

# *Journal of Synagogue Music*



## œ *Tehillim* œ

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**TEHILLIM – March 2014 – Volume 39 – Number 1**

## **FROM THE EDITOR**

**The Issue of *Tehillim*: A Safe Haven for American Jewish Worship? ..... 2**

## **ABOUT THE PSALMS**

***Tehillim* in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Usage**

Jalda Rebling..... 4

**Cantillation of the Psalms**

Joshua R. Jacobson ..... 17

## **PSALMS FOR LITURGICAL OCCASIONS**

**Psalm 91: Who Speaks**

Edward Feld..... 35

*Yosheiv b'seiter elyon* (after Abba Weisgal)..... 44

**Psalm 133: A Paragon among *Z'mirot***

Gleaned from many sources..... 46

*Hineih mah tov* (Jerome B. Kopmar)..... 48

## **A LITERARY GLIMPSE**

**“The Psalm-Sayer” (*Der Tehillim Yid*)**

Sholem Asch (excerpt)..... 52

*Shuvi nafshi* (Psalm 116; traditional, transcribed by M. Wohlberg) ..... 56

## **MAILBOX**

**The Way We Were**

Helen Winkler..... 57

## **REVIEWS**

**Richard Kaplan's CD—*The Hidden One (Hane'elam)*--Jewish Mystical Songs**

Shoshana Brown ..... 59

**The 2-CD Set—*Cantors, Klezmerim and Crooners: 1905-1953***

Gregory Yaroslow..... 63

**Jonathan L. Friedmann's *Synagogue Song: An Introduction to Concepts...***

Sheldon Levin ..... 64

**Aaron Bensoussan's CD – *A New Journey***

Charles Heller ..... 66

# FROM THE EDITOR

## The Issue of *Tehillim*—a Safe Haven for American Jewish Worship?

Speaking before the Cantor's Assembly's 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention In April of 1960, Rabbi Isaac Klein re-told a parable he had once heard from a *maggid*:

In Psalms we find the word *t'fillah* in three different connections. There is *t'fillah l'david*, *t'fillah l'moshe*, and *t'fillah l'ani*. Each one represents a type of *ba'al t'fillah*. First there is *t'fillah l'david*, a cantor who is like David. David was *n'im z'mirot yisrael*, the sweet singer of Israel. He had other qualities too. According to the rabbis, he was a scholar and a Tzaddik. This cantor has his strength in his music. He is a *ba'al m'naggein* and also knows *peirush ha-milot*; he is what we expect of a good cantor.

Then there is *t'fillah l'moshe*, a cantor who is like Moses. Moses was a hazzan, as you know. That is why we say *az yashir moshe*, "then Moses sang." We also know that he was *kh'vad peh*, his diction and his voice were not top-quality. He made that up, however, with *pirko na'eh u-z'kano m'gudal*. So we have a hazzan who is strong on theory; he knows his music and is a *talmid hakham*. That, of course, is also good.

Finally we have the *t'fillah l'ani*, the cantor who may be weak in both of the above qualities but who has the *krekhts* and really weeps when he prays. Of him, the Psalmist says, *leiv nishbar v'nidkheh elohim lo tivzeh*; God does not despise a broken heart.

Rabbi Klein then continued: "I would like to interpret that verse, however, to mean that the cantor should have *Judenschmerz*, a solicitude for the spiritual welfare of the Jewish community. He should suffer *hartsveitik* for the low state of Judaism in America and consider it part of his function to improve it."

During the 55 years since Rabbi Klein retold this parable, every issue of the *CA Convention Proceedings* and *Journal of Synagogue Music* has borne witness to the American Conservative cantorate's unflagging attempts to accomplish exactly what Rabbi Klein suggested. Have we succeeded in this unrelenting effort? Have shorter, snappier services led to anything other than a demand for even shorter and snappier services—mostly from people who habitually arrive just in time for coffee and cake?

Where does the process of diminution end? As the Reform movement retrieves poetic Hebrew elements of the liturgy that it had previously lost along the way, we continue to delete *piyyutim* (think of the excised *s'lihah*, *Omnam Kein*, that was sung to a 500-year-old Ashkenazi melody on Kol Nidre night).

Professor Max Wohlberg used to caution his Nusah students at the JTS about this wholesale jettisoning of cherished prayers, couching the admonition (as he so often did) in sparkling humor: "Once you commit suicide onstage," he asked, "what do you do for an encore?"

*Tehillim*, whose name in Hebrew (*mizmor*), Arabic (*zimra*) and Greek (*psalmos*) connotes singing, may provide part of the answer. Like a lifeline thrown to someone who is drowning, *Tehillim* offer us the chance to stand once again on solid liturgical ground, for they form the bedrock of our musical dialogue with God. No matter what liberties we take elsewhere in the service, the measured perfection of psalmodic language still seems to evoke a response in kind from us. For every religious occasion there is a Psalm that, when even a tiny part of it is sung, meets the needs of the moment as nothing else can.

The editorial challenge was to choose from an overabundance of musical settings. The choirmaster of Moscow's Cathedral, D. M. Bortnyanski (1751-1825), composed three complete musical cycles for the 150 Psalms. When asked why so many, he replied, "I could have written ten cycles, each one completely different!"<sup>1</sup> So it is with Psalm settings--no two are alike--yet each the melodies that have endured seem to capture the text's essence, often in a single phrase, while instantly resonating with readers.

With this first of our semi-annual issues we bid our long-time Associate Editor **Rick Berlin** a happy retirement as he and his lovely wife **Mary** prepare to spend their Golden Years in the Sunshine State of Florida. We also wish the best of luck to our charter Editorial Board member David Sislen as he assumes the duties of formatting *JSM* from now on. Our heartfelt Thanks go to both of them—for their loyalty—and above all for their continuing friendship.



\* \* \* \* \*

**ERRATUM** -- We sincerely regret the misspelling of Judith Naimark's review in our 2013 issue. It should have read -- "**Judeo-Caribbean Currents: Music of the Mikvé Israel-Emanuel Synagogue in Curaçao.**"

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Rumshinsky, *Klangen fun mayn leben*, 1944: 558f.

# ABOUT THE PSALMS

## *Tehillim* in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Usage

*By Jalda Rebling*

### How this article came about

I began collaborating with Ancient Music experts in 1984 when several guitar-playing colleagues and I adopted the lute as our instrument of choice. In 1988, as a mark of our commitment to the genre, my Ancient Music colleagues and I produced an LP of Sephardic *romanzas* (secular love songs) arranged in the Old style.<sup>1</sup>

My interest in Jewish music was stirred with the Klezmer revival. After organizing and directing a decade-long Yiddish festival in East Berlin from 1987 to 1997--that became a UNESCO project--I began looking for this tradition's sources. After all, Jews and Christians had lived as neighbors in Germany since the days of Charlemagne at the beginning of the ninth century. Jews were not strangers, but long-time neighbors. At the *Beit olam* in Worms the oldest headstones date from the early 11th century, and they face southward towards Italy, from where they had migrated to Germany. I could not believe their descendants' music had no connection with that of their surroundings.

Accordingly, we researched and recorded musical manuscripts of German Jewish origin. One song was based on an earlier one commemorating the infamous 17<sup>th</sup>-century expulsion of Jews in Frankfurt am Main.<sup>2</sup> On August 22, 1614 a mob of burghers in that city was incited to violence against the Jewish community by a ginger-bread baker named Vincent Fettmilch. The rioters broke into the ghetto, attacked its defenseless inhabitants ransacked their dwellings and looted their possessions (see **Figure 1**, below).<sup>3</sup> The rampage lasted through the night. Several days later, 1,380 suddenly impoverished Jewish men, women and children who had fled to the cemetery or taken temporary shelter in the homes of sympathetic gentile neighbors were forced to leave in small boats going up and down the Rhine River.

In March of 1616 the German Emperor Matthias, outraged over reports of the damage and loss of life, sent a detachment of armed commissioners to escort the Jews of Frankfurt back to their homes. They returned to the beating of drums and the sounding of horns. Vincent Fettmilch was hanged, and that Hebrew date, the 20<sup>th</sup> of Adar, was designated as a feast--*Purim vints*—the preceding day being observed with fasting. The so-called “Purim of Frankfurt” was later celebrated in a lengthy poem by R. Elhanan ben Abraham Helen: *Megillat vints*.<sup>4</sup> This was sung to a melody popular at the time, *Die Schlacht von Pavia* (“The Battle of Pavia,” 1625), in southwestern Lombardy, which had given Hapsburg Spain dominion over Italy.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ir me quiero—Sephardische Lieder und Romanzen*, LITERA LP, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> Erk and Boehme, *Deutscher Liederhort*, 110-111, no. 302 (1856), third printing 1893-1894. The document cited is by Elias Ullmann in Frankfurt/Main to Paul Lindau and printed in his journal *Gegenwart* BD XI n. 4, p. 62, Jan. 27, 1877.

<sup>3</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906, s.v., “Fettmilch, Vincent.”

<sup>4</sup> Published by Wagensil, Frankfurt, 1696.



**Figure 1.** Riot instigated by Vincent Fettmilch at Frankfurt-on-the-Main, August 22, 1614.

Here is a translation of the “Purim of Frankfurt” poem, *Purim vintz*, followed by its musical setting, known as *Das Vinz-Hans Lied*, which uses the melody of *Die Schlacht von Pavia* (**Example 1**), later adapted by the Jews of Frankfurt for *Hatsi-kaddish* following Torah reading (Exodus 7:8-16, relating to the war with Amalek) and *Adon olam* (“Eternal God”), the closing hymn during *Shaharit* services on Purim Day.<sup>5</sup>

It was at the time of the Mette,<sup>6</sup>  
 when a voice was heard:  
 We will soon be rid of the Jews,  
 the lot fell on them today.  
 We fled with great joy,  
 but also with sorrow:  
 the sorrow of having abandoned our *Kehillah*;<sup>7</sup>  
 the joy of having saved our lives.

<sup>5</sup> The verses from *Das Vinz-Hans Lied* are 40-51, out of 103. This melody, known in German as the *Paviatone*, appears in Fabian Ogutsch (*Der Frankfurter Kantor—Sammlung der traditionellen Frankfurter Synagogalen Gesänge* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann Verlag), 1930, nos. 319-320.

<sup>6</sup> Christian late-afternoon service.

<sup>7</sup> Jewish religious community

Es war wohl um die Met-ten zeit, als ei ne stim-me thet der-schal-len; Der Ju-den  
 11 wer-den wir bald quitt. Das los ist haynt auf sie ge-fal-len. Wir zo-gen her-aus mit  
 20 gros-ser Freud. Doch auch mit Schmerz und Trau-ren der-ne-ben: Das Trau-em das  
 27 man for K'-hil-lah scheid. Die Frue-de, dass wir be-hal-ten des Le-ben.

**Example 1. *Das Vinz-Hans Lied*, which uses the melody of *Die Schlacht von Pavia*.**

*Das Vinz-Hans Lied* appears on the CD that my Ancient Music colleagues and I produced in 1995: *Jews in Germany 1250-1750*. Four years later we followed that with another recording, titled *Jews in the Middle Ages--from Sefarad and Ashkenaz*. The professional confidence gained from these experiences encouraged me to enroll in the Cantorial program at ALEPH (Alliance for Jewish Renewal), under the direction of Hazzan Jack Kessler. In 2003 I was asked to lead High Holiday services at the *Oranienburger Strasse* Synagogue in Berlin. The preparation for that initial excursion into the world of *hazzanut* led me to try and understand how the Ashkenazic system of prescribed seasonal prayer modes--known as *nusah*--works, and my experience with Medieval music proved most helpful towards that end. It had taught me how to improvise melodies within a given mode, and how to make a melody fit a given text, rather than the other way around.

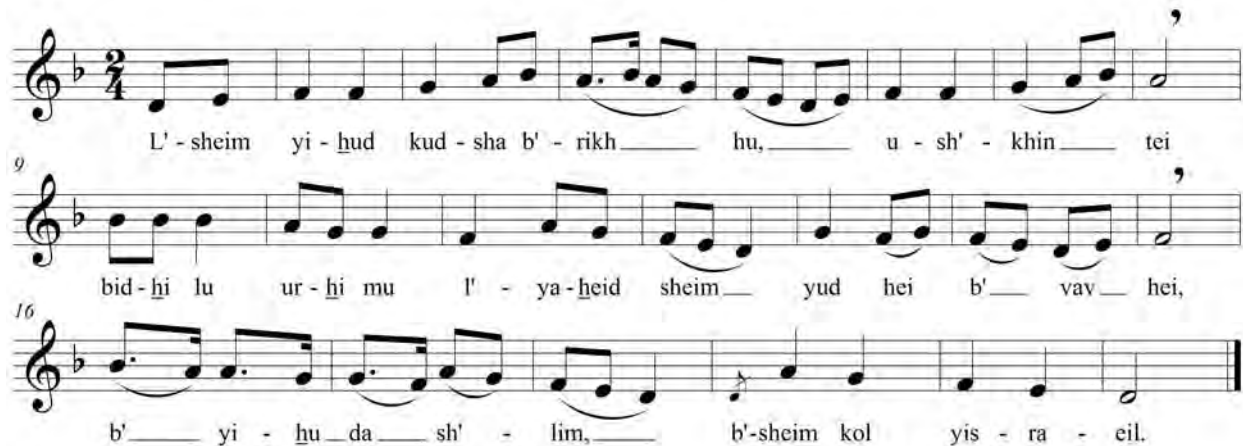
During my study of *hazzanut* I wondered especially why we were obliterating the poetry of *Tehillim* with modern music and phrasing that had little to do with the underlying words. I also sensed that the ancient synagogue prayer modes bore a resemblance to the Middle Eastern modes known as *makamat*--when stripped of their quarter tones--according to the comparative research of Abraham Idelsohn and others. What I needed to learn was: **a)** how did psalmody relate to traditional Ashkenazic *nusah* *ha-t'fillah*, and **b)** was there a link among various folk music traditions that carried over into their corresponding countries' liturgical rites?

I recalled Hazzan Richard Kaplan having guest-taught a course at an ALEPH-sponsored retreat, dealing with the close connection between folk tunes and liturgy among Sephardic secular *romanzas* and Sephardic sacred melodies. He highlighted this kinship by juxtaposing a *romanza* with a mystical invocation that precedes the donning of *Tallit* and *Tefillin* on weekday mornings, eating the *Afikoman* on Seder night and counting the *Omer* each evening between Pesah and Shavuot. Here is the invocation:



*L'sheim yihud kud'sha b'rikh hu...* For the sake of unifying the Blessed One with the Holy Presence... I prepare to perform the Mitzvah of...

Hazzan Kaplan set this text (**Example 2a**)<sup>8</sup> to a melody used by Salonikan Jews for singing the love song, *Entre la mar y el rio* ("Between the sea and the river a pear tree has jumped"; **Example 2b**).<sup>9</sup>



**Example 2a.** Mystical Sephardic *kavvanah*: *L'sheim yihud kud'sha b'rikh hu*.



**Example 2b.** The Salonikan Sephardic *romanza*: *Entre la mar y el rio*.

After that event Maria Jonas, an accomplished mezzo-soprano and teacher of both Ancient and Modern music, invited me to participate in a workshop on *Tehillim* and Psalms. Held at the Kolumba Museum in Cologne during November 2010,<sup>10</sup> it involved Maria's all-female choral group, the Ars Coralis Koeln, and it left us astonished over how well the old psalmodic method of call-and-response worked for both the Judaic and Christian cultures. Our group sang from one museum gallery to another, where a different ensemble of singers waited to answer, the site's reverberant acoustics lending never-ending overtones to our responsive song.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Kaplan, *The Hidden One (Hane'elam): Jewish Mystical Songs*, CD, 2009; see Shoshana Brown's critique of the recording in the REVIEWS section of *The Journal of Synagogue Music*, March 2014, Vol. 39 No.1.

<sup>9</sup> *Sefardische liederen en balladen*, Chanah Milner & Paul Storm, editors (Gravenhage: Albertsen & Co.), 1974.

<sup>10</sup> See the website of Maria Jonas—[www.mariajonmas.de](http://www.mariajonmas.de)—under "Klangwerkstatt."



We played with the various Ecclesiastical modes of Gregorian chant, and I was fascinated to discover how they somewhat resembled synagogue prayer modes.

We also experimented with Latin as well as Hebrew texts, and discussed the huge differences in where and why *Tehillim* are used in both sacred traditions. In one of these experimental sessions, just before my turn came that of Amelia Cuni, an Indian woman who specialized in *Dhurpad*.<sup>11</sup> This is a genre of singing classical texts such as the *Mahabharata* or the *Ramayana*, Hinduism's two major Sanskrit epics. Her rendition so stirred me that when my turn came I found myself 'adopting' her mode to the Psalm I'd chosen. Later on she asked me, a bit annoyed: "How do you know my *raga* [Indian equivalent of mode]?" My answer was: "Your *raga* we call *Freygish* [Yiddish for *Ahavah rabbah*]."

I met Miriam Amer, a student of philosophy and teacher of the Koran in Berlin, during an interfaith event. I had always wondered why the true folk poetry of *Tehillim* had seemingly disappeared in Muslim tradition, whereas in Jewish tradition and in early Christianity, anyone at any time could say *Tehillim*, even women. Working with Miriam I found out that bits and pieces of our *Tehillim* are spread throughout the Koran. I also began to realize just how close the *makamat* are to our *nus'ha'ot*, and so I altered the scope of this project to include Church Psalmody and Koranic quotes from *Tehillim*. Although it is still a work in progress, I would like to share with readers some of the things I've learned along the way.

### ***Tehillim* in early Christian usage**

Following Roman destruction of the Second Temple in 70 of the Common Era, the former practice of a Levitical choir responding to its precentor's psalmodic lead-ins was adapted to the needs of synagogues throughout the diaspora: a congregation responding to its cantor's prayer cues. It was at the beginning of this period that early Christianity adopted the technique as the oldest stratum of Church singing.<sup>12</sup> A clue as to how this process developed is illustrated by comparing the following nine lines from *Tehillim* with their adaptations in the Book of Revelations (15:3-4).

#### ***Tehillim***

How great are Thy works, O Lord (92:5)  
Who is mighty as Thou art, O Lord (89:8)  
The Lord is just in all His ways (145:17)  
O Lord, forevermore (93:5)  
A God feared in the council of the holy ones (89:7)  
And I will glorify Thy name (86:12)  
Thou alone art God (86:10)  
All the nations... shall come and bow down before Thee (86:9)  
Thy judgments are right (119:75)

#### **Revelations**

3. Great and wonderful are Thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!

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<sup>11</sup> Her website is: <[www.ameliacuni.de](http://www.ameliacuni.de)>.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Wagner, "Ursprung und Entwicklung der Liturgischen Gesangsformen," *Einführung in die gregorianischen Melodien*, Vol. I (Freiburg: Veith), 1895:6-16.

Just and true are Thy ways, O King of the ages!

4. Who shall not fear and glorify Thy name, o Lord, for Thou alone art holy;  
all nations shall come and worship Thee, for Thy judgments have been revealed.

