

# Journal of Synagogue Music

September 2017

Volume 42 No. 2

Our 50th Year



Cover Montage: A Half-century of Key Figures in Synagogue Music



## **Our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year**

September 2017

Volume 42 Number 2

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## FROM THE EDITOR--*Piyyut* and Hazzanut

A response intended to provide historical background for Tina Fruehauf's query posted on the Jewish Shul Music Network, December 2016. It is gleaned from the writings of Shelomo Dov Goitein (*Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 1967:568-569) and Wayne Allen *The Cantor in Jewish Lore and Law* (unpublished manuscript submitted to the *Journal of Synagogue Music*, 2015, for review upon publication). [JAL]

**A** notable feature of the medieval synagogue service was *Piyyut* (after the Greek *poietes*), poetical insertions within the prescribed liturgical benedictions. In Arabic, *piyyut* is called *hizana*, because it allowed the *hazzan*, or cantor, to prove his mettle—musically as well as linguistically. The biblical injunction to “Sing unto God a New Song” (Psalm 98:1) was taken literally during the Genizah period (mid-9<sup>th</sup> to mid-19<sup>th</sup> centuries); over 200,000 religious poems and fragments of poems were found in the Genizah of Cairo's Ben Ezra Synagogue, beginning in the 1890s.

The melodies to which these *piyyutim* were sung were undoubtedly what made the long hours in synagogue enjoyable and edifying; it certainly was not the convoluted language in which they were written, which remains obscure to scholars even today. So popular were the melodies that passages to which they were sung from older pieces often found their way into the manuscripts of later creations. Innovation was also provided by guest cantors from foreign countries; their appearance is frequently mentioned in the Genizah papers. The notation of Hebrew synagogue poetry in Lombardic neumes by the Norman proselyte Obadiah is a case in point. Another is the case of a judge—evidently unfamiliar with the Cairo High Holiday liturgy usage—who forced a cantor to use a *Hizana* composed by a well-known cantor from Alexandria, on Yom Kippur.

From the foregoing, one might think that Jewish religious authorities would universally favor the heightened level of devotion that *Hazzanut* brought to public prayer. Yet the ambivalence of rabbinic thinking about cantors appears as early as the Babylonian Talmud (Tractate *B'rakhot*, 34a):

Once, a certain disciple went down before the Ark, in the presence of Rabbi Eliezer, and he drew out the prayers at great length... [R. Eliezer's disciples] said to him: Master, how long-winded this fellow is... Another time it happened that another disciple went down before the Ark in the presence of Rabbi Eliezer and he cut the prayers very short... His disciples said: How concise this fellow is!

If cantors in 5<sup>th</sup>-century Babylonia could not win for losing, their 18<sup>th</sup>-century counterparts in Sephardic Diaspora communities ringing the Mediterranean found themselves in the exact same predicament. A Ladino ballad from that period has a despondent young girl imploring her mother not to follow standard funeral procedures in the event she should die from unrequited love:

*Mama, si yo me muero...* (Mother, should I expire...)

*Hazzanim no quero yo.* (*Hazzanim* I won't desire.)

**F**or cantors throughout the ages, the more things changed, the more they seemed to remain the same!



# RECENT ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL RESEARCH

## The Role of Congregational Singing

*By Marsha Bryan Edelman*

The period following World War II saw major demographic and psychological changes in the American Jewish community. A new wave of immigration brought the remnants of war-ravaged Europe to American shores and closed the chapter on European leadership in Jewish music. Now it became necessary for American Jews to produce their own musical leaders. The seminaries that had been training rabbis since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century finally established schools to train cantors as well. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (Reform) opened its School of Sacred Music in 1948; the Jewish Theological Seminary (Conservative) started training cantors in its Cantors Institute in 1952; and the Cantorial Training Institute at Yeshiva University (Orthodox) opened its doors in 1954.<sup>1</sup>

The graduates of these schools faced a Jewish community different from what their predecessors had known. Returning soldiers eager to resume their lives and start families led to the growth of suburbia and the proliferation of synagogues outside major city centers. These new congregations were started by young people with strong ideas about their role in the synagogue service and ready to play an active part in determining their spiritual destinies.

Unfortunately, the transition was not a smooth one. The cantorial training schools were dominated by faculty who had trained with the old European models. The 1954 reissuing of 25 volumes known as the *Out-of-Print Classics of Synagogue Music* reaffirmed the westernized 19<sup>th</sup>-century type of synagogue music published by Sulzer, Lewandowski, Naumbourg and others. This “High Church” style of practice continued to dominate the training of Reform cantors, while the role of the cantor as not just soloist but also purveyor-and-conservator of synagogue music in Conservative and Orthodox synagogues was pronounced from the ivory towers of the cantorial schools.

