

CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

Founded in 1889

Learning Lessons from *Mishkan T'filah*

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The week of בראשית held many promises for the Conference.

Among the CCAR's activities that week, the nominating committee selected new officers for the up-coming years; the newly appointed chairs of the governance task force initiated its work; and, the task force on the future of conventions began to evaluate responses from 639 colleagues to our first ever on-line survey.

Most significantly, *Mishkan T'filah* was in “יום הששי” -- its sixth day of creation -- as it entered its final stages of production at the print house and shipment schedules were being finalized. One of our rabbis and her community planned on praying from its pages on that שבת.

By the time we left בראשית and began the week of נח, we at the CCAR found ourselves in the midst of a great flood, stranded in open waters, as we faced the harsh reality that the printing of *Mishkan T'filah* did not meet our high quality standards. For a moment in time, it felt that we were on an ark without sails or a rudder.

However, we quickly learned that the Conference's navigational system is operational as CCAR leadership grabbed the oars to help steer us through these rough waters and onto dry land. Your leadership charted a course of action that included:

- Approving a communications plan.
- Selecting a response team.
- Authorizing the hiring of an outside publishing project director to guide us.
- Identifying programmatic and financial information needed to immediately understand the impact of the delay on the Conference.

The plan of action has now begun to unfold.

The initial step was to communicate by a letter to all members from Harry Danziger and me, which you should have received in the mail and which is posted on our website. Next, we mailed a letter to each individual or congregation who had placed an order for *Mishkan T'filah* explaining the delay in publication. Harry also posted notices on RavKav and on the URJ presidents' list serve with a link to the letter on our website. We are also continuing to communicate via email and telephone with the many people who have inquired about the status the book. Further communications (such as this article) will be regularly forthcoming to keep you up-to-date about ongoing developments.

The Steering Committee appointed Lance Sussman to head the response team. The team's immediate tasks include ascertaining the extent of the printing problems, retaining the publications project manager, evaluating our printers' ability to remedy the deficiencies and, ultimately, overseeing production of the high quality prayer book which we will all be proud to use.

During the week of לך-לך, the Budget & Finance committee met under the leadership of Rick Block. In addition to conducting their regular business, the members entered into new territory – exploring the financial impact of the delayed publication on the CCAR's current finances and on the 2007 budget. After reviewing preliminary financials, the committee directed staff to further evaluate the financial impact of two different potential scenarios: (1) if we can still publish the book during the 2006 calendar year and (2) if publication is delayed until sometime in 2007.

Today, when I write this article, it is the first day of the week of וירא. The opening words say of Abraham: והוא ישב פתח האהל. Like Abraham, we as a Conference need to sit at the entrance of our tent for a moment. As we sit, we need to consciously reflect upon the lessons we can learn from our experiences with *Mishkan T'filah*. This process of learning will take some time and will require open communications between our members and leadership. So far, we have already seen that:

- Our many volunteers provide an outstanding quality of leadership to the Conference.
- Members who share critical comments, as well as those who give positive suggestions, are both concerned about the continued viability of the Conference.

By remaining open to learning and growing as individuals and as an organization, the CCAR can become a *Mishkan* in practice and in prayer.