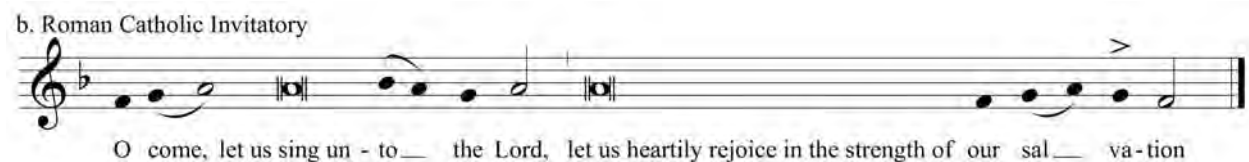
These examples of New Testament borrowing from Hebrew Scripture support historian Carl Kraeling's claim that psalmodic statements were adapted by the Christian Bible.<sup>13</sup> If the Church fathers used Hebrew texts so openly, might they not also have imitated already-established patterns for the musical renditions of those texts? Christianity's founders were originally Jews, and would have used the music they knew. **Example 3a**<sup>14</sup> cites an Iranian-Jewish chant to open Psalm 81:

*Harninu leilohim uzeinu, hari'u lelohei ya'akov.*

Sing joyously to God, our strength, proclaim to the God of Jacob.



Compare that to **Example 3b**,<sup>15</sup> the Roman Catholic chant for opening Psalm 95:



**Examples 3a and 3b.** Psalmodic chant in **synagogue** and **church**.

### Parallelism and the Call-and-Response approach

Perhaps the most important discovery I made while working with Maria Jonas and the Ars Coralis Coeln was that people generally sing psalmody to *each other*—alternately--in *half-verses*. The caesura (pause) after the initial ‘**Call**’ makes the musical ‘**Response**’ that follows seem both smoother and more logical.

There is also a midrashic reason why traditional Jewish practice has retained a call-and-response for chanting *Tehillim*, especially in times of peril to the community. Expounding upon Lamentations 9:16, 17-19, the Mishnah states:

What is... lamentation? One [woman] speaks and all the rest respond after her; as it is said, “and teach your daughters wailing, and every woman teach her neighbor lamentation (*Mo’eid katan* 3:9).

<sup>13</sup> Carl H. Kraeling, “Music in the Bible,” *New History of Music*, Egon Wellesz, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon), 1957:304.

<sup>14</sup> Abraham Z. Idelsohn, *Tol’ dot ha-n’ginah ha-ivrit* (Tel Aviv: Dvir), 1924:233.

<sup>15</sup> H. B. Briggs and W. H. Frere, *Manual of Plainsong* (London: Novello), 1902:21.

Psalms likewise express grief—on a personal level—which cannot easily be borne alone. Instead, we “enter the call-and-response of community, where the burden of stress and grief can be shared.”<sup>16</sup> This reaching out to others when facing overwhelming challenges is most clearly expressed musically through the alternating of half-verses between voices. The following verse exemplifies that **binary** (two-part) **parallel** form, articulating the same thought in two different—yet perfectly balanced—ways (**Example 4**):<sup>17</sup>

*Yosheiv b'seiter elyon; b'tseil shaddai yitlonan*  
Whoever dwells in the refuge of God, shall live in the Almighty's shadow”

Yo - sheiv b' - sei - ter el-yon, b'-tseil shad-dai yit - lo - nan.

**Example 4.** Perfectly balanced **binary parallel** chant in ‘**Call-and-Response**’ style (91:1).

For the minority of psalmodic verses that are **ternary** (three-part) I refer readers to Reinhard Flender’s groundbreaking book on the structure and chanting of Psalms.<sup>18</sup> *Sefer Tehillim*, along with *Iyyov* and *Mishlei* (Job, Proverbs), comprise the three biblical Books whose cantillation accents (Hebrew: *t’amim*) are known as *Ta’amei emet*—acronym for *Iyyov-mishlei-tehillim*—the so-called Poetical System. In order to accommodate ternary verses this special cantillation system includes the accent *Oleh-v’yoreid* (“rises-and-descends”) that does not appear in the other 21 Books of *Tanakh* (the Hebrew Bible). Flender characterizes it as, “the strongest disjunctive [separator] accent in the *ta’amei emet*], exceeding the disjunctive power of *etnahta* [mid-point caesura in the 21 other Books].”<sup>19</sup> The graphic symbol for *Oleh-v’yoreid* (read from right-to-left) resembles a *Mahpakh* above combined with a *Merkha* below (**Figure 2**):



**Figure 2.** Graphic symbol for *Oleh-v’yoreid*.

Here is a **ternary** psalmodic verse (24:4) showing the strong disjunctive power of *Oleh-v’yoreid* as it divides three hemistichs (**Example 5**):<sup>20</sup>

*N’ki khappayim u-var-leivav asher lo-nasa la-shav nafshi v’lo nishba l’mirmah*  
One with clean hands and pure heart / who hasn’t succumbed to vanity / nor sworn deceitfully

N' - ki khappayim uvar-lei-vav a - sher lo nasa lashav naf - shi v' - lo nishba l'mir - mah :

**Example 5.** *Oleh-v’yoreid* functioning as principle disjunctive of a **ternary** psalmodic verse (24:4)

<sup>16</sup> Regina L. Sandler-Phillips, “Vision, Lamentation, and the Question of How?” Internet D’var Torah on Parashat D’varim, Academy for Jewish religion, New York, August 4, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Words: Psalm 91:1; melody: The author’s improvisation in *Magein avot* mode.

<sup>18</sup> Reinhard Flender, *Hebrew Psalmody—A Structural Investigation* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, the Jewish Music Research Centre, Juval Monograph Series IX), 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> The author’s improvisation

Reinhard Flender gives a musical illustration from the Moroccan tradition for cantillating a tripartite psalmodic verse (19:10), recorded during its recitation in Jerusalem's Z'khor Avraham Synagogue in 1978 (**Example 6**):<sup>21</sup>

*Yir'at adonai t'horah omedet la-ad; mishp'tei adoni emet, tsad'ku yahdav.*  
The fear of God is pure and endures forever; God's judgments are true, altogether righteous

1 Yir - at a - do - nai t' - ho - rah o - me - det la - ad

2 mish - p' - tei a - do - nai e - met tsa - d' - ku yah dav

**Example 6.** Moroccan tradition for **cantillating a ternary** psalmodic verse (19:10).

Applying the balanced parallel approach we saw in Example 3 to other binary verses of *Tehillim* presents no problem. The real challenge arises when we attempt to employ **contrafaction**, the adaptation of an existent chant such as the verse illustrated above (Ps. 91:1)—to a ternary psalmodic verse (115:12):

*Adonai z'kharanu y'vareikh / y'vareikh et-beit yisrael / y'vreikh et-beit aharon*  
(God remembers and will bless us / while blessing the House of Israel / as well as the House of Aaron.)

Our music here consists of two phrases, our text contains three phrases; what to do? My suggestion would be to stretch the binary music's '**Call**' phrase (*Yosheiv b'seiter elyon*) to cover both the *Oleh-v'yoreid* and *Etnahta* words here (*Adonai z'kharanu y'vareikh / y'vareikh et-beit yisrael*; **Example 7a**):<sup>22</sup>

Adonai z'kharanu y'vareikh; y'vareikh et beit yisra - el,

**Example 7a.** Binary '**Call**' music adapted to the *Oleh-v'yoreid* and *Etnahta* words of a ternary verse.

Doing that would save the binary chant's '**Response**' phrase (*b'tseil shaddai yitlonan*) for the *Sof-pasuk* words of the ternary verse (*y'vareikh et-beit aharon*; **Example 7b**):

Y' - va - reikh et - beit a - ha - ron.

**Example 7b.** A binary chant's '**Response**' phrase adapted to the *Sof-pasuk* words of the ternary verse.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p.88.

<sup>22</sup> Idem.

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM THIS RESEARCH

### 1) Hallel

In all the various synagogues visited, I found that mostly modern melodies were used for these ‘Thanksgiving’ Psalms (113-118; sung on Festivals, New Moon and certain special occasions) and that the melodies changed throughout. Furthermore, the changes of melody generally had nothing to do with the specific meaning of the underlying text or with the ebb-and-flow of its poetry. Only in Sephardi or Mizrahi synagogues did they go through the entire Hallel using a single melody. Taking my cue from that remembered fact, I did likewise at a retreat for European *T’fillah* Leaders, organized by Cantor Jacqueline Chernett, founder of the European Academy for Jewish Liturgy. The event was unique in training voluntary *ba’alei t’fillah* in how to lead congregations in prayer by gaining functional proficiency in nusah. During my session I led the participants in chanting the entire *Hallel* via responsive psalmody in Weekday nusah—with minimal improvisation on my part. The result met with overwhelming approbation by the startled participants—and was an amazing experience for me as well!

### 2) The deceptive ‘simplicity’ of psalmodic melodies

Some consider the mostly-linear chants for *Tehillim* too simple—even boring—yet they are not, if imaginatively ornamented without sacrificing momentum. These easily grasped melodic patterns enable people to join in and are flexible enough to tone-paint their integral religious poetry no matter how few or how many syllables appear in a phrase. This alone might be enough to explain the persistence of psalmodic chant in our own day. Add to that the fact that its ancient sound offers the possibility of connecting with a longstanding tradition that offers solace and stability to those seeking spiritual uplift, and it is understandable why this genre has risen to the top of classical recording charts during recent decades.<sup>23</sup> The noble intonations composed by Obadiah the Norman Proselyte (*Ovadyah hag-geir*; ca. 1200) and uncovered over a century ago in the Cairo Genizah,<sup>24</sup> offer another viable old precedent plus a good source from which to improvise psalmodic-style chants.

### 3) Liturgical invocations

The three religious traditions under discussion employ a similarly invocative tone in their choice of devotional wordings to introduce--and/or conclude--the chanting of Psalms. Orthodox Jews recite such a special text<sup>25</sup> right after a group of *Tehillim* (145-150) that form part of the *P’sukei d’zimra* or “Verses of Song” section in the daily Morning liturgy.

*Barukh adonai l’olam, amein v’amein...*

Blessed be God forever... the One Who abides in Jerusalem...

God of the people Israel, Who alone works wonders... Blessed be God’s name and God’s presence throughout the world. Amen.

<sup>23</sup> Two CDs of Gregorian chant in particular have enjoyed great popularity: one by Benedictine monks at the Abbey in Burgos, Spain (1994); and another by Benedictine nuns at the Priory near Kansas City, Missouri (2012), John Jurgensen, “The Nuns at the top of the Charts,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 14, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Alfred Sendrey, *The Music of the Jews in the Diaspora* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff), 1970: 157-159.

<sup>25</sup> Combining phrases from Psalms 41:14, 72:18-19, 89:53, 106:48, 135:21.

Before initiating a special session of Psalm chanting (as on a fast day, for example) this invocative meditation is prayed:<sup>26</sup>

*Y'hi ratson milfanekha, adonai eloheinu veilohei avoteinu...*  
God and God of our forebears, Who chose David and his  
descendants along with song and praise, I pray that You  
accept the recitation of *Tehillim* which I am about to begin...

From *Ars Coralis Coeln* I learned that the Christian custom (in this case Anglican) is to conclude Psalm recitation with similar divine praise:

*Gloria patri et Filio et Spiritu Sancto Sicut erat in  
principio et nunc et semper et in secula saeculorum amen:*  
Glory to God, source of all being; Eternal Word and Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning is now and shall be forever. Amen.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4) Invocation before chanting Scripture in Muslim practice

As mentioned earlier, isolated verses of *Tehillim* are scattered throughout the Koran without accreditation. When recited as part of koranic readings they are chanted in similarly linear fashion--with very few significant ups-or-downs—a style that is reminiscent of the synagogue and church examples given above. Here is an illustration of Koran recitation, using a text known as the *Bismillah* or Introduction, and including verse 1 of the opening Sura or chapter (**Example 8**).<sup>28</sup>

*Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim*  
In the name of Allah the Compassionate, the Merciful...  
*Al-hamdu Lillahi Rabbil-Alamin*  
Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Creation.



**Example 8.** Chanted **Introduction** and **opening verse** of the Koran.

<sup>26</sup> *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, ed. Rabbi Nosson Scherman (Brooklyn, NY: MESORAH), 1988: 979.

<sup>27</sup> *Celebrating Common Prayer—A version of The Daily Office*, Society of Saint Francis (London: Bloomsbury), 2005.

<sup>28</sup> Private chant by Miriam Amer, recorded by the writer, August 13, 2013.

## 5) Antiphonal variations of *Tehillim* recitation

Talmud scholar Israel Slotki<sup>29</sup> posits several different methods that the ancients used for getting people to respond to an antecedent phrase while maintaining a high energy level.

a) You chant a verse—they answer with the same verse (Psalm 114:1):

**CALL:** *B'tseit yisrael mi-mitsrayim, beit ya'akov mei-am l'oeiz.*

**RESPONSE:** *B'tseit yisrael mi-mitsrayim, beit ya'akov mei-am l'oeiz.*

b) You chant a verse—they answer with the following verse (Psalm 114:1-2)

**CALL:** *B'tseit yisrael mi-mitsrayim, beit ya'akov mei-am l'oeiz.*

**RESPONSE:** *Haitah y'hudah l'kodsho, yisrael mamsh'lotav.*

c) You chant verse by verse—they respond always with the opening verse (Ps.114:2-3):

**CALL:** *Hay-yam ra'ah va-yanos, hay-yardein yisov l'ahor.*

**RESPONSE:** *B'tseit yisrael mi-mitsrayim, beit ya'akov mei-am l'oeiz.*

d) You chant verse by verse—they respond always with *Hal'luyah!* Psalm (113:1):

**CALL:** *Hal'luyah! Hal'lu avdei adonai, hal'lu et-sheim adonai.*

**RESPONSE:** *Hal'luyah!*

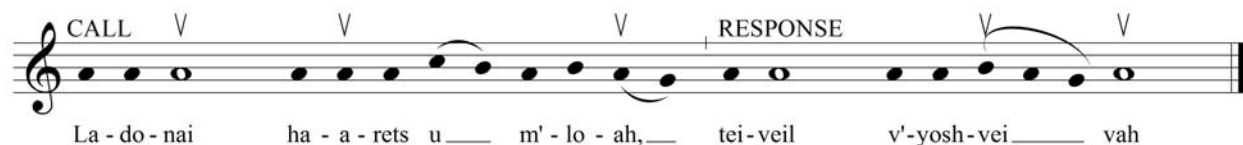
The above four methods comprise a sliding scale of congregational familiarity with Hebrew. Methods a) and b) will only work with a well-versed group who are able to repeat a verse they've just heard or recite the next one from scratch. Method c) would imply a beginners group that could retain and repeat the opening verse over and over. Method d) requires only reiteration of the word “Hal'luyah!” which works in almost any language.

## 6) The same Psalm verse chanted in the three different liturgical traditions

To demonstrate in succinct fashion the similarities in characteristic renderings of *Tehillim*, Church psalmody and the Koran chant, here is verse 1 of Psalm 24 as it might be heard, respectively, by contemporary worshipers in all three liturgical traditions. The Hebrew, Latin and Arabic wordings—in that order--convey the identical meaning (**Examples 9a, 9b, 9c**):

*Ladonai ha-arets u-m'loah; teiveil v'yoshvei vah*

To God belong all that the heavens and the earth contain



**Example 9a. *Tehillim* 24:1 chanted in Hebrew.**<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Israel W. Slotki, “Antiphony in Ancient Hebrew Poetry,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Jan. 1936), pp. 199-219.

<sup>30</sup> The author’s improvisation in a natural minor mode, prompted by comparative study of psalmodic-style chant in the three liturgical traditions.



The Latin translation of Psalm 24:1 is shown next as it would be recited in a daily Office to the melodic pattern of the 8<sup>th</sup> Psalm Tone **Example 9b**):

*Ad Domini est terra et plenitudo eis; orbis terratum et universi qui habitant in ei.*



**Example 9b.** Latin of Ps. 24:1 set to the 8<sup>th</sup> Psalm Tone.<sup>31</sup>

Verse 131 of Sura 4 in the Koran opens by quoting in Arabic the first verse of Psalm 24 verbatim (**Example 9c**):<sup>32</sup>

*Wa lillahi mā fī as-samāwāti wa mā fī al-'arḍi*  
And to God belong all that the heavens and the earth contain.



**Example 9c.** Chant in Arabic for the opening of Koranic **Sura 4:131**,<sup>33</sup> quoting **Psalm 24:1**.

<sup>31</sup> Text: Parallel Latin/English Psalter," *The Bible Gateway* (Zondervan Corporation), Internet; music: adapted from Richard Hoppin, "The Psalm Tones," *Medieval Music* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.), 1988:81.

<sup>32</sup> *The Koran*, translated by N. J. Dawood (Penguin Classics), 1985:380.

<sup>33</sup> Recorded privately by Miriam Amar for the author, August 17, 2013.

## Conclusion

Musicologist Hanoch Avenary's comparative studies of various faiths' liturgical recitative<sup>34</sup> reveal that Hebrew prayer chants effectively parallel the entire history of Christian plainsong. Not only that, but for centuries, synagogue *hazzanim*, church cantors and Muslim Muezzins all featured the same quavering-voice technique, thereby achieving a tremulous and solemn quality with multi-toned trills added at certain words to underscore them. This approach is recognized universally in both Eastern and Western religious rites as belonging to the measured and balanced phrases of what we know as *Tehillim*. When done with utter conviction the resultant chant can be deeply moving—as well as comforting—to worshipers.

*Hazzan Jalda Rebling's mother Lin Jaldati (1912-1988) was a well-known singer of Yiddish songs in post-War Europe, America and Germany. Her father Eberhard Rebling was a pianist and composer, while Jalda herself has researched, performed and taught Jewish music for 35 years. She wishes to thank Hazzan Jack Kessler who first made the treasure of Jewish music accessible to her, Maria Jonas who suggested this article, and Hazzan Shoshana Brown, who made it happen.*

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<sup>34</sup> Hanoch Avenary, "Formal Structure of Psalms and Canticles in Early Jewish and Christian Chant," *Musica Disciplina* Vol. 7 (1953), pp. 1-13. *Studies in Hebrew, Syrian and Greek Liturgical Recitative* (Tel Aviv: Israel Music Institute, 1963).

# The Cantillation of the Psalms

By Joshua R. Jacobson

Cantillation is the art of chanting a biblical text in the context of a synagogue service. Traditional cantillation is performed by a soloist in free rhythm using an ancient system of musical motifs. The motifs are notated in the text using a system of ekphonic symbols, called *te'amim*, devised at the Ben Asher academy in Tiberias more than 1100 years ago, and eventually universally accepted in all Jewish communities. These symbols represent more than just the musical motifs; they also serve to indicate the proper pronunciation of each word and to punctuate the syntactic structure of each sentence.