But the congregants in the pews wanted to sing, too! A second generation of Orthodox American Jews had already begun to establish a chain of “Young Israel” synagogues, where *sh’lihei tsibbur* taken from among the many male congregants capable of chanting regular Shabbat and Weekday services led their fellow worshipers in song, thereby replacing increasing numbers of traditionally oriented (and some felt, domineering) *hazzanim*.

In the Conservative and Reform movements, young people empowered by their positive experiences in denominationally sponsored summer camps rejected the notion of relinquishing

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<sup>1</sup> The Reconstructionist movement, which began training rabbis at its rabbinical college in 1969, only began to acknowledge a need for trained cantors for its congregations in the late 1990s. While most of its affiliated congregations still rely on lay precentors (or cantors trained by other movements), the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College located in Wyncote, Pennsylvania, developed a track for the training of Reconstructionist-oriented cantors in partnership with the Master of Arts in Jewish Music program at nearby Gratz College (non-denominational). That joint program produced its first “Reconstructionist cantor” in the Spring of 2000 (but graduated only a few students before the program was discontinued in 2009).

their newly won ‘right’ to actively participate in worship and reaccept docile subservience to a cantor and choir back at their home synagogues. The Conservative movement was first to attempt a response. The Cantors Assembly<sup>2</sup> published *Zamru Lo*, a steadily expanding multi-volume anthology of “congregational tunes” designed to increase worshiper participation in the synagogue service, while still maintaining the traditional *nusah* (prayer modality appropriate to the liturgical occasion). Composers began considering the needs of congregants when writing for cantor and/or choir; “singable refrains” allowed congregants to participate in at least selected passages within prayer settings. Max Wohlberg (1907-1996) was singularly successful at composing cantorial recitatives that remained faithful to traditional *nusah* while also providing opportunities for worshipers to sing (**Example 1**).<sup>3</sup>



**Example 1.** Opening of Wohlberg’s universally popular setting for *M’khalkeil hayyim b’hesed*.

The music of Chicago-based Max Janowski (1912-1991) had a similar effect on the repertoire of Reform temples. The unison refrain of his moving *Sim shalom* and the lyrical strophic form of his *V’sham’ru* enable congregants to sing along with their melodies even as the choir intones their lovely harmonies. The Hasidic-style lilt of his largely unison *Yism’hu* is a particular favorite of many congregations (**Example 2**).



**Example 2.** Hasidic-style lilt in opening of Janowski’s largely unison *V’sham’ru*.

Canadian composers Srul Irving Glick (1939-2002) and Ben Steinberg (b. 1930) were especially successful at writing music that invited congregational participation. Among American composers who have arranged both melodies of their own and centuries-old synagogue melodies known as *Mi-sinai* (“from Mt. Sinai”) tunes for congregational singing are:

<sup>2</sup> Professional organization of Conservative cantors, established in 1947. It forged a path for the later establishment of Reform’s American Conference of Cantors in 1953 and the Orthodox Cantorial Council of America in 1960.

<sup>3</sup> Wohlberg, a co-founder of the Cantors Institute at JTS, served as its primary instructor of *nusah* for 40 years. He thus had an opportunity to share his views—and his music—with several student generations of Conservative cantors. The ubiquity of his settings—most notably *M’khalkeil hayyim b’hesed*—would account for this continuing influence, as would the melody’s accessibility to young and old alike.

Herbert Fromm (1905-1995), Samuel Adler (b. 1928), and Stephen Richards (b. 1935; **Examples 3a-3b**).

Shi - ru la - do - nai shir - ha - dash;

This system shows the first two measures of the piece. The vocal line is in a single treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, treble and bass, with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The lyrics are 'Shi - ru la - do - nai shir - ha - dash;'.

shi - ru, shi - ru la - do - nai shir - ha - dash

This system shows the next two measures. The vocal line continues with the lyrics 'shi - ru, shi - ru la - do - nai shir - ha - dash'. The piano accompaniment continues with similar harmonic support.

