies the circumcised Jews by faith, and the uncircumcised through faith; and that there is no difference between Jew and Greek,

between bond and free, between male and female. They are all one in Christ.

§ 5 I believe, with a perfect faith, in a Holy Catholic and Apostolic church.

§ 6 I confess one baptism for the remission of sins.

§ 7 I wait for the resurrection and renewed life of the dead, and for the life of the world to come.
Amen

For Thy salvation, I wait, O Lord; I wait, O Lord, for Thy salvation, O Lord, for Thy salvation I wait. ⁶⁶

Rabinowitz expresses the same independence and liberty in his version of the popular Sabbath hymn, *Lekhah Dodi*.

Lekhah Dodi is, of course, not found in *The Book of Common Prayer* but Rabinowitz includes it in his *Tefilah* just as it is found in *Siddur for Messianic Jews* of 1988.⁶⁷

The author of the popular Sabbath hymn, first mentioned in Moshe ben Machir's *Siddur Hayom* (1599),⁶⁸ is Solomon haLevi (= Alkabez) a Safed kabbalist of the early 16th century. The hymn consists of nine stanzas, and as in the Song of Songs, the bride, the Sabbath queen, is praised and welcomed; the people of Israel are the bridegroom. Messianic motives of redemption can also be found in the hymn.⁶⁹

Rabinowitz could have used the hymn following the extant Hebrew text,⁷⁰ or he could have omitted it. He does not do either. Instead he includes the hymn with some alterations to the text. By doing so Rabinowitz changes the hymn into a Messianic hymn used during the Sabbath services. It is placed in the liturgy towards the end of the service, before the Creed and the Aaronic blessing. The reason for this is not given; or at least I have not come across any mention of why. One qualified guess could be that if Rabinowitz had gotten the permission from the authorities to celebrate Holy Communion — which he never got — the revised version of *Lekhah Dodi* could have been used very appropriately in connection with the Holy Communion towards the end of the service.

When I wrote a biography on Rabinowitz I neglected certain elements in Rabinowitz' version of this popular Sabbath hymn. Re-reading the sources, however, I have become aware of them.

By introducing a few changes in the traditional Hebrew text Rabinowitz welcomes not the Sabbath, but the Lord of the Sabbath. In the traditional hymn the chorus found both at the beginning and at the end of the hymn runs as follows:⁷¹

Come, my friend, meet the bride, Let's welcome the presence of the Sabbath.

⁶⁶ Kjær-Hansen, 96-97.

⁶⁷ J. Fischer & D. Bronstein, *Siddur for Messianic Jews* (Palm Harbor, Fl.: Menorah Ministries, 3rd ed., 1988), 14-25.

⁶⁸ I. Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967), 108.

⁶⁹ Bathja Bayer, "Lekhah Dodi", in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol.12, 4-8.

⁷⁰ In the article, "Lekhah Dodi", Bayer points out, that in "the extant text, there are only slight variations, although one version has five additional stanzas also attributed to Alkabetz" = Solomon haLevi; p. 5.

⁷¹ The English translation is from Fischer & Bronstein, *Siddur*.

In Rabinowitz' version this is changed to:

Come, come my friend come, come the Lord of the Sabbath.

Stanza 2 in the traditional text is

Let's go to meet the Sabbath, For she is the source of blessing from the beginning, anointed from ancient days, Though made last, conceived first.

By adding *Adon ha-* and changing the personal pronoun *Hi* (feminine, referring to the Sabbath) to *Hu* (masculine, referring to *Adon* [Lord] haShabbat) Rabinowitz produces this version:

Let's go to meet the Lord of the Sabbath, for he is the source

For Rabinowitz it is the Lord of the Sabbath, who is "annointed from ancient days" and "Though made last, conceived first"!

Stanza 4 in the traditional text is

Shake the dust off yourself, rise! Dress the garments of glory, my people. Jesse's son, the Bethlehemite, Draws near, bringing us redemption.

To this Rabinowitz adds "Yeshua," between "Jesse's son" and "the Bethlehemite" and leaves the rest of the verse unchanged. In this way the traditional Jewish expectation of redemption is re-interpreted in light of salvation history. The final redemption in the future is linked to "Yeshua" and his deeds in the past.

The final stanza in the traditional text is

Come in peace, crown of your lord, come with joy and with cheer, Come to the faithful among the chosen people, Come bride; come!

Rabinowitz has changed this to

Come in peace, man of redemption (Ish haGeulah) Come with joy and with cheer, Come to the faithful among the chosen people, Come, my friend, come the Lord of the Sabbath, prince of peace.

Rabinowitz cannot expect traditional Judaism to embrace his revision, but this does not change the fact that — as far as I can see — he has produced a consistent christological interpretation and that his alterations are legitimate for one who — like Rabinowitz — wants to insist on his Jewishness as well as his faith in Jesus, the Jew.

Also the Sabbath needs to be seen in light of God's salvation history and what Jesus has done.

Above, we referred to the present day *Siddur for Messianic Jews*, which also includes *Lekhah Dodi*. Contrary to Rabinowitz in his *Tefilah*, the modern Messianic *Siddur* mentions also the title, *Lekhah Dodi*, including the hymn in its traditional Jewish text. It is the Sabbath that is welcomed, but after the final stanza the following lines conclude the hymn:

Come my beloved, Come my beloved to meet the bride. The face of Sabbath we receive, the face of Sabbath we receive Sabbath peace in Yeshua, Sabbath peace, Shabbath peace, Shabbath peace in Yeshua, Shabbath peace, Shabbath peace.⁷²

⁷² Fischer & Bronstein, 25.

This is another way of doing it. Which is best — Rabinowitz's or the one found in *Siddur for Messianic Jews* — we shall not judge. We leave it to others to answer that question.

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