The *te'amim* are found in all twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible, but they are arranged differently in three of those books: Proverbs, Psalms and Job.<sup>1</sup> No one is certain why the *te'amim* are different in these three books.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it is because of the compact, epigraphic nature of the text. Indeed, these three books, known by their acronym, ספרי אמ"ת (standing for *משלי, איוב, תהלים*), are often referred to as the "poetic books."<sup>3</sup>

Biblical poetry is characterized by a style known as parallelism<sup>4</sup>, and this style is most consistently notable in the Three Books. Each verse is divided into two balanced halves or "hemistichs," the second echoing the content and/or the structure of the first. As Prof. James Kugel has observed, the second half of the verse often "sharpens" or expands on the idea posited in the first half.<sup>5</sup> To illustrate, let us examine this well-known verse from Psalm 145. כָּכָל-יּוֹם: אֲבָרְכְּךָ וְאֶהְלֶלְךָ אֱלֹהֵי לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד: "Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever." The second hemistich takes the idea of "I will bless You" and expands it into "I will praise Your name." Likewise, "every day" is expanded in the second hemistich into "forever and ever."

Traditional performance practice of Psalms in many synagogues and churches is based on this parallel structure. In this practice, known as "psalmody," the entire Psalm is treated as a strophic composition, with the same musical pattern applied to each verse. Furthermore, each of the two hemistichs is allotted its own unique melodic pattern, with a half cadence at the end of the first hemistich and a full cadence at the end of the second.

The first hemistich begins with an appropriate opening pitch, the "initium," which then rises or falls to the "running tone" ("tonus currens" or "tenor"), a pitch that is repeated as many times as is necessary to accommodate the syllables, and then rises or falls (sometimes through a brief melodic formula) to the "mediant" pitch, its half-cadence marking the first resting point. The second hemistich then begins with its initium, its tonus currens and its "finalis," or full cadence. This pattern is then applied to each verse of the Psalm. With some variations, this pattern

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1. The book of Job comprises both poetic and prose sections. The *te'amim* for the concise poetic verses, 3:2-42:6, are the same as those used for Psalms and Proverbs. The *te'amim* for the narrative sections with longer verses, 1:1-3:1 and 42:7-17, are consistent with those used for the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

2. In the (pre-Tiberian) Babylonian notation system, the three books in question were punctuated no differently from the other twenty-one books.

3. In this article, I will refer to them as the "Three Books."


4. This same parallel structure also characterizes the poetry of other ancient Middle Eastern cultures, yet is absent from Indo-European literature of the same period (Werner, "The Origin of Psalmody," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 25, 1954: 331-333).

5. James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981: 8.

can be seen in numerous traditional chants from both Jewish and Christian traditions, as can be seen in the following examples.

**Tone 5. a.**

Mediant of 1 accent.                      Ending of 2 accents.

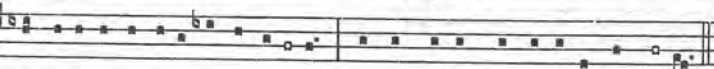


1. Laudá-te pú-e-ri Dóminum : \* laudá-te nó-men Dómi-ni.  
 2. Sit nómen Dómini benedíctum, \* ex hoc nunc, et úsque in saé-culum.  
 3. A sólis órtu usque ad oceásus, \* laudábile nómen Dómini.

**Ex. 1.** Gregorian Chant for Psalm 113 "Laudate pueri Dominum" (first three verses).<sup>6</sup>

**Tonus Peregrinus.**

Mediant of 1 accent with 3 preparatory syllables.                      Ending of 1 accent with 1 preparatory syllable.



1. In éxi-tu Isra-el de Aegý-pto, \* dómus Jácob de pópu-lo bárbaro :  
 2. Fácta est Judaé-a sancti-ficá-ti-o é- jus : \* Isra-el pot-estas é- jus.  
 Flex : palpábunt : †                      And so for all the Verses.

3. Máre vidit, et fúgit : \* Jordánis convérsus est retrórsum.  
 4. Móntes exsultavérunt ut arietes : \* et cólles sicut ágni óvium.  
 5. Quid est tibi máre quod fugisti? \* et tu Jordánis, quia convérsus es retrórsum?  
 6. Móntes exsultástis sicut arietes, \* et cólles sicut ágni óvium?  
 7. A fácie Dómini móta est tór-ra, \* a fácie Déi Jácob :  
 8. Qui convértit pét-am in stá-gna aquárum, \* et rúpem in fón-tes aquárum.

**Ex. 2.** Gregorian Chant for Psalm 114 "In exitu Israel."<sup>7</sup>

· Psalm 114 Lithuanian Jews



b. *B' tze'li Yis - ra - el mi - miz - ra - yim, beth Ya' á kov me - 'an lo - ez :*

· Psalm 29.



c. *Miz - mor l' - dá - vid. Ha - vu la - do - nai b' - nay e - lim, Ha - vu la - do - nai ka - vod va' - oz.*

**Ex. 3.** Lithuanian Jewish psalmody for Psalm 114 and Sephardic Oriental Jewish psalmody for Psalm 29.<sup>8</sup>

6. *Liber Usualis*, Great Falls, Montana: St. Bonaventure Publication, 1997: 150.

7. *Ibid.*, 160.

8. Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1959: 419.

# Ashrei

Psalm 145

Traditional

Ash - rei yosh - vei vei - te - cha od y - ha - l' - lu - cha se - lah Ash -

rei ha - am she - ka - cha lo ash - rei ha - am - she A - do - nai e - lo -

hav

Ex. 4. Traditional Ashkenazic psalmody for the "Ashrei" (excerpt).<sup>9</sup>

8. Ashkenazic אשכנזי Aschkenasisch

Lě - hu ně - ra - ně - nō la - dō - nōj nō - ri - ō lě - tsur jiš - ê - nu.

Ně - kad - mō fō - nōv bě - sō - dō biz - mi - ros nō - ri - a lô. etc.

Ex. 5. Ashkenazic psalmody for Psalm 95:1-2.<sup>10</sup>

9. Zamru Lo, *The Next Generation: Congregational Melodies for Shabbat*, ed. Jeffrey Shiovitz. New York: The Cantors Assembly, 2004: 290.

10. Abraham Z. Idelsohn, *Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies. Volume II: Songs of the Babylonian Jews*. Berlin: Benjamin Harz, 1923: 68.

19. *qahal*

mi.zmôr læ.do - wid ho.bu læ.dô.noj bë.něj ê.lim ho.bu læ.dô - noj  
 ko.bôd wo. 'ôz. ho.bu læ.dô.noj kë.bôd šě.mô hi.šě.tă.hă.wu læ.dô.noj  
 bă.hăd.răt gô - dăš. gô - l ă - dô.noj 'al hămmă - jim ê - l hăk.ko.bôd hir. 'im  
 ă - dô - noj 'al mäj - jim rab - bim. gô - l ă - dô.noj bāk.kô - âh  
 go.l ă - dô - noj bă - ho - dor. go.l ă - dô.noj šo.hēr ā - ro - zim  
 wă - jě - šăb - bër ă - dô - noj ă - ṭ ar - zēj hă - lě - ho - nôn.

**Ex. 6.** Yemenite psalmody for Psalm 29:1-5.<sup>11</sup>

Another performance practice derived from parallelism is antiphony. In the performance of Church psalmody, often the priest will chant the first hemistich and the choir will respond with the second (see ex. 7).

Psalm 122.

*The Cantor.* *The Choir.*

1. Ad te levavi ócu-los mé- os, \* qui hábi-tas in caé- lis.  
 2. Ecce sicut óculi servórum \* in mánibus dominórum suórum.  
 3. Sicut óculi ancillae in mánibus dóminae súae : \* ita óculi nóstri ad Dóminum Déum nóstrum, donec misereátur nóstri.

**Ex. 7.** Gregorian chant for Psalm 123:1-3, "Ad te levavi."<sup>12</sup>

The Talmud provides evidence of a different kind of practice in performance of the Hallel Psalms (113-118). When an adult chants the Hallel, the congregation responds to each line with a refrain. When a child chants Hallel, the congregation responds by repeating what the child had just chanted.<sup>13</sup> Vestiges of this practice can be found in contemporary Yemenite performance of the Hallel. In the example below the word "halleluyah" is chanted as a congregational refrain after each phrase of Psalm 113 that is chanted by the leader.

11. Abraham Z. Idelsohn, *Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies. Volume I* (1914): *Songs of the Yemenite Jews*. Berlin: Benjamin Harz, 1925:13.

12. *Liber Usualis*, 1997:1733.

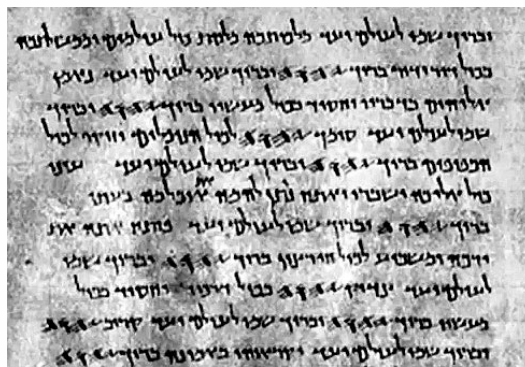
13. b. *Sota* 30b, *Tosefta Sota* 6:2, y. *Sota* 24b (5:4), *Midrash Mekhilta* Exodus 15.





**Ex. 8.** Yemenite antiphonal performance practice.<sup>14</sup>

The presence of a congregational refrain is attested in an ancient copy of Psalm 145 found in the Qumran caves<sup>15</sup>. The doxological refrain ברוך ה' וברוך שמו לעולם ועד (Blessed be God and blessed be His Name forever and ever) has been inserted after each verse of the Psalm.



**Fig. 1.** Ancient copy of Psalm 145 found in Qumran Caves.<sup>16</sup>

But psalmody is not cantillation. In the practice of cantillation a unique musical motif is assigned to each word, while in psalmody a generalized musical outline is assigned to each phrase. In fact, the musical realization of the *te'amim* for the Three Books has been almost completely lost and forgotten. Judaism ordained regulated cyclical cantillation in the synagogue of the complete Torah, as well as selected portions of the *nevi'im* (*haftarot*), and *ketuvim* (Esther, Lamentations, Song of Songs, Ruth, Ecclesiastes). But there was no corresponding tradition of

14. Reinhard Flender, *Hebrew Psalmody: A Structural Investigation*. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1992, ex. 12. ("S" indicates solo; "C" indicates congregation.)

15. Psalm 145 (excerpt) from 11QPSa. (<http://e-homoreligiosus.blogspot.com/2011/07/reverence-for-tetragrammaton-in-11qps.html>)

16. Psalm 145 (excerpt) from 11QPSa (loc. cit.).



cantillating the Psalms. Psalms that were included in the liturgy were chanted in psalmody, as described above, or using appropriate *nusah*, or set to new music performed by cantor, congregation or choir. Even those congregations (primarily Mizrahi) that have traditions of chanting the complete book of Psalms, especially in times of communal trouble or illness, chant them in rapid psalmody, rather than using the *te'amim*.<sup>17</sup>

Let us turn our attention now to the *te'amim* for the Book of Psalms. While they may at first look strange to us, we can recognize several symbols that are familiar to us from cantillation of other books of the Bible. It will be instructive to compare a passage from Psalm 105 that reappears almost identically in 1 Chronicles.

1 Chron 16.8–22	Psalm 105:1-15
הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה קִרְאוּ בְשֵׁמוֹ הוֹדִיעוּ בְּעַמִּים עֲלִילוֹתָיו:	הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה קִרְאוּ בְשֵׁמוֹ הוֹדִיעוּ בְּעַמִּים עֲלִילוֹתָיו:
שִׁירוּ לוֹ זִמְרוּ לוֹ שִׁיחוּ בְּכָל־נַפְלְאוֹתָיו:	שִׁירוּ לוֹ זִמְרוּ לוֹ שִׁיחוּ בְּכָל־נַפְלְאוֹתָיו:
הִתְהַלְלוּ בְּשֵׁם קָדְשׁוֹ יִשְׁמַח לֵב   מִבְּקֵשֵׁי יְהוָה:	הִתְהַלְלוּ בְּשֵׁם קָדְשׁוֹ יִשְׁמַח לֵב   מִבְּקֵשֵׁי יְהוָה:
דִּרְשׁוּ יְהוָה וְעִזּוּ בִּקְשׁוֹ פִּנּוּ תַמִּיד:	דִּרְשׁוּ יְהוָה וְעִזּוּ בִּקְשׁוֹ פִּנּוּ תַמִּיד:
זָכְרוּ נַפְלְאוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מִפְתִּיו וּמִשְׁפְּטֵי־פִיהוּ:	זָכְרוּ נַפְלְאוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מִפְתִּיו וּמִשְׁפְּטֵי־פִיו:
זֶרַע יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדוּ בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב בְּחִירָיו:	זֶרַע אַבְרָהָם עֲבָדוּ בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב בְּחִירָיו:
הוּא יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ מִשְׁפָּטָיו:	הוּא יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ מִשְׁפָּטָיו:
זָכְרוּ לְעוֹלָם בְּרִיתוֹ דְּבַר צוּה לְאַלְף דָּוָר:	זָכְרוּ לְעוֹלָם בְּרִיתוֹ דְּבַר צוּה לְאַלְף דָּוָר:
אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וּשְׁבוּעָתוֹ לִיצְחָק:	אֲשֶׁר כָּרַת אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וּשְׁבוּעָתוֹ לִישְׁחָק:
וַיַּעֲמִידָהּ לִיעֲקֹב לְחֹק לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרִית עוֹלָם:	וַיַּעֲמִידָהּ לִיעֲקֹב לְחֹק לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרִית עוֹלָם:
לֵאמֹר לְךָ אֶתֶּן אֶת־אֶרֶץ־כְּנָעַן חֶבֶל נַחֲלֹתְכֶם:	לֵאמֹר לְךָ אֶתֶּן אֶת־אֶרֶץ־כְּנָעַן חֶבֶל נַחֲלֹתְכֶם:
בְּהִיּוֹתְכֶם מִתִּי מִסְפָּר כְּמַעֲט וְגָרִים בָּהּ:	בְּהִיּוֹתֶם מִתִּי מִסְפָּר כְּמַעֲט וְגָרִים בָּהּ:
וַיִּתְּנֵם לְכֹהֲנֵי אֱלֹהֵי וּמִמֶּלֶכָה אֶל־עַם אַחֵר:	וַיִּתְּנֵם לְכֹהֲנֵי אֱלֹהֵי וּמִמֶּלֶכָה אֶל־עַם אַחֵר:
לֹא־הָיָה לָאִישׁ לַעֲשֹׂקָם וַיּוֹכַח עֲלֵיהֶם מְלָכִים:	לֹא־הָיָה אָדָם לַעֲשֹׂקָם וַיּוֹכַח עֲלֵיהֶם מְלָכִים:
אֶל־תִּגְעוּ בְּמִשְׁחֵי וּלְנִבְיָאֵי אֶל־תִּרְעוּ:	אֶל־תִּגְעוּ בְּמִשְׁחֵי וּלְנִבְיָאֵי אֶל־תִּרְעוּ:

17. Flender, *Hebrew Psalmody*, 95-99.

**Table 1.** Verses from Psalm 105 with corresponding verses from 1 Chronicles.<sup>18</sup>

The last word of each verse in both systems is marked with the strongest disjunctive accent, סִילֹיק. In Chronicles, because of the shortness of the verses, the primary dichotomy is marked with זָקָף; in Psalms it is marked with אֶתְנַחֲתָה (or אֶתְנַחֲתָהּ).

But the rest of the *te'amim* in the Psalm may look strange to us. Some words are marked with two *te'amim*. Look at the word בְּעֵמִים in the first verse, bearing both רְבִיעַ and גֶּרֶשׁ. That *ta'am* is called רְבִיעַ-מְגֵרֶשׁ and may be used to indicate the subdivision of a hemistich. The word לָבוּ in the third verse has a מֶהֱפֶה and a vertical line that looks like פִּסְקוּ or לְגֵרְמָהוּ. That *ta'am* is the disjunctive מֶהֱפֶה-לְגֵרְמָהוּ.

There are some symbols that look out of place. The word מְבַקְשִׁי in the third verse seems to have a מוֹנֵחַ placed over the word rather than under it. That is the conjunctive עָלוּי. Also in the third verse, the word הִתְהַלְלוּ has what looks like טְפִחָא but in a prepositive position. That is the disjunctive גָּחִי.

There are some combinations that look odd. In the fourth verse the punctuation of בְּקִשׁוֹ is at odds with what we would expect in the other books. We expect a conjunctive on פָּנָיו and a disjunctive on בְּקִשׁוֹ. In fact, טְפִחָא is a conjunctive, even though it looks like טְפִחָא. And מוֹנֵחַ has been transformed from a conjunctive to a disjunctive, according to one of the many complex rules of transformation that one finds in the punctuation of the Psalms.

In verse 11 we may be surprised to see two words in a row marked with רְבִיעַ in the phrase לֹא־מֵרָחֵק אֶת־אֶתְנַחֲתָהּ. In the corresponding verse from Chronicles we see the expected pattern, רְבִיעַ followed by פְּשֻטָא. But in the punctuation of the Psalms, these two words are both marked with רְבִיעַ, the second רְבִיעַ גְּדוּל serving as a substitute for the disjunctive גָּחִי.

The rules governing the punctuation of the Three Books are quite complex, due to the numerous exceptions, also known as substitutions or transformations. I will give just a few examples. In Psalm 105 we saw that the closing word of the first hemistich was always marked with אֶתְנַחֲתָה, and this is the most common way to punctuate the primary dichotomy of a verse.<sup>19</sup> Psalm 1:4 illustrates this punctuation: לֹא־יָכֹן הִרְשָׁעִים כִּי אִם־כָּפְלִין אֲשֶׁר־תִּדְבְּנוּ יוֹחֵם.

However, in longer verses in which the second hemistich comprises five or more words, the last word of the first hemistich is marked instead with וַיִּנְרֹד.<sup>20</sup> Psalm 123:1 illustrates this punctuation: שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלֹת אֵלֶיךָ נִשְׁאֲתִי אֶת־עֵינַי הַיֹּשְׁבִי בַשָּׁמַיִם:

In some short verses, the last word of the first hemistich is marked instead with רְבִיעַ.<sup>21</sup> Psalms 150:6 and 21:1 illustrate this punctuation: כָּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תִּהְלֵל יְהוָה הִלְלוּ־יְהוָה:

לְמִנְצֶחַ מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:

And in a few rare cases, in which the first hemistich comprises only one word (such as the Psalms beginning with הַלְלוּיָהּ or a one-word superscription such as לְדָוִד), the main division is marked with אֶתְנַחֲתָהּ, or פָּזֵר. Psalms 138:1 and 30:1 illustrate this punctuation:

18. Compare also 2 Samuel 22 with Psalm 18 and Jeremiah 10 with Psalm 79.

19. אֶתְנַחֲתָה marks the main subdivision in 2,011 (80%) of the 2,527 verses of the Psalms.

20. וַיִּנְרֹד marks the main subdivision in 352 (14%) of the 2,527 verses of the Psalms. This *ta'am* comprises two symbols placed on one word: a מְרָבָא placed under the first letter of the stressed syllable and a מֶהֱפֶה placed over the first letter of the preceding syllable.