**Example 3a.** Refrain of Steinberg's congregation-friendly *Shiru ladonai*.

An - im z'mi-rot v'shi - rim e-e-rog ki-ei - le - kha-naf - shi - ta-a-rog

This system shows the refrain of the piece. The key signature remains one flat. The time signature changes to 2/4. The vocal line starts with a quarter rest followed by the lyrics 'An - im z'mi-rot v'shi - rim e-e-rog ki-ei - le - kha-naf - shi - ta-a-rog'. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

**Example 3b.** Opening of Fromm's equally singable *An'im z'mirot*.

## Popular Music in the Synagogue

However forthcoming cantors and composers may have become in welcoming new music and group singing into the synagogue, by the late 1960s it was clear that the contemporary liturgical music being composed was still not providing the kind of warmth and spiritual nourishment that some congregants wanted. Notwithstanding efforts to bring new music into the synagogue, Jewish liturgical music had not changed substantially in 100 years. The Immigrant Generation of 1880-1920 had needed to retain the music of its past—partly out of a false sense that “European” culture represented authenticity<sup>4</sup> and partly as a “security blanket” against the raging and unpredictable winds of changing American popular culture. Unlike the music of virtually every previous generation of Jews, the music of America’s Jews had failed to take on the trappings of the majority culture surrounding it. American Jewish music was artificially frozen in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century vernacular, and this musical language simply did not speak to the Baby-Boomer generation. Young people who sang spirited folk tunes and Neo-Hasidic melodies in summer camps and youth services were not happy in their parents’ synagogues, singing their grandparents’ songs.<sup>5</sup>

Some cantors and composers noted the generational gap in their sanctuaries and sought remedies amid the popular culture of the missing youth. Charles Davidson (b. 1929), who had earlier invoked Hasidic, Oriental and Jazz idioms in Sabbath services written for his Conservative synagogue, turned to Rock music for his *S’lihot* service, *The Hush of Midnight* (1970).<sup>6</sup> Davidson wisely retained the motives and melodies of the High Holy Day period that are traditionally introduced at this service. However, he underpinned those anticipated melodies with a Rock beat and the accompaniment of piano and electric guitars (**Example 4**).

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<sup>4</sup> America’s Jewish community was by no means the only one to retain a preference for the cultural heritage of Europe, nor has this problem been completely overcome. Programmers for modern symphony orchestras and choral societies are still seeking ways to convince audiences that American composers (and musicians) have something valid to offer.

<sup>5</sup> This is not to suggest that the estrangement of young people—as well as some older congregants—from the synagogue was entirely a musical problem. There were obviously social and demographic issues at play that went far beyond musical criticism. Nevertheless, it was easier for congregational lay leaders and clergy alike to focus on music precisely because it did have so much potential power to actively involve worshipers.

<sup>6</sup> *S’lihot* are a body of prayers that beg forgiveness for wrongdoings against God. They are recited for a minimum of three days before Rosh Hashanah, beginning the Saturday night before the holiday (if Rosh Hashanah falls prior to Thursday of the coming week, the *S’lihot* are begun a full week earlier). *S’lihot* are typically added to the Morning service, but to demonstrate eagerness to begin the process of repentance, the first of the *S’lihot* are recited as early on Sunday morning as possible, traditionally at or near midnight on Saturday.



Ah a - sham - nu, ba - gad - nu, ga - zal - nu,

di - bar-nu-do - fi.

**Example 4.** Opening of “Ashamnu,” from Davidson’s *S’lihot* service, *The Hush of Midnight*.

Interestingly, despite its somewhat dated musical idiom (notwithstanding Davidson’s 1986 revision) *The Hush of Midnight* continues to be presented regularly in communities across North America. Part of the welcome for this particular work stems from general familiarity with the traditional material, along with accessibility of several melodies that Davidson composed and wove throughout the hour-long service. The score comes with an extremely important recommendation: that cantors and conductors hold a “teaching session” prior to the service, so that interested congregants may learn the new melodies in advance. Then they—together with the (mostly two-part) chorus—can encourage others to sing along during the actual service.

Other composers relied only tangentially on pre-existing melodies to “legitimize” their new music. Raymond Smolover, writing for his Reform congregation in a New York suburb, borrowed melodies by Max Helfman,<sup>7</sup> Robert Strassburg<sup>8</sup> and Ernest Bloch<sup>9</sup> for his “folk/rock”

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<sup>7</sup> Max Helfman (1901-1963) was a composer, conductor, lecturer on Jewish music and music educator. He led many secular musical ensembles, as well as choirs at synagogues in California and New Jersey. During his years as Director of Music at the Brandeis Art Institute (later known as the Brandeis-Bardin Institute) in California, Helfman had a strong impact on the education of countless young adults whose prior exposure to Jewish tradition had been limited, and whom he helped to affect Jewishly, through music.