21. רְבִיעַ marks the main subdivision in 131 (5%) of the 2,527 verses of the Psalms. This substitution will occur if the second hemistich comprises only one word or only two short words.

22. אֶתְנַחֲתָהּ marks the main subdivision in only 17 of the 2,527 verses of the Psalms. This *ta'am* comprises two

לְדוֹד | אֹדֶךָ בְּכָל-לִבִּי נֶגֶד אֱלֹהִים אֲזַמְרֶךָ:

מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר-חֲנֻכַּת הַבַּיִת לְדוֹד:

Following the principle of recursive dichotomy, each hemistich is then further syntactically bisected. If the first hemistich is terminated with אֲתַנָּה then רְבִיעַ מְגֵרֶשׁ will usually be used to subdivide the second hemistich.<sup>23</sup> (See Psalm 1:4 above.)

If the first hemistich is terminated with עוֹלָה וַיֹּרֶד instead of אֲתַנָּה then אֲתַנָּה will be used to subdivide the second hemistich. (See Psalm 123:1 above.)

But sometimes סִילּוֹק is preceded by two conjunctives: טַרְחָא and מוֹנֵחַ, as in Psalm 1:6—  
כִּי-יִיָּדַע יְהוָה דְּרָךְ צְדִיקִים וְדָרֶךְ רָשָׁעִים תֵּאבֹד:

The complete set of rules and exceptions and substitutions is quite complex. Those wishing to delve deeper could consult the excellent monographs by Wickes, Perlman, Breuer and Yeiven.<sup>24</sup> Here we will just provide a list of the *te'amim* that are used to punctuate the Three Books. Those who are familiar with the *te'amim* for the Twenty-one Books will notice that some of these *te'amim* are identical, while others are slightly different. The conjunctive טַרְחָא resembles the disjunctive טַפְחָא. Note that there are two forms of שְׁלִשְׁלָת, one a disjunctive and one a conjunctive. The disjunctive שְׁלִשְׁלָתוֹ is marked with a postpositive vertical line, as does the disjunctive שְׁלִשְׁלָתוֹ used in the Twenty-one Books, even though in the latter case it has no conjunctive equivalent. There are two forms of צְנוּרִי; again, one is a disjunctive and the other a conjunctive.<sup>25</sup> The disjunctive form is distinguished by being marked as a postpositive accent, as is the disjunctive זָרְקָא used in the Twenty-one Books, even though it also has no conjunctive equivalent. These observations suggest that the punctuation of the Twenty-one Books may have developed subsequent to that of the Three Books.

The disjunctive accents:

סִילּוֹק, עוֹלָה וַיֹּרֶד, אֲתַנָּח, רְבִיעַ, דְּחִי, רְבִיעַ קָטָן, רְבִיעַ גָּדוֹל, צְנוּרִי, רְבִיעַ מְגֵרֶשׁ, שְׁלִשְׁלָת  
גְּדוֹלָה, מִהֶפְדָּה-לְגִרְמָה, פֶּזֶר, אֲזֵלָא-לְגִרְמָה |

The conjunctive accents:

מְרַבָּא, מוֹנֵחַ, עֲלוּי, מִהֶפְדָּה, אֲזֵלָא, שְׁלִשְׁלָת קִטְנָה, צְנוּרִית-מִהֶפְדָּה, טַרְחָא, גִּלְגִּל

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symbols placed on one word: אֲזֵלָא placed over the first letter of the stressed syllable and a vertical line placed after the word.

23. Using the principle of recursive dichotomy, the following verse (Psalm 111:9) would be bifurcated at the אֲתַנָּה, and the first hemistich then bifurcated again at the רְבִיעַ.

בְּדוֹת | שְׁלַח לְעַמּוֹ // צִוְּהָ-לְעוֹלָם בְּרִיתוֹ / קָדוֹשׁ וְנֹרָא שְׁמוֹ:

"He sent redemption to His people; He ordained His covenant for all time; His name is holy and awesome."

But some authors argue that such verses display a symmetrical three-part division. That viewpoint seems to be reflected in the punctuation of the JPS translation cited above.

בְּדוֹת | שְׁלַח לְעַמּוֹ / צִוְּהָ-לְעוֹלָם בְּרִיתוֹ / קָדוֹשׁ וְנֹרָא שְׁמוֹ:

24. William Wickes, *A Treatise of the Accentuation of the Three So-called Poetical Books of the Old Testament: Psalms, Proverbs, and Job*, 1881; Michael Perlman, *Sefer tehillim mefusak al pi ta'amei ha-mikra*, Tel Aviv: Zimrat, 1982; Mordecai Breuer, *Ta'amei ha-mikra*, Jerusalem: Horeb, 1989; Israel Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah*. Translated and edited by E. J. Revell, Scholars Press, 1980.

25. The conjunctive form is known as צְנוּרִית, and is combined with a second *ta'am*. E.g. הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי (Psalm 3:8).

This system of notation was developed at the Ben-Asher academy in Tiberias prior to the tenth century. But while the symbols have come down to us intact, their sound, preserved only in oral tradition, has largely disappeared.

The earliest witnesses of Psalm chanting seem to describe psalmody rather than cantillation. Augustine (354–430 CE) describes the singing of Psalms in the early churches of northern Africa as "nearer speaking than singing."<sup>26</sup>

There are a few intriguing documents that suggest that in some Eastern Jewish communities in the middle ages, Psalms were performed not in cantillation, but with elaborate artistry. Rabbi Petahia (late 12th century) of Regensburg, Germany kept a diary in which he recorded impressions of his extensive travels. Of the Jews of Babylon he wrote,

There is a youth with a pleasant voice who sings the Psalms with his pleasant voice. On the intermediate days of the festival they sing Psalms with musical instruments. Moreover, they have a tradition as to which melodies [are appropriate]. They have ten melodies for the "Asor" Psalms, and eight melodies for the "Al-Ha-sheminit" Psalms.<sup>27</sup>

Petahia's contemporary, Benjamin of Tudela (Spain) was another world traveler who left a record describing his encounters. He relates that Psalm tunes of levitic origin existed in the Baghdad community *circa* 1170. "Rabbi Elazar ben Tsemah is the head of the order, and he traces his genealogy back to the prophet Samuel the Korahite. He and his brothers know to perform the Psalms (*z'mirot*) in the same manner as the musicians were performing them when the Temple was standing."<sup>28</sup>

Ovadia Ha-ger (born c. 1070)<sup>29</sup> was an Italian Christian priest who converted to Judaism in 1102, and eventually settled in Egypt. The earliest notation of Jewish music is attributed to his hand. His notation of a *piyyut* bears a remarkable resemblance to contemporary Jewish Psalmody, and many scholars have speculated that he may have been transcribing a traditional Egyptian Jewish chant. Even though the lyrics of Ovadia's music are not from the Psalms, this notation may provide us a window to an early practice of chanting that may have been used for psalmody as well.

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26. Augustine, *Confessions*. Tr. by Edward Bouverie Pusey. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/augconf/aug10.htm>. 03 June, 2013, 10:33.

27. ויש בחור שיש לו קול נעים. ואומר מזמור בקול נעים. בחולו של מועד אומרים המזמורים בכלי שיר. ויש מסורות באיזה נגונים. ואל עשור יש להם עשר נגונים. ואל השמינית שמונה נגונים. ועל כל מזמור יש כמה נגונים. (ספר המסעות של פתחיה מרגנשבורג, עמוד 46)

*Travels of Rabbi Petachia*, A. Benisch, ed., London: Trubner & Co., 1856. HebrewBooks.org. 03 June, 2013.

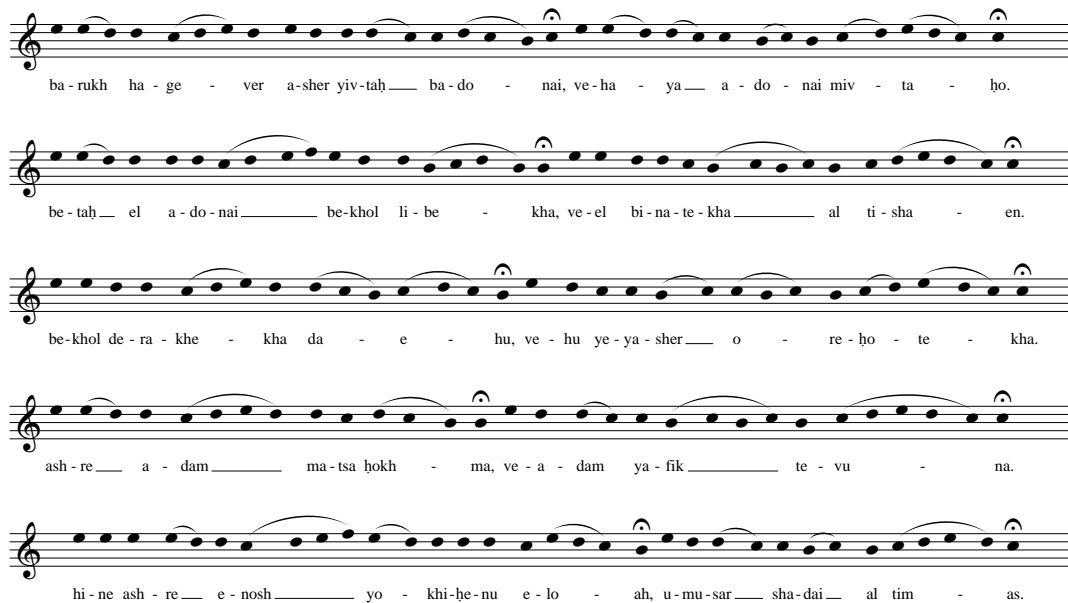
28. ורבי אלעזר בן צמח ראש הסדר והוא מיוחס עד שמואל הנביא הקרחי. והוא ואחיו יודעים לנגן הזמירות כמו שהיו המשוררים נוגנים בזמן שבית המקדש קיים. (עמור ס')

*The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, Marcus Nathan Adler, ed., Oxford University Press, 1907; Reprint ed., New York: Feldheim, Inc. n.d.

29. Reinhard Flender, "Parallels between the notation of Ovadia ha-Ger and a psalmodic cantillation transmitted in the oral tradition of the Jews of Djerba." In *Giovanni-Ovadia da Oppido, proselito, viaggiatore e musicista dell'età normanna: atti del convegno internazionale, Oppido Lucano, 28-30 marzo 2004*, 225-230. Edited by Antonio De Rosa and Mauro Perani. Firenze: Giuntina, 2005.

## Barukh Ha-Gever

Ovadia Ha-Ger



ba - rukh ha - ge - ver a - sher yiv - taḥ ba - do - nai, ve - ha - ya a - do - nai miv - ta - ḥo.  
be - taḥ el a - do - nai be - khol li - be - kha, ve - el bi - na - te - kha al ti - sha - en.  
be - khol de - ra - khe - kha da - e - hu, ve - hu ye - ya - sher o - re - ḥo - te - kha.  
ash - re a - dam ma - tsa ḥokh - ma, ve - a - dam ya - fik te - vu - na.  
hi - ne ash - re e - nosh yo - khi - he - nu e - lo ah, u - mu - sar sha - dai al tim - as.

## Moroccan Jewish psalmody for Psalm 19:2

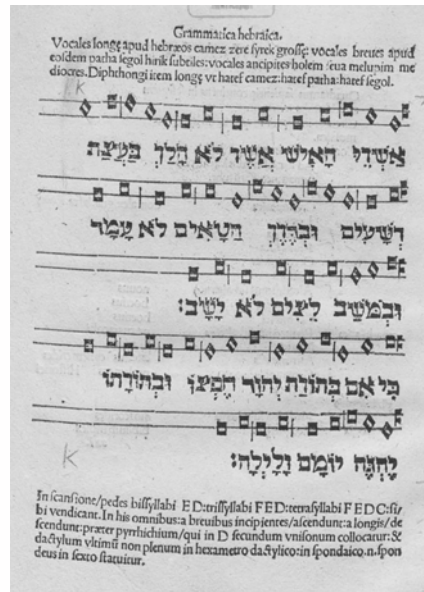


ha - sha - ma - yim me - sa - pe - rim ke - vod el, u - ma - a - sey ya - dav ma - gid ha - ra - ki - a.

**Ex. 9.** Transcription by Hanoeh Avenary of Ovadia Ha-Ger "Barukh Ha-Gever" and Moroccan psalmody for Psalm 19:1.<sup>30</sup>

The earliest transcription of a Hebrew Psalm chant into Western notation is found in *Grammatica Hebraica* from *Quadratum sapientiae, continens in se septem artes liberales veterum* by Johannes Mader (a.k.a. Johannes Foenisecca), published in Augsburg in 1515. The first two verses of Psalm 1 are printed with the Hebrew words running right to left and the musical notes accomodating that directionality. We may assume the clef to designate F. The chant is extremely simple, traversing only a minor third. Each phrase begins and ends on D (see fig. 2).

30. Alfred Sendrey, *The Music of the Jews in the Diaspora (up to 1800)*. New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1970: 161; Abraham Z. Idelsohn *Hebräisch-orientalischer Melodienschatz. Volume V: Gesänge der marokkanischen Juden*. Berlin: Benjamin Harz, 1929, no. 17.



**Figure 2.** First two verses of Psalm 1, printed with Hebrew and music running right to left.<sup>31</sup>

The earliest transcription of the *te'amim* for a Psalm was notated in *Sefer ha-niggunim* by Jacob Levi Finzi of Casale Monferrato, a book written sometime between 1605 and 1650, but subsequently lost or destroyed (see ex. 10). What did survive is a copy made by Abraham Joseph Solomon Graziano in 1669/1670. Graziano wrote,

With the help of God. The *te'amim* of Psalms and their melody, from the manuscript of the sage, the author J[acob] L[evi] F[inz]i, in his *Sefer ha-niggunim*, his transcription of musical notes in a big book containing the order of the chant of the liturgical poems according to the customs of the Holy Congregation of Ashkenazim, and according to what he received from his rabbi the exalted leader Abraham Segre, blessed be his memory, of Casale Monferrato, as was written by the above mentioned sage, the author of the above mentioned book, *Sefer ha-niggunim*.<sup>32</sup>

31. Johannes Foenisea (a.k.a. Mader), *Quadratum sapientiae, continens in se septem artes liberales veterum*. Augsburg, 1515. [http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00003168/image\\_6](http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00003168/image_6). 20 June, 2013, p. 2.

32. ב'ה'. טעמי תהילים וניגון שלהם מכתבת יד החכם המחבר ילפי' בס' הניגוני' וצורות הנוטי' מהמוסיקא שלו בס' ארוך עם סדר ניגוני היוצרות וקרובץ כפי מנהגי ק'ק אשכנזים וכפי מה שקבל מרבו ואלופו הקצין כמ'הר אברהם סגרי ז'ל מקסאל מונפרא כאשר כתב החכם המחבר הנ'ל בס' הניגוני' הנ'ל.  
(Israel Adler, *Hebrew Notated Manuscript Sources up to circa 1840*. Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 1989: 24.)





Ex. 10. Transcription by Israel Adler of Graziano's *Ta'amei tehillim*.<sup>33</sup>

Note that the nomenclature of the *te'amim* differs from the standard. Graziano adds several interesting annotations describing the application of the *te'amim*.<sup>34</sup>

We have no knowledge of any further serious attempts to transcribe the cantillation of the Psalms before the twentieth century. In his thorough study of cantillation published in 1881, British scholar William Wickes wrote, "the Jews themselves allow that the musical value of the accents of the three Poetical Books is altogether lost."<sup>35</sup> But in a footnote, Wickes adds, "Such is the testimony of the European Jews. But according to Eben Sappir 55a, the Jews of Yemen have still a particular melody for the three books." *Even Sappir* (1866) is a book by Jacob Saphir (1822–1886) in which he describes his travels to Yemen, India, Egypt and Australia. He writes that the Yemenite Jews "have a separate melody for Torah reading, a separate one for the Prophets, a separate one for the *Ketuvim*, and a separate one for *ta'amei emet* (that were forgotten by the Ashkenazim)."<sup>36</sup>

In *HOM Volume II, Songs of the Babylonian Jews*, Idelsohn writes, "These three Books [Psalms, Proverbs and Job] have notoriously an individual accentual system. ... The intonation, i.e. the modes of the three Books seem among the Ashkenazim to have been forgotten. On the

33. Adler, *Hebrew Notated Manuscript Sources*, 25. Also cited in Idelsohn *HOM*, vol. 6, p. 234, where it is attributed to Abraham Sagri, 1600.

34. גרמיה אין לו נגון אלא עם מיושב או צנור אחריו, ואם עם מיושב יורד, גם אז אין לו נגון. הכתף ימין עם מיושב או סוף פסוק, אפי' יש טעם מפסיק בינם, יש לו נגון, וכמיושב. ילפ'י.

צנור צריך שיהיה אחריו עולה ויורד אם תרצה לעשותו הנגון.

גרמיה וצנור נגונו כמרעיש: ב' גרמיה הנגון לשני: ימנית גלגל או מרכא, הנגון לימנית: ב' גלגלים הנגון לשני. ילפ'י. Adler *Hebrew Notated Manuscript Sources*, 25-26

35. William Wickes, *A Treatise ...* (1881), 2.

36. ויש להם לקריאת התורה ניגון לבד לנביאים לבד וכתובים לבד וטעמי אמ' (שנשכחו מהאשכנזים) לבד. (א55) Jacob Saphir, *Even sappir (Iben Safir)*. Lyck: Siebert, 1866. HebrewBooks.org. 26 June, 2013.



other hand the Babylonians as well as the Syrians and the Sephardim have preserved their modes."<sup>37</sup>

While Idelsohn regularly provides transcriptions of the complete "Zarqa Table" for the cantillation of Torah, *haftarah*, and the *megilot*, for Psalm cantillation he presents his analysis of only five of the *te'amim*. (And two pages later he presents the different melodies used in the cantillation of Job.) Idelsohn is perhaps implying that motifs are assigned only to these five disjunctives, and that some degree of improvisation is allowed with the rest of the words, in which case this praxis is closer to psalmody than to cantillation.



**Ex. 11.** Motifs for the cantillation of Psalms. Idelsohn *HOM*, vol. 2, p. 13.



**Ex. 12.** Motifs for the cantillation of Job. Idelsohn *HOM*, vol. 2, p. 15.

Idelsohn identifies the last measure as representing the motif that is shared by what he terms the "dynamic accents: zarqa, pazzer, etc."

Idelsohn included numerous transcriptions of biblical cantillation in his monumental *Treasures of Hebrew Oriental Melodies*, but there are only two examples of Psalm cantillation. Example 13 shows Babylonian Jewish cantillation from Psalm 104. Notice that Idelsohn supplied the *te'amim* over each word, a practice that the author consistently used for transcriptions of cantillation. The *te'amim* are not supplied for other Psalm transcriptions. Some of the *te'amim* align with Idelsohn's analysis cited above. But the רביע מוגרש in verse 2 is different. The עולה ויורד in verse 3 is different. סילוק sometimes ends with A rather than B-flat.<sup>38</sup> And טרחא appears in four different forms.<sup>39</sup>

37. Idelsohn *HOM*, vol. 2, p. 13.

38. Reinhard Flender called this practice "Versüberlappung" (verse overlapping), and it describes the linking of the end of one verse to the beginning of the next through alteration of the cadence pattern. (Flender, "Neue Aspekte zum Strukturellen Zusammenhang zwischen ta'ame emet und hebraisch-orientalischer Psalmodie," in *Yuval: Studies of the Jewish Music Research Centre*, Volume 5, pp. 318-355, edited by Israel Adler, et al. Jerusalem: the Magnes Press. 1986: 344).

39. Idelsohn, *Ibid.*, no. 183.

(Psalm.104. 1-11) B. N<sup>o</sup> 61

183.

1. B<sup>o</sup>r - hi naf - ši e<sup>t</sup> ä - dö - naj ä - dö.naj ę - lo - haj ga -

dal - ta mę.öd h<sup>o</sup>d wę - ha - dar la - baš - ta 2. O - tę ôr kas.sal.ma nô - tę sa -

ma.jim kaj - ri - 'a. 3. Ham.qa - re<sup>t</sup> bam - ma - jim 'ä - li - j<sup>o</sup> - taw has.sam 'a - bim rę - hu -

b<sup>o</sup> ham.hall<sup>o</sup>h 'al kan - fę ru - a<sup>h</sup>. 4. O - sę mal - a - haw ru - h<sup>o</sup>t mę - s<sup>o</sup> - rę - taw

ęs l<sup>o</sup>h<sup>o</sup>t. 5. Ja - sad ę - re<sup>t</sup> 'al mę.h<sup>o</sup> - ne - ha bal tim - m<sup>o</sup>t 'o - lam wa.ęd.

6. T<sup>o</sup>h<sup>o</sup>m kal - buš kis - si - t<sup>o</sup> 'al ha.rim ja - 'am.du ma - jim. 7. Min ga - 'ä - rat - ha ję - nu -

sun mim q<sup>o</sup>l ra - am - ha ję - ha - fę.zun. 8. Ja - 'ä - lu ha - rim ję - du bę.qa - 'ot

ęlmę.q<sup>o</sup>m zę ja - sad - ta la - hęm. 9. Gę.bul sam - ta bal ja - 'ä - b<sup>o</sup> - run bal

ję.su.bun lę.has.s<sup>o</sup>t ha - a - re<sup>t</sup>. 10. Ham.s<sup>o</sup>l - lę - a<sup>h</sup> ma - ja - nim ban - ha - lim bên ha -

rim ję - hal - lę.hun. 11. Jaš - qu k<sup>o</sup>l haj - t<sup>o</sup> sa - daj jiš.bę.ru fę.ra.im sę.ma.am.

**Ex.13.** Babylonian Jewish cantillation of Psalm 104:1-11.

In his transcription of a Sephardic Oriental Jewish performance of Psalm 1 in *HOM volume IV* (1923),<sup>40</sup> Idelsohn included the only other notation of Psalm cantillation with the *te'amim* written over the notes (see ex. 14). But does this indeed represent an authentic Psalm cantillation? Here again we seem to find consistency only in the performance of סילוק and אתנחתא. Flender posits that we should not analyze the cantillation of the Psalms using the same criteria by which we observe the cantillation of the Torah, *haftarot* or *megillot*. In the first place, all non-Ashkenazic cantillation tends to be rather free in its musical performance. In some traditions no fixed melodies are assigned to the conjunctive *te'amim*. In some traditions the lesser disjunctives all share a common melody. And all of the contemporary examples of Psalm cantillation that we have encountered derive from non-Ashkenazic sources. Flender writes, "It is therefore a miscon-

40. Abraham Z. Idelsohn, *Hebraisch-orientalischer Melodienschatz. Volume IV: Gesänge der orientalischen Sefardim*. Berlin: Benjamin Harz, 1923.

ception to try to search for each accent its own musical motif."<sup>41</sup> He adds that the "Oriental Jews" who cantillate the Psalms do not conceive of the *te'amim* as an abstract paradigm; they do not learn to chant the names of the *te'amim* apart from the biblical text. "The realization of the poetic accent system as it is performed by the Oriental Jews, however, does not follow such a method, the sequence of stationary designs. It follows the principle of psalmody, by which the accents are seen as structural indicators."<sup>42</sup>

1.1-5.

Aš-re ha-iš ă-šer lo ha-laḥ ba-ă-sat rē-ša'im  
ub-de-reḥ haṭ-ṭa-im lo 'a-mad ub-mo-šab le-šim lo ja-šab. Ki im bē-to-rat  
ă-do-naj heṭ-so ub-to-ra-to jeh-gē jo-mam wa-la-j la. Wē-ha-ja  
kē'eš ša-tul 'al pal-ge ma-jim ă-šer pir-jo jit-ten bē'it-to  
wē'a-le-hu lo jib-bol wē-hol ă-šer ja-ă-se jas-li-aḥ. Lo hen ha-  
rē-ša'im ki im kam-moš ă-šer tid-dē-fe-nu ru-aḥ. 'Al ken  
lo ja-qu-mu rē-ša'im bam-miš-paṭ wē-haṭ-ṭa-im ba-ă-dat šad-di-qim.

**Ex. 14.** Sephardic Oriental Jewish cantillation of Psalm 1:1-5.<sup>43</sup>

Several years ago a young man in my synagogue gave me a non-commercial CD that contained instructions in how to chant the Psalms according to the *te'amim*. The CD had no label or case. I have transcribed the spoken introduction from the recording.<sup>44</sup>

Unfortunately the Ashkenazic community and most of the Sephardi community no longer have a *mesorah* for the tune of *sifrei emes*. Only the Syrian community retain such a *mesorah*. A certain Ashkenazic *kheder* in Yerusholayim called Aderes Eliyohu decided they were going to teach the children all of Tanakh including *sifrei emes*. One of the children complained that they were learning the *trop* for all of Tanakh but not *sifrei emes*, and that if a *trop* for *sifrei emes* exists somewhere the yeshiva should find it and teach it to them. So a search was conducted. They obtained three recordings of the *trop* of *sifrei*

41. Flender, "Neue Aspekte," 327. The present author's translation.

42. Flender, "Neue Aspekte," 344. The present author's translation.

43. Idelsohn, *HOM*, vol. 4, no. 3.

44. In the transcription I have retained the speaker's Ashkenazic Hebrew pronunciation.

*emes* from three Syrian Jews. The *menahel* of the *kheder* examined the three recordings. The one that he felt was most accurate to the rules of the *trop* (something that was not lost) was chosen to be taught. Another thing that must be mentioned is that the *trop* as was taught to me doesn't sound exactly like the Syrians sing it. That's because it was an Ashkenazi singing a Sephardi tune. It is by nature going to sound a bit different. Therefore before you begin I need to thank Reb Yosef Silbermann *shlita* the *menahel* of the *kheder* for his work in rediscovering a *trop* for *sifrei emes* that we Ashkenazim can use.

Here is my transcription of the *te'amim* from this recording.

סילוק  
 si - luk  
 מרְכָא סילוק  
 mere - kha si - luk  
 טְרַחַא מוֹנַח סילוק  
 tar - ha mu - nah si - luk  
 עוֹלָה וַיּוֹרֵד  
 oleh veyo - red  
 אֶתְנַח  
 at - nah  
 דְּחִי אֶתְנַח  
 de - hi at - nah  
 רְבִיעַ  
 re - vi - a  
 רְבִיעַ  
 re - vi - a  
 רְבִיעַ עוֹלָה וַיּוֹרֵד  
 re vi a oleh veyored  
 רְבִיעַ  
 re - vi - a  
 סילוק  
 si - luk

*munah* is a "mini-disjunctive" in this case  
*munah atnah* same melody  
*dehi* is a "mini-disjunctive" here  
 any conjunctive  
*revia katon* is always followed by *oleh veyored*  
 usually followed by:

צָנוֹר  
tsin nor usually followed by *revia katon*,  
*oleh veyored*, *galgal*, *oleh veyored*

גָּלְגַל עוֹלָה וְיִוָּרֵד  
gal-gal oleh veyored

צָנוֹר  
tsin - nor

רְבִיעַ עוֹלָה וְיִוָּרֵד  
re - vi a oleh veyored

צָנוֹר עוֹלָה וְיִוָּרֵד  
tsin - nor oleh veyored

פָּזֵר  
pa - zer same melody for *mahpakh legarmeh*,  
*shalsholet gedolah*,  
*azla legarmeh*. מִהַפְּךְ לַגְרָמָהוּ  
שְׁלִשְׁלוֹת גְּדוֹלָהוּ  
אֲזַלָּא לַגְרָמָהוּ

*galgal* before *pazer* has no special melody. Just extend the pickups.

#### Ex. 15. Transcription by the author of Psalm cantillation motifs.<sup>45</sup>

But one nagging question remains. Do these transcriptions of cantillation reflect an unbroken centuries-old tradition, or do they represent a retrojection, an attempt to fill in the gaps in order to create a consistent system? In the words of scholar Avigdor Herzog,

Although the Psalms are furnished with accents in the Masoretic texts, the question, whether they were ever, or still are, sung according to the accents is still moot. Even the 17th-century Italian notation of accent motives for Psalms and the claims of present-day informants that they sing according to the accents are not conclusive. Most scholars think that the system of the accents is too sophisticated to be followed precisely or that there was a "lost art" of Psalm cantillation. It may even be that some present day practices of following the accents approximately are a back-formation phenomenon: since the accents were there, it was felt that they had to be obeyed somehow and after many generations some characteristic motives became attached to the accent-signs in coexistence with the overall psalmodic line.<sup>46</sup>

It has been said that the Psalms have been set to music more than any other book. From their original improvisatory creation, through splendid performances by the levitic orchestra and choir in the ancient Jerusalem Temple, the psalmody of early churches and synagogues, the tradi-

45. *Ta'amei Tehillim*, as performed by the Aderes Eliyohu School in Jerusalem (adapted by Rabbi Joseph Silverman from a Syrian tradition).

46. Avigdor Herzog, "Psalms, Book of: Musical Rendition in Jewish tradition." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., Vol. 16, Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 679-683. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 25 June 2013, 681.



tional *nusah* of the liturgy, impassioned performances by great *hazzanim*, magnificent works of art by European and American composers, and popular contemporary congregational tunes, these lyrics have inspired a tremendous variety of musical expression for thousands of years. The cantillation of the Psalms, though little understood and rarely and imperfectly practiced, is yet another manifestation of this enduring spiritual legacy.

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# PSALMS FOR LITURGICAL OCCASIONS

## Psalm 91: Who Speaks

*By Edward Feld*

It is not surprising to find in Psalms the anonymous third-person voice we find in much of the Bible. When the Bible says, "In the beginning, God created heaven and earth..." it is an authoritative voice that speaks to us which can tell us about God and describe God's acts and God's speech; the words are spoken by an observer who knows all. Many Psalms, too, reflect this stance. As we read a Psalm and hear a phrase like "Praise God" we accept the anonymity of its source for it feels appropriate: it is the same authoritative, all knowing, commanding voice we are used to from so many of our other encounters with the Bible. Who is speaking in these poems? The priest? A Levitical chorus? The poet? The person behind the voice is closed to us, though we may experience the message as the collective voice of a tradition, or the summoning voice of someone in authority. As we read, or as we listen, as we enter into the story being told or the poem being recited, we accept this anonymous authority of the text, and allow it to address us.

There is another kind of speaking which typifies the Book of Psalms. The majority of Psalms speak with a personal voice, we hear the "I" of the poet, a subjective stance which allows us to visualize a person breathing behind the anonymous mask of authority. We may be especially engaged by these Psalms for they constitute one of the few places in the Bible where we can encounter a first person report so consistently. In fact, medieval commentators were so taken aback by this personalization that they attached many of these anonymous, first person passages to events in David's life. They had difficulty allowing the Psalm to exist with the "I" of everyman, of the common man, but instead returned even this "I" to an authoritative voice: they thought that the only ones who could speak personally were the epic Biblical heroes--our own lives were too paltry to reflect on. Many Psalms, though, seem to exalt this personal "I," and in our generation, the ability to hear such a personal voice express its feelings can be a special moment in the reading of Biblical texts.

But what can be even more surprising in Psalms are the times when the antiphonal voice, the voice responding to the prayer of the Psalmist, is the voice of God. God speaks and answers prayer. We not only hear our own voice in Psalms, but at times may be vouchsafed a response. This, after all, is the ultimate wish of prayer: that we might experience an answer--for a moment hear God's voice.

God's speech in Psalms is certainly not oracular, consisting of pronouncements addressed to individuals regarding the future course of their lives; nor does God respond in riddles, or in nonsense syllables that must be unraveled by an interpreter. Rather the message is unambiguous and straightforward, reflecting prophetic visions of justice and expressing reassurance to those who act righteously of the presence and care of God. The words themselves are frequently



quotations or paraphrases and restatements of what must have been normative theology. Drawing on the common faith enunciated by the prophets, or wisdom literature, or received tradition, these messages from God assert obvious truths of biblical faith.

The truths contained in the words spoken by God but written by the Psalmist, truths we readily agree with, hide the brazenness of authorial reach. They are believable statements in the mouth of God precisely because they represent essential Biblical teaching. Yet, this does not detract from the drama of hearing God speak. The power of God's speech overwhelms all the other voices in these Psalms. A person prays and hopes for a response, a contemporary devotee reads the words of the Psalm expressing gratitude or perplexity or anguish reflecting inner religious emotions of thankfulness or of torment and then hears the words of God in response and finds reassurance.

Commentators on Psalms have remarked on what they point to as the "performative function" of the recitation of Psalms in the Temple precincts. They argue that many Psalms were intended to evoke the presence of God, to make the listener feel he or she was experiencing an entrance into the Divine realm. Such historical reconstructions of the ways in which Psalms may have been used in Temple times are, of course, speculative.<sup>1</sup> The Book of Leviticus which meticulously describes the sacrificial ritual never offers any liturgical directions, never describes any words to be recited in approaching the altar and the Psalms themselves do not describe their use in the Temple. But I think these analyses can be helpful in our understanding of our own reaction to Psalms: what frequently happens to us through the recitation of Psalms is that we hear the verses coming toward us, moving from the pages of the book, recited by us but heard in our inner ear. This movement seems to grant us a sense of the presence of something beyond ourselves, makes us feel that we are hearing a voice which speaks across time--a voice which comes toward us from eternity. It is as close as we will get in liturgy to hearing the voice of God. This is true even of those Psalms that contain no reference to God's speech--in reciting a Psalm we hear more than our own speaking.<sup>2</sup>

It is this function of psalmic poetry that may have led the Biblical authors to go one step further--to actually incorporate God's speaking into the body of the poem. Placing words in the mouth of God is such an unexpected technique that frequently translators and commentators have failed to notice how easily the Psalmist has slipped into this voice. Indeed, sometimes sentences obviously uttered by God are translated as if they are the words of the Psalmist and the dramatic power of the Psalm is lost. Ancient Hebrew texts did not contain any punctuation marks, therefore the quotation marks in translation are always an interpretive addition. Yet there is no doubt that many Psalms contain direct quotation of Divine speech and when we pay

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1 Twentieth century literary studies of Psalms have particularly emphasized this point, most notably Gunkel (*The Psalms: A Form-Critical Analysis*, Fortress Press) who theorized that there was an actual enthronement ceremony. The difficulty is that reconstruction of such a ceremony is purely an imaginative act on the part of the contemporary scholar. A softer version of this position was developed by Herb Levine who argues that there need not have been an actual ceremony but that the ritual and liturgy inspired the imagination of the worshipper. See his, *Sing unto God a New Song* (Indiana: 1995).

2 Ibid.

attention to who the speaker is, we recover the literary power of those Psalms. Such moments are ones in which words have the power to evoke God's presence.

Of course, frequently a particular Psalm speaks not with a single voice, but we can detect multiple voices. Sometimes we experience a leader calling and a chorus responding--the two voices creating a rhythmic antiphonal dialogue. At other times quite a different drama plays itself out: we may hear the Psalmist speaking personally, and then another voice (perhaps a priest or a Levitical chorus) responds, as if in answer to the plea of the pious. At times we may feel that the multiple voices expressed in a Psalm represent the multiple voices we hear inside our own hearts. Our own subjective arguments become contending voices in the Psalm. It is this play of voices that allows the Psalmist to enunciate yet another voice: to allow us to hear the voice of God affirming that our prayers are heard.

Perhaps it was the setting for at least some Psalms which encouraged this literary device: greeted with songs sung by the choir, the devotee entering the Temple precincts felt a closeness to God available nowhere else. He or she may have made this pilgrimage to give thanks, pray for help, atone for some act whose guilt was especially pressing, or come to the Temple to hear God's instruction. That heightened expectation allowed for a poetic speaking of God responding to the devotee. The Temple, after all, was supposed to guarantee the presence of God. So, if the Psalms were indeed sung by the Levites or a Temple choir, then we could well imagine that the literary device of the quotation of God took on an almost personified expression in the setting of the Temple, evoking the very presence of God in response to the devotee's prayers. I rather think that it was not the Temple itself which was the setting for these words--the ritual itself contained enough power that it needed no additional comment, but rather it was the looking toward the Temple, the expectation of what would occur there, that aroused the imaginative power of these Psalmists. Thus, these may be pilgrim's poems, composed and recited on the journey to the Temple. The intense expectation may have given rise to the need to hear God's voice directly, to anticipate meeting God in the Temple.

But we need not enter into the historical speculation to appreciate the literary innovation of these Psalms. In allowing us to hear God's response to our prayers, the Psalmist takes us to a realm normally foreclosed to us. At times of prayer, it is a world we wish and hope for, and these Psalms take an imaginative leap we all secretly desire. It should be added that having moved to the realm of imagination in describing God's own speaking, it is not surprising that some of these Psalms are filled with fantasy and illusion, or that the scene that is set by the poem is entirely one of fantasy.

In this article, I will illustrate these points through a Psalm in which the speech of God becomes a critical element in the development of the poem.

## Psalm 91

- 1       Whoever dwells in the secret places of the One on High  
lodges in the shadow of the Almighty.
- 2       I would say to *Adonai*, the One Who Is, "My refuge, my tower,  
my God." I would trust Him.
- 3       For He will save you from the fowler's trap,  
from the destructive plague;
- 4       With His pinions He will cover you;  
under His wings you will find refuge.  
His truthfulness is an encircling shield.
- 5       You will not fear the terror of the night,  
or the arrow that flies by day,
- 6       Nor the plague that stalks in the darkness,  
or the scourge that ravages at noon.
- 7       A thousand may fall at your left side,  
ten thousand at your right,  
but it shall not reach you.
- 8       For you will peer with your own eyes,  
and see the recompense of the wicked.
- 9       "For You, *Adonai*, the One Who Is, are my protection."  
  
You have made your refuge the One on High--
- 10      no harm will befall you,  
no disease touch your tent.
- 11      For He will order His angels for you,  
that they guard you wherever you go.
- 12      They will carry you in their hands  
lest you hurt your foot on a stone.
- 13      You will tread on cubs and vipers;  
you will trample lions and asps.
- 14      "Because he desired Me, I will rescue him;  
I will raise him up, for he knows My name.