service, *The Edge of Freedom*. In describing his motivation for writing the work, Smolover wrote:

I realized that we had been asking our children to accept our God and the God of our fathers, and what He sounds like. I realized, after almost 20 years of teaching them the sound of my God, that I must listen to the sound of theirs. I dared enter their world aware that I may be respectfully tolerated, amusingly indulged, or murmuringly ignored. They welcomed me. It may be that the Folk/Rock Service is not completely their sound, nor my own. It may be what happened, when their God met mine.<sup>10</sup>

But as welcomed as Smolover may have felt, his music did not pass the test of time, in part because he was, after all, an interloper in a youth culture not of his making or understanding. More importantly, it was because the times had changed. Even services by young people themselves—Michael Isaacson’s (b. 1946) folksy *Avodat Amamit* (sic) and Debbie Friedman’s (1951-2011) folk/rock *Sing unto God* (both written in 1972) quickly became outdated.<sup>11</sup> Creative responses to the musical/spiritual yearnings of America’s Jewish youth were better supplied by two very different sources: Shlomo Carlebach and the Israeli Hasidic Song Festivals.

## Reinventing Hasidic Music

**S**hlomo Carlebach (1925-1994) was among the most unorthodox Orthodox rabbis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With a unique personality that reflected the full fervor of his adopted Hasidic background<sup>12</sup> as well as a genuine love for his fellow Jews, Carlebach traveled North America telling stories, reaching out to Jews of all persuasions (including those with no affiliation), and using his talents to craft melodies that touched his listeners and became instant staples in Havurot<sup>13</sup> and *minyanim* (religious quorums) across the denominational spectrum. His setting of “Esa Einai” (Psalm 121; “I lift my eyes”), one of his earliest hits, was not originally

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Strassburg (1915-2003) was an author, conductor, teacher and composer, who taught at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles and joined the faculty of California State College in 1966. Strassburg wrote several books on Jewish themes, as well as a biographical monograph entitled *Ernest Bloch: Voice in the Wilderness* (1977).

<sup>9</sup> Ernest Bloch (1881-1959) was a Swiss-born composer and teacher whose numerous “Jewish-themed” works for voice, chamber ensemble and/or orchestra earned him a reputation as a “Jewish” composer – despite his larger number of completely “secular” works.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond Smolover, notes on the jacket for the LP recording of *The Edge of Freedom* (1968).

<sup>11</sup> Although they first flashed onto the Jewish music screen by writing alternative music for the synagogue, both Isaacson and Friedman have composed non-liturgical music as well.

<sup>12</sup> Carlebach came from German-Jewish stock and was educated in mainstream *yeshivot* before immersing himself in the Hasidic world.

<sup>13</sup> Havurot, literally “friendship” groups, were established in the 1960s as an alternative to synagogues that were perceived to be unnecessarily formal and often unfriendly. Havurot were purposely kept small to allow their members to know one another well and to enjoy meaningful interactions. In addition to holding egalitarian services in which men and women participated equally without the need for trained clergy, members of *havurot* celebrated holidays and life-cycle events together. Some established residential communities reminiscent of (but more acceptable than) the “hippie” communes that emerged in America at the time.

intended for use in regular worship.<sup>14</sup> As things turned out, the melody has been borrowed for use in conjunction with other texts, including the Sabbath Hymn of Glory (*An'im z'mirot*—“Sweet garlands of song do I weave”; **Examples 5a-5b**).



**Example 5a.** Opening of Carlebach’s Psalm 121 (“Esa Einai”).



**Example 5b.** Carlebach’s “Esa Einai” melody applied to the Sabbath Glory Hymn, “An’im Z’mirot.”

Some of the other Carlebach melodies that became standard parts of worship services were originally written for entry into Israel’s annual Hasidic Song Festivals. In 1968 a small-budget Israeli play-with-music, called *Ish hasid hayah* (“There Was Once A Hasid”), brought traditional Hasidic songs and stories to the generally non-observant masses who comprised its audiences. The success of this material inspired enthusiasts to revitalize Hasidic music by soliciting songs in an ostensibly ‘Hasidic’ style to be presented in an annual festival, starting in 1969. After Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War of June 1967, the fascination of American Jews with most things Israeli led promoters to bring a version of the Hasidic Song Festival to North American audiences.