- 15        When he calls on Me, I will answer him;  
             I will be with him in distress;  
             I will strengthen him, honor him;
- 16        I will sate him with a full life,  
             and show him My salvation."<sup>3</sup>

This is a Psalm filled with a variety of voices. In the very first three sentences of this Psalm we hear three distinct speakers and the intertwining of these voices prepares us for the emergence of yet another voice--the voice of God--at the end of the Psalm.

Who speaks the very first sentence?

Whoever dwells in the secret places of the One on High  
lodges in the shadow of the Almighty.

This opening line is an almost anonymous heading appropriate to all that follows, as if the poem had a title. The words may be those of an adage, a reassuring statement of faith, a prayer, a quotation. We can, perhaps, hear it as the opening statement of the priest as the pilgrim enters the Temple, or a sign over the entranceway remarking on the life of faith. Perhaps it is the musing of the poet, thinking about the reasons to remain faithful. It may be the voice of a chorus or speaker instructing the devotee in the life of the Godly, followed by the disciple then announcing his acquiescence in the second sentence. Or perhaps, were there punctuation marks in Biblical times, the sentence might have been followed by three dots. It is the anonymous voice of faith on which the rest of the Psalm is a meditation and response.

There is an elusiveness to this opening thought, with its mention of the secret places, and its suggestive but difficult reference to dwelling on high--humans can sleep in heaven only metaphorically, after all. This first sentence uses neither the personal nor the generic name of God, instead we meet a distant and almost anonymous Almighty (Hebrew--*Shaddai*). This lack of designation matches the allusion to the "secret places," and is picked up further with the thought that we are in the "shadow"--shadows are only hints of real figures.

The second verse is clearly distinguished from the voice of the first. The insertion of the personal 'I' changes the effect of the statement even if it is a repetition of the ideas of the opening of the Psalm.

I would say to *Adonai*, the One Who is, "My refuge, my tower,  
my God." I would trust Him.

This is a first person statement of faith recited by the pilgrim herself. This first person litany is a corroboration of public statements of faith in the inner life of the devotee. I am to be counted

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3        Or, "and display him in my victory march," meaning allow him to march with me in victory.

among the faithful, announces the pilgrim. Thus, the first and second verses, the two voices, validate each other.

Interestingly, in the mouth of the devotee, that which had been secret is now described as a fort, a protected tower, a visibly secured place, and God is referred to with both the personal and generic name of divinity. The two images of protection, public and secret, will be combined in the metaphor that follows, in which God's protection is depicted as a bird guarding its young. The devotee is nestled, hidden, in God's wings, and is carried through the sky, on high, soaring over whatever dangers life presents.

For He will save you from the fowler's trap,  
from the destructive plague;

This metaphor is spoken by yet another commentator beside the initial speakers. The author of verses three to eight addresses the pilgrim directly. This is not an anonymous quotation or generalized remark by some courtly third person, but rather a direct response to the pilgrim--addressed forthrightly in the second person: "you." We might imagine it as the voice of the priest or elder, the instructor in the life of faith. It may be the same speaker who opened the Psalm in anonymous third person voice now addressing the pilgrim directly. What is different is that there is a conversation--the pilgrim and the "elder" are addressing each other directly. The "I" of the Psalmist has brought the direct response of the leader, engaging him in conversation.

(It is possible to see the poem in more imaginative terms: we may find both voices to be that of the poet and perhaps what is taking place here is an internal dialogue in which the author unifies his soul through the articulation of diverse voices--the first touching on his fears, the second sounding words of reassurance.)

The duality of voice is echoed in verse nine, when once again we hear the devotee speaking personally in response to the reassuring words which have punctuated the intervening verses:

For You, *Adonai*, the One Who Is, are my protection.

Again the leader returns to second person speech, addressing the pilgrim directly:

You have made your refuge the One on high--  
no harm will befall you...

The second blessing, verses ten to thirteen, repeats the assurances offered in the first, stating them in only slightly different manner. The first blessing, verses three to eight, talks of God carrying the penitent in his arms, while in the second an angelic courier safeguards the devotee. In the first part, it is the human who is frequently the enemy, hunting other humans like an animal; in the second it is the animal world that is the enemy. In the beginning, the Psalmist is at home, in his tent, which has now become a fortress; in the second part, the pilgrim is on the road, protected in his travels. In both sections, the images of danger are quite similar--protection from plague and attack. Thus the second half of the poem is an echo of the first, though there is a

lessening of both the care and the threat. The two parts, for all their differences, are elaborations of similar themes.

These two stanzas are separated, as we have said, by the prayer of the faithful, verse nine. The use of this particular device to divide the two halves is critical--the multiple voices introduced at the beginning of the Psalm, reemphasized by the divide in the middle, will prepare us for the entrance of the third voice, that of God, who, from verse fourteen to the end, responds to the prayer of the pious.

But this description misses an important point--the way fantasy and imagination have overtaken us. In the first part of the poem, God is described as a bird, carrying the poet by her pinions, nestling the Psalmist in her wings. In the second description, the poet herself, has become birdlike, skipping over viper's nests, seemingly flying above all the traps of the earth. The power of faith and belief has allowed the devotee to enter into a world of imagination and fantasy, of transformed reality. We are literally flying high. As in many a good fantasy, the dangers are drawn concretely and graphically: the hunter's trap, the viper's nest. It will be amidst this fantastic world that God's speech will unfold.

The last line of the first speech, verse eight, alludes to a final, just, redemptive moment:

For you will peer with your own eyes,  
and see the recompense of the wicked.

There will be a time when justice will be meted out--that is as assured as your current protection from harm. Now at the end, God enunciates these themes of care and final victory.

The last three verses, fourteen to sixteen, consist of this direct response of God. The promise of the priest or of the chorus that the faithful will be protected, which has been the substance of the two speeches, now receives its confirmation in the voice of God. Verses fourteen and fifteen and sixteen are filled with verbs of assurance, phrased in the first person: "I will save him," "I will raise him up," "I will answer him," "I will strengthen him," "I will honor him," "I will sate him," "I will show him." In Hebrew, each of these phrases are contracted into one word; the effect is to sum up what had been promised and give a Divine imprimatur to the assurance of protection. More, the verbs build to a crescendo, as if God were almost shouting the reassurance. What can be more comforting than the very voice of God, vouchsafing the promise of safety and security?

Because he desired Me, I will rescue him;  
I will raise him up, for he knows My name.

When he calls on Me, I will answer him;  
I will be with him in distress;  
I will strengthen him, honor him;

There is an absolute validation of God's ultimate care and safekeeping of the devotee. Equally important, there is an affirmation by God that prayer will be answered. The Divine pledge serves as validation of the promises offered earlier in the poem. The verbs assuring protection and safe keeping, of being raised up and strengthened, are appropriate to the images elaborated in the earlier stanzas which remarked on the danger roundabout.

But something new happens as God's speech and is enunciated in the culmination, the final verse, verse sixteen.

I will sate him with a full life,  
and show him My salvation.

Earlier, God's reward was couched in terms of shielding the righteous from enemies: the metaphors were of war, battle and victory, the expressed hope was of defeat of evil, but now when God climaxes this Divine speech, God promises something which had not been mentioned or even alluded to earlier: the fullness of days--time. It is time that is the ultimate reward. The images of protection that were voiced earlier were salvation from the negative--saving from harm. Now God is able to assure the positive--length of days, peacefulness and bounty. This satiety, this blessing, is vouched for by the Divine voice. It is the fullness of time that will afford satisfaction. Salvation is the moment in existence after the defeat of evil. This time, which is unknown to us, is truly the secret of the One on high.

Had the poem only contained the reassurance of the priestly voice it would have been merely a pious recitation of received beliefs--the reader would have been left with the awareness of danger and the promise of divine protection, but it would have had the air of stock piety. By having God speak these words of assurance, a simple statement of faith has been granted a grandeur it would not otherwise have had.<sup>4</sup> The poem gains its power through the progression of a fourfold speaking capped by God's own hopeful words. And the voice of God takes us to a place only God can reassure us about--the future. This is an ultimate imaginative act on the part of the devotee. For the future has no reality--it only exists as an act of consciousness. In imagining that future, the Psalmist offers the ultimate reassurance of prayer--the future contains hope, blessing will come.

There are many Psalms that express doubt. There are many Psalms in which there is a plea for help. The implications of all these Psalms is that we voice our innermost need, hoping to be heard, wishing for a response. In Psalms in which we can actually hear God speak, we cross over beyond a world of hope to the actualization of imagination--we move beyond the silence which normally greets us in prayer. Ultimately, this may be the function of all Psalms: through

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4        There is an alternative reading of verse 1, in which the poet begins by remarking on God's hiddenness:

O You who sit in the hidden places, O Most High,  
The Almighty who dwells in the shadows.

In this reading, the poem, of course, ends with having made God manifest through his voice. I am grateful to Nili Gold for having pointed out this possible reading.



speaking, through voicing our innermost reality of hope and fear, longing and belief, a greater reality opens up to us and our own pain is put in perspective. Prayer allows us to grasp that which can never be seen, only sometimes imagined, imagined through the power of words, the beyond which summons us in time. The words allow us an act of imagination, perhaps otherwise foreclosed to us, hearing the "yes" of response.

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# Yosheiv b'seiter elyon

Psalm 91:1-11

After Abba Weisgal

*pp*

1. Yo - sheiv b'-sei-ter el - yon, b' - tseil shad - dai yit - lo -

5 nan. 2. O - mar la-do-nai makh - si um'-tsu-da-ti, e-lo - hai ev -

10 tah bo. 3. Ki hu ya - tsil - kha mi - pah ya -

14 kush, mi - de - ver hav - vot. 4. B' - ev - ra - to ya - sekh lakh v' - ta-khat k' - na -

17 fav teh-seh, tsi - nah v' - so - hei rah a - mi - to. 5. Lo ti - ra mi - pa - had lai -

20 lah, mei - heits ya - uf yo - mam. 6. Mi - de - ver ba - o - fel ya - ha -

23 lokh, mi - ke - tev ya - shud tso - ho - ra yim. 7. Yip - pol mi - tsid - kha

26 e lef, ur' - va - vah mi - mi - ne kha.

29 8. Rak b' - ei - ne - kha tab - bit, v' - shi - lu - mat r' - sha - im tir - eh

32 *f* 9. Ki at-tah\_\_\_ a-do - nai, el-yon sam-ta-m'-o-ne<sup>3</sup>\_\_\_ kha. 10. Lo t'-u-neh\_\_\_ ci-le\_\_\_

36 kha ra - ah v' - ne - ga lo yik-rav b'-o-ho - le - kha. 11. Ki mal-a-khav y'-tsa-veh\_\_\_

40 lakh, lish - mor - kha b' - khol\_\_\_ d' - ra - khe<sup>rit.</sup>\_\_\_ kha.

## A Paragon among *Z'mirot*.. Psalm 133

### *Gleaned from many sources*<sup>1</sup>

The challenge of transcribing melodies long associated in an informal way with Sabbath Table Songs (*z'mirot*) involves some difficulty. This fact becomes apparent once we realize that the songs have come down from parents to children by word of mouth--often accompanied by a good deal of hilarious distortion that is acceptable only in the confines of family and friends--and therefore defies our attempts to harness them to the accepted canons of staff notation.

They have been intended, after all, to be sung by a merry group that has just partaken of a meal made deliberately more sumptuous than on any other day (or night) during the week. Accordingly, it should come as no surprise that some of the lyrics and their comical melodic treatment present problems for the chronicler. To be honest, some of the passages never rise above the level of a "drinking chorus."

Picture the scene, with the head of household leading each verse, the children gleefully taking advantage of the opportunity to "get away" with plays on words-and-tune that would be considered scandalous in other circumstances such as a Religious School assembly--and invited guests, caught in the middle--haplessly trying to keep their polite heads above water in the turmoil. To further stir the pot, the leader--having overdone the mitzvah of imbibing Kiddush wine--might be improving the songs with coloratura passages of his own devising, and the younger generation, not to be outdone at their own game, would have inevitably improvised Pop riffs on every one of their elder's impromptu themes. All the above would have had a tendency to become permanent features of every *z'mirah*. Rose L. Henriques summarizes:

Some members of the family might perhaps pride themselves on their ability to 'sing seconds,' and all sorts of simple yet effective harmonies would be added at convenient corners of the melody. Sometimes the harmonies were so successful as to warrant a slight change in the melody itself in order to bring out the *pièce de resistance* to more advantage. A chance visitor, having been given the honor of conducting post-prandial benedictions, might sing his own family tunes. Some of these, finding favor in the ear of his host, might then be absorbed into the latter's repertoire (and not always accurately).

Thus it is no mystery that our received *z'mirot* tunes vary so widely from locale to locale and from family to family. Many of them consist of several disjointed phrases that are musically uneven and even unrelated. These are often suspended in a matrix of cantorially-or-folk-inspired recitative. This suffices for anyone reared in the particular tradition to manage in singing its version of the *z'mirot* from childhood through adulthood and to pass on the tradition--warts and

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<sup>1</sup> The excerpted and adapted sources in alphabetical order by author are: *The Psalms*, Abraham Cohen, ed. (London, 1958); Rose L. Henriques, "The Music of the Zemiroth," *Mediaeval Hebrew Minstrelsy* (London, 1926); Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, *Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies*, vol. IX, "The Folk Song of the East European Jews" (Leipzig, 1932); Kaufman Kohler, *Jewish Theology* (New York, 1918); Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption* (1921, tr. William W. Hallow, New York, 1971); Rabbi Mortimer J. Rubin, version of "Sheves akhim /l'khayim brieder" sung at his family gatherings, Washington, DC, in the 1960s.

all--to one's children and grandchildren. Today, increasing unfamiliarity with the folkways of preceding generations has necessitated the formulation and publication of *z'mirot* anthologies whose "standardized" versions will preserve the tunes, albeit at the cost of losing whatever 'local color' may have accrued to them over the years of family usage. Luckily, what still shines through is the warmth of family ties felt in traditional Jewish homes, that is so strikingly evident in these quasi-liturgical table hymns.

Philosopher Franz Rosenzweig believed the key to Judaism's eternal life lay in its liturgy, and what counted in Jewish worship was not the common word, but the common gesture: what people did together as an extended family. When a congregation sings together--of its own volition and not because it's been instructed to do so--it resembles a large family singing *z'mirot*. Aside from their extremely singable melodies and the opening they give all participants to fool around by deliberately mispronouncing the frequently Aramaic lyrics, *z'mirot*-singing sessions tended to smooth out any ideological differences between members of the family.

For the half-hour that brothers and sisters sang together, they forgot whether they supported the Democratic or Republican candidate in the upcoming election, or whether the Giants had fielded a better team than the Dodgers or if the Yankees could beat both of them on any given day of the week. The *z'mirot* part of the Shabbat meal brought to mind Psalm 133: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is when siblings can sit down together--in peace." Everyone knew the Hebrew--*Hineih mah tov u-mah na'im shevet ahim gam yahad*--and everyone had their own favorite tune for those words. There was the Russian one from Hebrew school that sounded like "The Volga Boatman," the Hasidic dance that made you want to keep time by pounding the table, the Israeli-style Hora that got you up and dancing even on a full stomach, and the American Revivalist hymn whose final syllables kept disappearing one-by-one with each repetition.

Some commentators held that this beautiful short poem on the theme of brotherly relationship was written to support the procurator Nehemiah's endeavor to increase the sparse population of Jerusalem after the return of Judean exiles from Babylon in the late-5th century B.C.E. (Nehemiah 11:1f). Bible scholar Kaufman Kohler read the Psalm as a didactic metaphor:

Brethren are to dwell together as brethren should do. A strong and united metropolis, at once the religious and political center of the country, will concentrate and invigorate the whole nation, and spread blessing through the body of which it is the head.

# *Hineih mah tov* *For Jack Merkin*

Psalm 133

Jerome B. Kopmar  
*Five Psalms, 2011*

*Molto andante, espressivo*

*dolciss. REFRAIN mp*

*(Flute) freely* *a tempo* Hi - neih mah

As an option flute plays treble, and harp the bass

*mp* *a tempo* *(Harp)*

*sempre legato*

3 tov u - mah na im she -

5 vet a - him gam ya had hi -

*mp* *f* *mf*

7

neih mah tov u-mah na im she -

9

*dim.*

1.

vet a - him gam ya - had Hi - neih mah

⊕ Last time to Coda

11

2.

***f*** *molto espress.* 2 verses, Refrain after each

had 1. Ka - she men ha - tov al ha - 2. K' tal her

*colla voce*

13 *mp*

rosh mon she - yo - reid al ha - za - tsi -

yo - reid al ha - r' - rei tsi -

15 *mf*

kan yon z' - kan a - ha ron, shey - yo -

ki sham tsi vah a - do

17

reid al pi mi - do tav

nai hay yim ad ha o



**D.S. al Coda**

19

lam \_\_\_\_\_ Hi - neih mah  
Hi - neih mah

20 **Coda**

gam ya - had *ppp*

*ppp*

# ***A LITERARY GLIMPSE***

## **The Psalm-Sayer**

***By Sholem Asch***

This excerpt from *Der Tehillim Yid* (Warsaw: Culture League, 1935) tells how a simple-minded, Psalm-quoting Jew in a 19th-century Polish *shtetl* is accepted by his community's common folk as their wonder-working Tzaddik and savior. [Translated by JAL]

He was named Yekhiel--God lives--for good reason: the God of goodness and forgiveness lived in his heart. Not the God of complicated Kabbalism with its Spheres and Emanations, nor the God of involved disputation with its legalistic casuistry. On the other hand, neither did he any longer look upon God as a close acquaintance; everything he had learned led him to fear an eternal Creator for whom no words could do justice. "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God," he recalled. Even the concept of infinity did not explain God--so much as our own inadequacy when contemplating The Holy One.

Yekhiel's trepidation evoked within him great awe at what God had wrought in this world of ours. It was a feeling of overwhelming gratitude mixed with one of tremendous fear, for he now realized that the myriad details of a sunlit landscape comprised a Law which far transcended the halakhically prescribed minutiae that controlled his life. When considering the cloud-streaked heavens above and the stream-laced fields below, he was not in any way concerned about them proving an obstacle to the path of Torah study. Instead, their exquisitely varied shapes and never-repeating configurations--plus the Supreme One who had made them--are what drew his interest and admiration.

Had not the Bible given primacy of place to the world's Creation? In Yekhiel's mind this connected it with the World of Spirit above, as is written: "The holy spirit only descends in response to a call from below." Even the breath of animals was related to the mechanism that sustains all of life, without which nothing could exist. He recalled having once read that dumb beasts are also to be highly regarded, for they too were created by God, Whose Presence will envelop only those who love all creatures.

And yet at the pinnacle of Creation stood humans. They alone were made in God's image. More than any other living things, they reflected divine handiwork, the epitome of earthly existence to which all other creatures deferred. The most insignificant human being was a paragon: the world brought to perfection. It is written that God created and destroyed many previous worlds--because they were not inhabited by humans. Therefore, Yekhiel blessed God every time he passed a home, for having "created the abode where humans dwell."

For him, serving people meant serving God. When done out of love for others, no task was too lowly for Yekhiel to perform.

But his greatest love--the one that brought him most happiness--he reserved for those solitary moments when he clung to God like a child to its mother, merging with Him like a teardrop in the ocean. What brought him to this exalted state was prayer--specifically, reciting

Psalms--which asked for nothing more than to be in God's presence. This overwhelming desire, though as painful as any other conceivable desire, more than anything else.

\* \* \* \*

If the intricate reasoning of *Gemara* learning was not Yekhiel's strong point, then *tehillim* *zog'n*--Psalm saying--would suffice for bringing him closer to God. If brilliance of mind could not unite him with the Divine, then intensity of religious fervor would be his conduit to the mystical Palace on High. He would live the righteous life of a Tzaddik (knowing he could never legitimately aspire to that official status), and thereby perhaps earn the right to intercede with the *Ribono shel olam* on behalf of downtrodden fellow-Jews.

How could that be accomplished? By relinquishing all claims to earthly possessions. By amassing no wealth or taking pleasure in any good fortune that happened to come his way. He resolved to devote his life to God. He would personify the Psalmist's words: "All my bones shall say, *Adonai*, Who is like You?" His poverty would proclaim his lack of material aspirations. His ragged garb might mark him as a beggar, but what of it? That was how Hasidism's founders lived; surviving on the washing their wives took in, while they gave shelter in their meager huts to those who had less, cleansing the filthy bare feet of the destitute and de-lousing the infested heads of their children.

He listened intently to tales of these saintly miracle workers, internalizing the minutiae of their fabled careers and analyzing their every marvelous deed as closely as a sage studied the Talmud. He determined to pattern himself after the teaching of the Rabbi of Sassow: "Learn three things from a common thief. Fear dominates his life. He plies his trade unnoticed, while others sleep. What he acquires at great personal peril, he willingly gives away to others."

\* \* \* \*

When Yekhiel had been married for five years, fate interceded on his behalf. Late one Friday afternoon in the dead of winter, a pair of Polish noblemen rode up to the family's inn, hitched their horses outside and without removing their muddy boots, sat themselves down at the family's Sabbath table. They threatened his mother in law with a hunting knife and ordered her to bring them the wine and fish at once.

Yekhiel and his father in law had meanwhile been standing in a dark corner, silently reciting the *Amidah* of *Ma'ariv*, which they had not interrupted despite the ruckus. Now his father in law walked over and politely invited the strangers to another room where they could eat and drink at their leisure. The intruders would have none of it, they insisted upon pre-empting the family's set table with its white cloth, silver goblets and candlesticks.

That brazen behavior would have been bad enough, but the younger of the two Poles now took notice of Reyzl, the couple's daughter, with her pretty face and slender figure. He stared at her full breasts so lustfully that her father took her by the elbow and ushered her into a bedroom, whispering for her to lock the door from the inside. The fellow of course noticed this, and made for the locked door. When her father attempted to block his path, he was knocked to the floor for his troubles.

All eyes were now on Yekhiel, who remained in the corner murmuring the hymn *Eishet hayil* ("A Woman of valor who can find?"), seemingly sheltered in his own meditative cocoon. He had been reluctant to disturb the sanctity of his self-imposed Sabbath isolation while only fish and wine were involved. Suddenly, the moment of truth had arrived. The uninvited guests had rendered his father-in-law helpless and were about to break into the bedroom with the intent of violating his beautiful and innocent wife. It would be a religious desecration for either of the ruffians even to share an enclosed space alone with her!

The younger of the two was about to burst open the door behind which Reyzl stood shuddering with fright, when Yekhiel took the only kind of action he knew. With what weapon would a Tzaddik fight such evil? With the help of Almighty God Who, according to the Book of Psalms, stands ready to confound His people's enemies--if they but call upon Him in time of peril. Yekhiel raised his hands to heaven and cried out pitifully:

***Save me O God, for I sink in deep waters where there is no standing!***

When his in-laws heard this, they repeated after Yekhiel in the same pleading tone:

***Save me O God, for I sink in deep waters where there is no standing!...***

The older roughneck guessed that this pale-faced fellow wearing a silk caftan and fur cap was these people's rabbi and the slim-waisted young woman was his wife. "Shut your mouth, you Jewish scum," he commanded, "or I'll shut it permanently with a bullet!" He aimed his rifle at Yekhiel, who ignored it and resumed his fervent entreaty:

***O deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked;  
from out of the cruel and sinful one's clutches!***

The rifleman, enraged, shot at Yekhiel. But a miracle occurred--God evidently directed the bullet and the man--who had never before missed--did so this time. The round merely ruffled the fur of Yekhiel's cap and extinguished a candle fastened to the wall.

The shooter was now beside himself. Furiously, he re-aimed--as Reyzl's parents shrieked in terror while Yekhiel stared defiantly at the gunman and intoned loudly:

***I do not fear the wicked, for You are with me!***

Whereupon, the rifle slipped completely from the would-be killer's hands.

Everyone froze, and in that momentary pause Yekhiel--his whole being aflame like an avenging angel and dancing like a string-held puppet--roared:

***God is on His way to help us, even now  
His messengers are about to save us!***

They all stared at him. His in-laws' eyes betrayed their confusion. They asked in disbelief: "How can you know this?" With trepidation they hissed: "Who can be coming in the dark rescue us?"

Confused, and fearful that their scandalous behavior was on the verge of being discovered, the attackers glanced at each other uncertainly. But the younger of the two, who had

wanted to ram the bedroom door with us rifle-butt, now charged it and forced the barrier open. He stumbled in, blinded by his lust for the slender young Jewess. All he found was an open window through which she had escaped moments before. The two hooligans fled, only to be apprehended by the local Count who had heard of their nefarious misdeeds. He had them thoroughly whipped and sent packing the next morning.

\*       \*       \*       \*

From that day on, the town's *Hevra tehillim* (Psalm Fellowship) took Yekhiel as their own wonder-working Tzaddik. Its constituents--the wagon drivers, tailors, butchers and fishmongers--began to gather in his shop every Sabbath late in the afternoon. For the following few hours, as Shabbat waned, they met to prolong its departure late into the night.

These humble God-fearing Jews all shared an inchoate yearning for something higher in their bleak existence. It was not bound by the selfish desire for an easier livelihood or better health for themselves and their ever-growing families. Instead, it had to do with improving the lot of all Israel, while glorifying the Name of God. They could not achieve it through great knowledge--they had no learning to speak of. But they were able to follow their new-found spiritual guide, who they hoped would show them the path of righteousness.

When they first began to gather at Yekhiel's shop they dared not sit at his table, but remained standing around the room's perimeters, observing how he ritually washed his hands before supping, how he blessed the bread and cut the braided loaf--just like a priest in the ancient Temple. They brought with them the leftovers from their Sabbath meals--a slice of khallah, a piece of fish--which they placed on his table as they pulled chairs around it.

Yekhiel could not openly reject this unsought beatification. Yet, how could he dare to play the Tzaddik for these simple folk? He never pretended to be anything other than what he was: one of them. Yet their awareness of that fact brought him even closer to them. It united the Psalm Fellowship into a true family of believers. For that was his gift to them: the certainty that God was nearby. No longer did they long for the Holy One every Sabbath at sunset; they now felt His Presence among them. They lengthened the Day of Rest's farewell with exquisitely drawn-out Psalm tunes, not sad ones as was the custom at Hasidic courts. Instead they chose brighter melodies borrowed from Polish country dances heard in surrounding villages by travelling peddlers and tradesmen who regularly came to town.

The Saturday Evening Psalm Fellowship was bound together by rejoicing. That, plus the miraculous power of their leader and the redemptive words of the Psalms themselves, gave them comfort through the six workdays between one Shabbat and another, be they filled with stitching peasant garments or shaping boots for the nobility. They were no longer afraid to face the dreary weekday routine; was it not written in the Psalms:

*Yea, though I walk through the shadow of the valley of death;  
I will fear no evil, for You are with me...*

# Shuvi nafshi

Psalm 116:7-11

Traditional, transcribed by  
Max Wohlberg, JTS 1955

*Pleadingly*

Shu vi naf-shi lim nu hai-khi ki a-do - nai ga-mal a-lai

khi. Ki hi-lats-ta naf-shi mim ma-vet, et ei - ni

min dim ah, et rag-li mid - de - hi, et rag li - mid - de - hi, et hal-

*Brightly*

leikh lif-nei a-do - nai b' - ar - tsot ha - hay - yim. 1. He-e -

man - ti ki a - dab-beir a - ni, a - ni a - ni ti m' - od zi, he - e - man - ti ki a -

mar - ti, ani a - mar - ti, a - ni a - mar ti v' - hof - zi, ani a - mar - ti, ani a -

bom bom bom bom bom bom bom bom bom bom

dab - beir a - ni a - ni a - ni ti m' - od zi 2. Ani-a a -

mar - ti, a - ni a - mar ti v' - hof - zi

bom bom bom bom bom

ni a - mar - ti v' - hof - zi kol ha a - dam ko - zeiv!

Melody  
Harmony

## MAIL BOX

### Subject: The Way We Were

January 25, 2013

*I found the following two excerpts in Elkin Nathan Adler's book, **Jews in Many Lands** (Jewish Publication Society, 1905). The text, including the musical example given below, is now accessible on the Internet, and I got the impression that the author did not think too highly of this music. Not being sure exactly why, I've sent both text and music to the Journal, hoping that in an historical context they may prove to be of some significance to readers more knowledgeable than myself.*

*Helen Winkler  
Toronto*

### A Chassidish Dance

I never saw a Jew in Jerusalem without his hat on but once, and it happened thus. On Simchath Torah eve, I paid a visit to the famous Rabbi Judah Leib Diskin. As I entered, I found the Rabbi sitting in an armchair, gazing contemplatively into space. Some of the young men of the Yeshibah were dancing around the room in rollicking fun, and one of them, with true Oriental hospitality, thought he would honor and gratify me by exchanging his head-covering for mine. True, mine was a somewhat battered straw-hat and his a crown of fur, but all the same I felt rueful and alarmed when he crowned me, and I am afraid my greetings lost in dignity and impressiveness. In fact, I felt somewhat like Gulliver among the Brobdingnagians, when the monkeys patronized him. The style of rejoicing was none the less of great interest. The tune to which they danced, and which in other Chassidish Chevras was evidently the favorite, made a deep impression at the time. A musical friend, the Rev. Francis Cohen, has been good enough to transcribe my now half-faded recollections of the Chassidish howl. He says that the effect (of the version I sang for him) is not very classical, but "rather like a Chassid's nightmare after a heavy supper." Mr. Cohen's transcription follows:



I will not be answerable for the consequences if any fair friend attempts to articulate the notes, vocally or instrumentally. The tune is, I daresay, to be heard in Chassidish communities a thousand miles north of Jerusalem, but there it was evidently the favorite of—well—‘melodies.’

Of course, one of the most striking peculiarities of the Holy City is the total absence of opportunities for amusement, as a young English resident pathetically complained to me. Perhaps with the assistance of M. Nissim Behar's talented wife, an occasional concert in her drawing-room will in the future be allowed to relieve the gloom, and it would not be surprising if the next

English traveler who follows my good example and pays the Jerusalemites a visit has his ears greeted by the familiar strains of Sullivan's incidental music to "Macbeth."

### **The Rejoicing of the Law**

If the tune of the Chassidim is funny, the manner in which they make the Hakafoth, or circuits of the synagogue, during the Rejoicing of the Law, is funnier still. Each bearer of a scroll is surrounded by three or four men who dance slowly, but with evident gusto and superabundant gesticulation, *die Rolle treu, mit lacherlichem Ernst* ("the devotional role--played with laughable solemnity"). It was comical and shocking to see venerable graybeards pirouetting on their toes like some European fairy of the pantomime, but it was highly appreciated, and I had to simulate satisfaction for fear of being rebuked, as Michal was when she objected to King David's "dancing with all his might."

A very good illustration of the esteem in which this religious dancing is held is furnished by a story related of the Kabbalist Isaac Luria, in the Rodelheim edition of the *Maase* [Yiddish: *maiseh* or story] *Buch* published in 1753, and quoted by Dr. Max Grünbaum in his *Jüdischdeutsche Chrestomathie* (Jewish-German Anthology). It is related that one Sabbath morning R. Isaac told his disciples that he would show them something very extraordinary if they promised not to laugh, and he warned them that whoever broke his promise would die within the year. They give the required assurances, and the wonder-worker conjures up, from among the spirits of the vast deep, seven ghosts, whom he calls up to the reading of the Law. Their prototypes in the flesh are no less personages than Aaron the high priest as Cohen, Moses his brother as Levite, and as ordinary Israelites, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The seventh and last to be called up is King David, and he comes forward jumping and dancing in honor of the Law. One hapless *talmid* involuntarily bursts out laughing, and of course, dies that selfsame year. But the Rabbi himself does not escape unscathed, and the very next story relates how he, too, dies soon after, by way of penalty for being too yielding to his pupils' idle curiosity, and too ready to prostitute to an unworthy love of ostentation--that talent which it was death to discover--and with which he was endowed for higher purposes.

*The son of Nathan Marcus Adler, Anglo-Jewry's fifth Chief Rabbi, Elkin Nathan Adler (1861-1946) harbored a disdainful attitude towards the Hasidic way of life, a prejudice that was shared by many of his co-religionists in England, Europe and America at the turn of the 20th century. His remembered dance melody bears resemblances to "Tunes in minor..." numbers 34, 38, 53, 62 and 107, in A. Z. Idelsohn's Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies Vol. X, 1932.*

*For more on this topic we refer readers to: Sholom Kalib, **The Musical Tradition of the Eastern European Synagogue** (Vol. I, Part 1, 2002:79-80); Akiva Zimmermann, "The Hasidic World's Attitude Toward Hazzanut," **Journal of Synagogue Music** Vol. 151; 34, 2009:151; Helen Winkler, "Hasidim and Mitnagdim Between the Wars in Northeast Poland," **Journal of Synagogue Music** Vol. 35, 2010:231. We thank Helen Winkler for this and previous contributions, the most recent being "From the Yizkor Book of Staszow, Poland" in our 2013 issue [JAL]*



## REVIEWS

**Richard Kaplan's CD--*The Hidden One (Hane'elam)*—  
*Jewish Mystical Songs*, 2009, [www.kaplanmusic.com](http://www.kaplanmusic.com)**

*Reviewed by Shoshana Brown*

When artists record vocal music, they hope that it will appeal to listeners reasonably educated in the artist's genre, even if the listener is unacquainted with the singer's previous work. There is no doubt in this reviewer's mind that Kaplan's high baritone voice, smooth and rich and full of feeling, will appeal to the uninitiated. But since his chosen genre here is "Jewish mystical songs," it might be appropriate to orient potential listeners towards what Kaplan calls the Divine Within, in order to help them fully appreciate the depth and subtlety of this collection.

Kaplan's first CD, *Tuning the Soul* (1999, with Michael Ziegler) was a mind-and ear-opening collection of Jewish sacred songs, chants and *niggunim* from around the globe—with a heavy emphasis on Middle Eastern and Hasidic melodies and modalities, and a lively ensemble of instrumentalists and background voices helping to create a sound alluringly distinct from your typical Western cantorial or folk-liturgical fare. His second CD, *Life of the Worlds* (released in 2003, and reviewed in these pages (volume 35, 2010), continued along this path in an ever-expanding manner, with a full background chorus and an even greater range of melodic sources and influences. It included an original, heart-breaking *kinah* (lament) that Mother Earth (Kaplan) sings in English over the *hurban* (the destruction) of our Planet to the tune of *Eikhah* (Lamentations) trope, turning the traditional Tishah B'Av song of mourning for the Temple into an elegy for the primordial *Gan Eden*. One also hears in this second CD the increasing influence of American jazz, especially in Kaplan's own keyboard accompaniment.

With *The Hidden One*, listeners familiar with Kaplan's previous recorded work feel the artist turning inward—and yet he continues to expand, exploring new worlds *within*. The whole album is in fact a *soul-journey*. For the most part, it is not music that *hazzanim* will use when singing prayer texts. But they might well adapt some of the gorgeous meditative *niggunim* for use at select interstices during the lengthy *Yamim nora'im* services. The simpler chants might effectively provide "breathing space" during *Yizkor*, or be taught on a congregational retreat to serve as "soul-lifters" for the group.

As ground-breaking as Kaplan has been in setting Jewish liturgical texts to music from around the world, he is nevertheless quintessentially American. One senses in him a strong kinship with John Coltrane—particularly with the latter's album "A Love Supreme." Indeed, although much can be said about the vast breadth of selections and styles on "The Hidden One" (including two chants set to the melody of a Mongolian folk song), the direction of both Kaplan's and Coltrane's soul-journeys is the same—toward the Supreme Source of Love.

That is why one needs a bit of orientation when listening to "The Hidden One." Without first reading the CD's accompanying 18-page booklet, for example, the listener can be put off or at best, confused. For a collection of "Jewish mystical songs," the album opens in a fairly straightforward manner with *LeShem Yikhud* ("For the Oneness"). The booklet explains that this number employs the language of Kabbalistic "intentions"; it is in essence a *kavvanah* for the entire album. Kaplan's booklet provides the English for a whole string of intentions, ending with:

Behold, we have come to sing in a pleasant voice the Song of Songs  
For the sake of the unification of the Holy One and the Indwelling Presence  
To unify The Name, *Yud Hei* with *Vav Hei*.

Although in fact Kaplan never sings any portion of *Shir ha-shirim* (the canonical "Song of Songs") on "The Hidden One," nevertheless the entire album is a love-song to the Divine—in particular to the Divine in-dwelling Presence—but also to the Divine Love that surrounds and fills all the space of the world. This gentle piece (just Kaplan with minimalist piano and violin accompaniment) sets the tone for the album, starting us on an inward journey with quietness, collectedness, and love, inviting us to breathe and to be thankful for the Presence that both fills and surrounds us.

We move on to a somewhat more confusing piece, *Ani nikhna* ("I Surrender"). Because of the esoteric nature of the mystical teachings/meditative practices on which the words of this song are based (the English and Hebrew words were written by Kaplan himself with the consultation of his friend and teacher Rabbi Miles Krassen), the casual listener may easily get the impression that the singer is an unabashed narcissist in love with himself:

*Ani nikhna l'nishmati, v'nishmati ponah eilekha*  
I surrender to my soul, and my soul communes with You

*Libi ohev et nishmati, v'nishmati ohevet ot'kha*  
My heart is in love with my soul, and my soul is in love with You.

It is obvious, when one sees these words written out, that the *You* is God, not the singer's own self...but what does it mean to be in love with one's own soul? In the CD's booklet, this selection is introduced as "a song to support the ongoing process of enthroning one's soul, and the concomitant diminution of the tyranny of the ego." So the song/meditation is meant precisely as a tool to *prevent* narcissism, and to elevate that part of our being that is most connected with God and with other souls. But without careful reading of the notes, this concept might not come across: the melody is taken from a "Moroccan chanting tune." To this reviewer, however (unlike Kaplan, I am not an ethno-musicologist) this hardly sounds like "Moroccan" music. Notwithstanding how faithfully Kaplan may have followed the contour of a Moroccan chant-melody, he has thoroughly "Kaplanized" it, making it more accessible to the Western ear. The result: a tender, caressing love song to the Soul and to God. Not your typical synagogue fare!