In reality, the only truly ‘Hasidic’ elements in a majority of these songs were their relatively short melodies and liturgical lyrics. Still, the presence of catchy new tunes for brief prayer texts encouraged their use in the services of synagogues looking to increase congregational singing—even by worshipers who were not fluent in Hebrew. Carlebach’s *V’ha’eir einenu* (“Enlighten our eyes with Your Torah”) was quickly added into the morning services from which its lyrics were taken (see Example 6 below), and Nurit Hirsch’s (b. 1942) *Oseh shalom* (“May the One Who makes peace on high”; traditionally recited quickly by the cantor to conclude the Reader’s Kaddish), not only launched the composer’s subsequent career (limited almost exclusively to writing secular songs), but became a staple of Sabbath and Weekday services across the continent.



**Example 6.** Opening of Carlebach’s *V’ha’eir einenu*, from the Morning service.

<sup>14</sup> The text of Psalm 121 is not part of the regular liturgy. However, Carlebach did not write with regular liturgical usages in mind, but instead meant for his settings to be used in concerts as part of the “popular Jewish music scene” that blossomed outside the synagogue during the late 1960s.

## Varied Voices in the Modern Era

While the popularity of the Hasidic Song Festivals gradually waned,<sup>15</sup> the border between popular song and the music of worship was effectively breached. A succession of popular American-Jewish artists began, or in the case of Debbie Friedman and—on a more sophisticated level—Michael Isaacson, continued to contribute music that was just as successful in the synagogue on Saturday morning as it was in the concert hall on Saturday night. Not surprisingly, the Reform movement led the way in this more liberal musical style. The guitars that dominated American folk and popular music were welcomed in many Reform synagogues and even replaced the organ as the instrument of choice in congregations moving away from the decorous classical style of Sulzer and Lewandowski to a more inviting and participatory “warm Reform” service.

While the Orthodox movement continued to eschew instrumental accompaniment, many of its congregations were actively adopting more contemporary sounds into their services. Tunes that had been written originally for non-liturgical presentation inexorably crept into synagogue use. The common preference among Orthodox synagogues to utilize lay *sh’lihei tsibbur* (as opposed to seminary-trained *hazzanim*) also contributed to the rapid proliferation of borrowed melodies, quite often from among popular Israeli and American songs (Examples 7a-b).



**Example 7a.** Opening of the Israeli ballad, *Erev shel shoshanim*.



**Example 7b.** The melody of *Erev shel shoshanim* adapted to words of the Sabbath *K'dushah*.

The American Conservative movement lagged somewhat behind this popular tendency to insert contemporary songs and musical styles into the liturgy. The sanctuaries where adults worshiped initially held fast to a traditional body of music taught to students at the movement's Cantors Institute and/or gathered in various *Zamru Lo* collections published by the Cantors Assembly. Members of the movement's United Synagogue Youth groups and campers and staff at the various Ramah Camps eagerly adapted popular song melodies into their own services. Unfortunately, the Cantors Assembly leadership rejected these innovations as “camp songs.” This stand-off continued throughout the decades when Israeli music was being embraced by the movement's other wings: the Ramah summer camps, the Solomon Schechter Day Schools, local

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<sup>15</sup>As years passed, the songs moved further away from the roots of their Neo-Hasidic origins. At the same time, infatuation with Hasidic-type music faded (partly as a result of increased tensions between Ultra-Orthodox Hasidim and non-observant secular Jews in Israel). The final Hasidic Song Festival was held in 1986.



synagogues' adult education programs, and beyond. That seemingly endless font of new material proved a disincentive to the creation of original music from within the movement's ranks.

Eventually, the pressure felt by Conservative cantors as a result of the "alternative" music's ever-spreading popularity among religious school students, youth group members and Havurot (often breakaways from traditional mainstream Conservative services) resulted in a gradual willingness by cantors and congregations to experiment with the music sung during worship. A small percentage of synagogues had organs installed, and occasionally permitted the use of other instruments as well. In 1987, the ordination of female cantors<sup>16</sup> brought a wave of dramatically new voices into the synagogue. Many of these women, whose very presence represented a major change, were more inclined than their male counterparts to welcome liturgical innovation.