As our journey continues with *Zikhr'kha* ("Remembering You"), Kaplan moves outward from the soul to include the body in a devotional dance/chant. His notes state that this 2-line chant (Hebrew and English) is set to a "Turkish Jewish Sufi *zikr* (dance of remembrance)," and he gives directions for how to move the body as one chants it. It is hard to tell from Kaplan's

still-gentle, intimate rendition here how powerful this chant can be in a larger setting, but I have experienced it with an entire congregation in a retreat-setting. As more and more people do the movement in unison and with a strong percussion holding everyone together, this chant can induce a "group high," and indeed involve the whole cardio-vascular system in one's praise of God.

There is not room in an introductory review of this type to give a detailed response to each of Kaplan's eighteen selections on *The Hidden One*; but I do want to underline the ever-broadening arc of the soul's journey as we progress through this album. Not all of the melodies are Middle Eastern; Kaplan's fifth track presents us with his strong suite: the Hasidic meditative *niggun* (wordless melody). The CD's first Hasidic selection, it is a *niggun hakhanah*, a "melody of preparation," composed by Rabbi Shalom Dov Ber of Lubavitch (1860-1920). Although normally I would like to hear such a selection sung without any instrumentation (as would be the case in its *sitz im leben* or real-life context), Kaplan provides such a lovely, non-intrusive piano introduction and accompaniment, that it is a joy to hear. He labels this one a "melody for entering," and indeed, it feels that with it we have entered a new "palace" (to borrow from the mystic's terminology) on our journey, and this lilting, cheerful, yet yearning tune sets us up wonderfully for the piece that follows it.

Now that we have ventured into the soul-territory of Jewish Eastern Europe, it is appropriate (but brave!) of Kaplan to offer his own rendition of the famous *A Dudele*, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev's prayer/cry/meditation on theodicy. Everywhere I turn—*Du, Du, Du*. All the questions of why good things happen--why bad things happen--melt away in the realization of God's presence. Throughout the album the second-person address to God persists, and here is where Jewish meditative practice differs from the Buddhist. The Jewish spiritual paradigm is one of *ani/Atah; ich/Du; I/You*. Kaplan sings this well-loved Yiddish/Hebrew heart-outpouring in such a way as to make it immediate, fresh, and passionately felt. His choice of the *tsimbl* or *cimbalon* (hammered dulcimer) and the klezmer *barabam* or drum set as accompaniment, sets Kaplan apart in his loving effort to be authentic to the time, place, and people of this song's origin--and this may be the first recording to use such an appropriate--yet unexpected--setting.

This part of the journey includes several more Hasidic melodies (tracks 7, 8, and 10), including the one for *Sim Shalom* that borrows a melody by Joel Engel made famous by its use in the play *The Dybbuk*, and an exquisite (but hardly congregation-friendly) setting of *Y'did nefesh* attributed to the Baal Shem Tov. But the crown of the album, set at its center (track 9 of 18) is *Atah, Atah, Atah* ("You, You, You"). Arriving at this summit is like reaching the sticky center of a flower awaiting pollination. At the singer's touch it opens lushly, stretching out extravagantly-colored petals, layer upon layer, pouring forth scent. This flower has sprouted from the seed of a phrase attributed to Rabbi Alexander Ziskind (d. 1794) and found in Yitzhak Buxbaum's *Jewish Spiritual Practices* (1990). Apparently Rav Ziskind had the mystical custom of repeating the words *yotzri u-vori atah* as a mantra to his "Fashioner and Creator." Kaplan takes the mantra as his starting-point and cushions it within liturgical phrases from The Berditchever's *A Dudele*. He piles on (as he writes in his notes) "many key verses from other songs on this recording." The layers consist of Kaplan's solo voice, his piano accompaniment, a "chorus" of two female voices together with Kaplan (although they sound like many more); and we hear a montage of phrases in English, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Yiddish, layered one upon the other. Significantly, Kaplan

here employs the word *HaVaYaH* as a vocalization of God's most sacred name, *Yud-Hei-Vav-Hei*. In modern Hebrew, this word means "existence," and it feels that with this composition we are gazing into the well of all existence, its Source being the ultimate *You* from which we have all sprung, from which we draw our existence at each moment, and towards which we are all journeying, to merge with it once again. This is a flower that only Kaplan could cultivate, combining his mysticism, his deep feeling for Hasidic meditative *niggunim*, his fluid jazz piano technique, and his soul-kinship with John Coltrane. (Although Kaplan refrained from doing so, it would have seemed quite natural to include Coltrane's "A Love Supreme" as one more layer of petals into this musical flower!)

The remaining tracks on *The Hidden One* each have their varying charms: there is *S'u minkhah* ("The Offering"; another Kaplan composition), which shares some of the "layering" of "*Atah, Atah, Atah*." Although the "layering" here is more intimate in scale, with solo voice, piano and violin, it nevertheless impresses as a flower viewed through time-lapse photography. I am particularly partial to those selections which Kaplan sings unaccompanied ("The Besht's *Y'did Nefesh*"--A Sabbath Song attributed to Reb Aharon of Karlin--and "A Melody for Leaving the Body," taught to Kaplan by his musical and spiritual mentor, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi). Kaplan's pure voice is so full of tenderness and yearning for the *You* to whom he sings that no accompaniment is needed, and indeed, unaccompanied songs like these two seem richer for the absence of any extraneous ornamentation.

As our meditative soul-journey draws to a close, the orientation is no longer *inward*, but *outward*. At this point Kaplan, like the Holy Temple's *kohanim*, serves as a vehicle of blessing directed outwards towards all humanity. Like an Old World hazzan, Kaplan sings a closing *Birkhat kohanim* with lots of *ai-yai-yai*'s and *ya-ma-ma*'s, and yet (although he writes in his notes that this "version...comes from the *ChaBad* Hasidic lineage), with his rippling piano underneath and bourbon-smooth voice above, Kaplan does *not* attempt to replicate an Eastern European *khazonishe*-sound. There is certainly a plaintive, pleading quality to this request for blessing upon us all--but then it is as if the sun has come out from behind the clouds, the notes of blessing pouring forth like honey, or perhaps like sunshine dancing upon water. The attentive listener goes forth feeling blessed indeed.

I stress that it is the *attentive* listener who will be blessed by this album. Just as the God who is *ne'elam*, hidden, can be known only by those who heed God's plea to *be still and know that I am God* (Ps. 46:11), so this album can only be fully appreciated by those who are able to still their souls and let themselves be led on this journey with Kaplan. In our day of instant downloads, who knows how much longer the work of a mystically oriented recording artist like Richard Kaplan can maintain its integrity in its completeness? How many are willing to take the time to listen to a whole album with real *kavvanah*? For those who have been blessed with this stillness and with the *mazel* to have stumbled upon Kaplan's *minhah* ("offering"), a reward awaits them comparable to that which we mention when we don the *tallit* in the morning:

*They will feast on the abundance of God's House,  
and drink from the Divine's streams of delight (after Ps. 36:9).*

*Hazzan Shoshana Brown and her husband, Rabbi Mark Elber, serve as joint Spiritual Leaders for Congregation Beth El of Fall River, MA. She is a frequent contributor to JSM, her review of Shmuel Barzilai's "Chassidic Ecstasy in Music" having appeared in the 2013 issue. Her choral arrangements of Psalms set to Celtic-Appalachian ballad music--"Songs of Yearning and Celebration"—were performed at the 2011 ALEPH Biennial Kallah.*

**The 2-CD set--Cantors, Klezmerim and Crooners 1905-1953:  
Classic Yiddish 78s from the Mayrent Collection  
JSP Records, 2009**

*Reviewed by Gregory Yaroslow*

This historic recorded anthology is gleaned from nearly 9,000 78-rpm discs acquired by Sherry Mayrent, co-donor of a \$1 million endowment to the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison <http://livingtraditions.org/docs/store.htm#> .

The 3-CD set gives listeners a sweeping soundscape of the music made by and for the Yiddish-speaking community during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Cantorial selections, klezmer dance tunes, Yiddish vaudeville skits and Yiddish theater songs abound in its 67 tracks--42 of them never before reissued. The project provides a wonderful opportunity to relive the most recent Yiddish cultural renaissance at its zenith. Liner notes were provided by Mayrent and longtime scholar and performer of Klezmer music, Henry Sapoznik. Grammy-award-winning producer Christopher King did the digital re-mastering, and award-winning designer Susan Archie created the accompanying 72-page illustrated booklet.

Among the included cantors are Yossele Rosenblatt, Berele Chagy, David Roitman, Alter Yechiel Karniol, Mordechai Hershtman, Gershon Serota, Leibele Waldman, Zavel Kwartin and Pierre Pinchik. King's clever re-mastering makes it sound like you're standing right next to Pinchik as he sings his famous *Rozo D'shabbos*. If you close your eyes, it's not hard to imagine that he is singing it just for you!

Female performances are by Fraydele Oysher, Molly Picon, Sophie Tucker, Bessie Thomashefsky and a delightful unidentified voice singing *Kiddush*, that one might swear was male, were it not for the alto tessitura. The Meyer Machtenberg Male Choir is represented by an arrangement of *Areshes S'foseynu*, and venerable actor-comedian Fyvush Finkel offers a memorable *Ikh Bin a Boarder Ba Mayn Vayb*. There is also a wonderful rendition of *Yes! We Have No Bananas*—in three different Yiddish accents. I know that my late father, a real *meyvin* on the subject of Yiddish humor, would have doubled over at many of the comedy skits.

From Mayrent's notes on the remastering: "Christopher King (has a) rare ability to restore the sound to the clarity and dynamic range present on the day (they were) recorded." She quotes King describing his technique: "My approach is... that every session will be equalized and compensated... so as to bring out the dynamics and clarity of the performance." Her conclusion: "The results of King's approach are transfers that have an immediacy and intelligibility that permit the listener to follow the middle parts of a choral accompaniment or understand the... words sung or spoken in many cases over 100 years ago."

I can only add that the producing team was highly successful in resuscitating these treasured old recordings. From its highs to its lows, this delightful collection brought many a tear to my eyes! I believe it is a 'must-have' for every Jewish Music lover's library.

*During Gregory Yaroslow's 25-year tenure as Hazzan at Congregation Emanu El in San Bernardino, he also chaired the Cantors Assembly's Western Region and served on both its Convention Management and Membership committees. He currently teaches voice, coaches cantors and arranges, transcribes and formats Jewish sacred and secular music.*

## **Jonathan L. Friedmann's *Synagogue Song: An Introduction to Concepts, Theories and Customs***

***Reviewed by Sheldon Levin***

When you combine the thinking of a 21st-century religious sociologist and hebraic scholar with that of a musician and cantor who is also an amazingly articulate writer, you come up with this new and engaging text on synagogue music. Jonathan L. Friedmann teaches music history at the Academy for Jewish Religion in Los Angeles, serves as a hazzan in Las Vegas, is music editor for the *Western States Jewish History Journal* as well as the author of several books on Jewish music and numerous scholarly articles. His extensive in-depth research, points of view, insights and engaging writing style make this new volume accessible to both trained Jewish musicians and lay people of any faith.

Though the book is available in paperback from McFarland & Company publishers, it is much less expensive to peruse on an electronic device. I think this "new" publishing form, likely to be the preferred way of reading for future generations, suits Friedmann's study perfectly. Writing in the age of Twitter, when short attention spans are the norm, *Synagogue Song: An Introduction...* is different from scholarly texts of the past because of its format.

Rather than writing a handful of chapters and delving deeply into each subject, Dr. Friedmann presents us with 100 short essay-chapters. Each entry, which takes but a few minutes to read, is filled with clearly explained and documented information. From clarifying the psychology of music while describing its beauty and emotion, from cataloguing modes to delineating ethnicity, from exploring holiday texts and specific prayers to discussing congregational participation and choral music, this book covers a very wide span of topics.

Friedmann explains his unusual approach thusly:

As a theoretically minded practitioner of synagogue song, my primary interests were in origins and functions – that is, explanations for the union of text and music in Jewish worship. And as an educator equally drawn to the minutia of the relevant disciplines and committed to reaching the widest audience possible, I made a point of presenting my findings in a way that was substantive enough to appeal to the expert, yet accessible enough to attract the lay reader.

The author has succeeded spectacularly in achieving these goals. In many of the chapters I either learned entirely new information or gained a different understanding of subjects that I thought I knew already. Clearly, someone with limited understanding of Jewish texts, liturgy or practices will gain much from this take-nothing-for-granted approach. For example, without diluting or overly simplifying, Friedmann posits that regardless of country of origin, historic period or particular religious denomination, the songs used during Jewish worship exhibit four main functions: “communing with the divine, imparting key concepts and ideals, giving voice to personal and collective emotions, and strengthening bonds to community and heritage.” He believes that “the shared experience of music works to consolidate the intellectual and emotional energies of the community, fostering or enhancing a sense of affiliation and unity.”

He quotes—among others—from Jewish scholars, writers and musicians like Abraham Heschel, Heinrich Heine, Chemjo Vinaver, Abraham Idelsohn, Joseph Levine and Sam Weiss, as well as from non-Jewish musical scholars and theologians. A case in point: he cites French composer/ conductor Pierre Boulez’s reference to the contemporary Dutch professor of Music Philosophy Marcel Cobussen’s remark that “a piece of music is first a mystery, becomes clear through study, and with performance, becomes a mystery once again.” He then applies this characterization to Jewish prayer songs. He matches analyses of hymns and psalms in the Christian tradition by Augustine and Hermann Gunkel with interpretations of the same texts in Jewish usage. Augustine’s advocacy of regularly inserting the wordless *Jubilus* (musical “jubilation”) when reciting Psalms prefigured Shneur Zalman of Liady’s rationale for the efficacy of *niggunim* by 1,400 years. Nineteenth-century Bible commentator Hermann Gunkel examined the life-setting (*Sitz im Leben*) context of Old Testament narratives, particularly in the Book of Genesis.

At one point in the book Friedmann gives readers his own view of congregational singing and the vital role it plays in a religious service:

The ease with which worshippers possessing a range of vocal confidence and skill join together in these songs can be attributed to several converging factors, including the simplicity of the music, the warmth of the community and a sense of religious obligation.

He then quotes the writings of a Protestant Congregationalist minister from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century who explains that discordant singers are like the “wolf stop” of a church organ: “a pipe which produces most inharmonious sounds, but which are overborne by the music of the other stops and so made to swell the general harmony.”<sup>1</sup> Friedmann then stresses several positive

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: the Talmudic parallel to this observation concerning “inharmonious sounds” during congregational singing appears in the Babylonian Talmud, *K’ritut* 6b:

“Said R. Hana b. Bizna in the name of R. Hisda the Pious, ‘a fast in which none of the sinners of Israel participate is no fast; for behold the odor of galbanum [*helvona*] is unpleasant and yet it was included among the spices for incense’.”



effects of congregational song—including health benefits, liturgical literacy, strengthening of community, religious identity, a sense of heritage, etc.

Other chapters give detailed explanations of important prayers that appear on Shabbat or holidays, and there is an excellent Appendix listing hundreds of authoritative works on both Jewish and non-Jewish sacred music, as well as an extensive Bibliography of the numerous sources quoted throughout this book.

For anyone interested in familiarizing themselves with how music actually works in Jewish prayer, whether a professional synagogue musician or not, will learn much from this compact anthology of 100 informative essays. Jonathan L. Friedmann's book—in its printed or digital edition-- is a wonderful addition to the growing number of resources in the field.

*Sheldon Levin has served as Hazzan and Educational Director at Congregation Neveh Shalom in Metuchen, New Jersey since 1999. He is a Past President of the Cantors Assembly, has published numerous choral arrangements, edited seven books on Jewish Music and Education, conducted the Arbel Chorale of Philadelphia for 18 years, and is co-founder of the New Community Choir of Highland Park, NJ. His article, "Planning to Succeed in Teaching Prayer and Song in Afternoon Hebrew Schools" appeared in the Fall 2006 issue of JSM.*

## **Aaron Bensoussan's CD—*A New Journey*** **([aaronbensoussan.com](http://aaronbensoussan.com)), 2012**

### ***Reviewed by Charles Heller***

Many years ago Cantor Aaron Bensoussan produced a string of CDs featuring his exciting brand of modern liturgical settings that became popular throughout the Jewish world. His *Lekha dodi* in particular has been performed in countless versions (perhaps most thrillingly with backing by students from the Caribbean community playing steel pans). But after he took up a position in Toronto, the creative impulse withered.

It is only now, after a very long and difficult period, that he has summoned up the mental and physical energy to re-emerge as a creative artist, with a CD most appropriately titled "A New Journey."

The 13 tracks on this CD traverse both familiar and unfamiliar ground, ranging from attractive sing-along melodies for *Tov lehodot* and *Ledor vador* to meditations based on lesser-known Moroccan *piyyutim*, reminiscent of the almost trance-like performances by Sufi musicians that Cantor Bensoussan has always admired. (I recall vividly one such performance given in London in 1999 when Bensoussan, in top form, was followed on the concert stage at about midnight by an elderly Egyptian Sufi singer who, after an instrumental introduction lasting about

half an hour, slowly raised himself up and exclaimed: “*Lah!!*”). Unfortunately some of the selections on this recording seem to have been beyond the comprehension of the band—it seems at times as though they are not quite sure which piece they are supposed to be playing. But apart from that, they do a good job in providing the heavy electric-folk-rock backing that has become familiar to us since the 1970s.

Full disclosure: Although the present reviewer collaborated closely with Cantor Bensoussan for years to bring many of his musical ideas to fruition, such as the above-mentioned *Tov lehodot* (originally *Sim shalom*) and *Ledor vador*, which used to be sung with gusto by the choir and congregation at Toronto’s Beth Emeth Synagogue, I regret to say that the acknowledgements in the CD’s liner notes neglect to mention either my name or this fact. Nevertheless, “A New Journey” is certain to help reinstate Hazzan Aaron Bensoussan’s high ranking as a creative force for our time.

*Charles Heller is the award-winning author of **What To Listen For In Jewish Music** ([www.ecanthuspress.com](http://www.ecanthuspress.com)). A selection of his compositions can be explored through the website of the Canadian Music Centre ([www.musiccentre.ca](http://www.musiccentre.ca)).*

# *Journal of Synagogue Music*

OUR SEPTEMBER 2014 ISSUE WILL HIGHLIGHT THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES:

- **Psalmody: Concept or genre?**
- ***Adonai ro'i* – A Psalm of Transfiguration in the House of Mourning**
- **On the Daily Psalms for Sunday through Friday**
- **Notes from a Workshop: Recycling an Existent Psalm Tune**
- **Reviews: Max Wohlberg's *Haggadah* and Zalman Schachter's *Davening***
- **Two Symbolic Songs of the Seder Night**



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