The real watershed in congregational singing came with the success of one congregation located on New York's Upper West Side. B'nai Jeshurun--or "BJ," as it is affectionately called by its members (and derogatorily scorned by its detractors)—gained widespread popular appeal during the tenure of Rabbi Marshall Meyer (1985-1993) and continues now under the leadership of Rabbis Marcel Bronstein and Ronaldo Matalon, and Cantor Ari Priven. BJ attracted hundreds of worshipers to regular services when it adopted a family-friendly attitude plus a repertoire of reverent but upbeat new melodies (as well as "refurbished" versions of older tunes) that welcomed the Sabbath with fervent singing. A noticeable contrast between the numbers of BJ attendees overflowing Manhattan's sidewalks and the number of empty pews in most other mainstream Conservative synagogues was directly attributable to B'nai Jeshurun's music.<sup>17</sup> Demand from within and without the congregation inspired the synagogue's leadership to record its melodies as teaching tools for its membership and as models for other congregations to follow.

## Future Thoughts

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century began, the future course of American synagogue music was not clear. Some traditionalists decried the preference for community singing—of any kind of music—over the preservation of *nusah* as the "nail in the coffin" of Jewish musical continuity. For others, "usurpation" of the role of cantor/*hazzan* by Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrants and lay precentors<sup>18</sup> has signaled an ironic return to the anarchy of the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century and a tragic surrendering of musical and professional ritual standards.

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<sup>16</sup> Women had been ordained by JTS as Conservative rabbis since 1985. Reform's Hebrew Union College had begun ordaining female rabbis in 1976, and female cantors in 1985.

<sup>17</sup> Charismatic rabbinic leadership, relaxed standards of decorum, an orientation toward social action programming outside the synagogue and acceptance of casual clothing worn by the membership also played a role in the congregation's appeal. Yet it was the dramatic difference in the synagogue's musical repertoire that proved most immediately identifiable to visitors and prospective new members with very young children.

<sup>18</sup> A growing number of synagogues and Reform temples are also employing "Cantorial soloists." In some cases, congregations feel they need someone with a beautiful voice and some musical background to sing key portions of the service, but cannot afford (or do not believe they require) someone with more training to additionally teach in

In some quarters, enfranchisement of the congregation as an appropriate response to every Jew's search for an active, participatory role might be applauded. They may see the decline in choral singing as a victory for the community, and herald the embrace of contemporary music as an inevitable and historically consistent response to a new era and the evolving cultural heritage of its majority. Yet the "return to spirituality" that has coincided with the turn of a new millennium could just as well represent certain adjustments within Jewish liturgical practice. The familiar opening blessing of the *Amidah* (Standing Devotion) will undoubtedly be subject to adjustment as the Matriarchs of Israel are invoked along with the Patriarchs, as will the opening-and-closing of every ensuing *Amidah* blessing, which has begun with "our God and God of our fathers."<sup>19</sup> This does not imply rejection of the cantor's traditional chant, in which congregations of all denominations have joined as of late. Not surprisingly, newly introduced melodies for other parts of the liturgy are sung with a fervor comparable to that of the Hasidim, whose earliest music "rescued" pre-existent melodies—even secular ones—so that the masses might be empowered to serve God by singing with all their hearts.

One of the most interesting cases of "new-old" music is a setting of *Ahavat olam* ("With an everlasting love have You cherished Israel"), the second blessing before *Sh'ma yisrael*, the Credo of the *Ma'ariv*--or Evening--service, written by Ami Aloni (1928-1999), for cantor, choir and accompaniment. Aloni seems to harken back to the *Chorshul* (literally "choral synagogue") practice that prevailed in Eastern Europe up until the outbreak of World War II. Contemporary American congregations largely reject this tradition as being indulgent on the part of professional musicians and as an affront to worshipers who are eager to play a more active role in the service.

On the other hand, Aloni was writing this setting for a High Holiday *Ma'ariv* service, an occasion when congregations are willing to accept choral singing and cantorial solos as part of a larger repertoire intended to enhance the special liturgical season of Repentance—together with a somewhat lengthier liturgy and more elaborate ritual. Moreover, Aloni has adapted a seasonal musical theme that is familiar to the entire community and infuses the *Ma'ariv* service. And so, worshipers are not only put at ease by their recognition of the time-appropriate choice, but caught up in the heightened atmosphere of the special occasion, they are encouraged to sing along with cantor and choir.

The High Holiday theme waits before announcing itself, content to be introduced by a counter melody that only hints at traditional material in its accompaniment. As the paragraph draws to a close, the concluding blessing triumphantly intones the time-honored melody in a way

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their Religious Schools or assist their rabbis in performing other clerical duties. In still other cases, synagogues may be forced to accept individuals with limited Judaic backgrounds, or even to engage non-Jews because they are unable to secure the services of a better-trained *hazzan*. Despite an increasing interest in spiritual pursuits by many congregants, a number of individuals who might be well-suited to the cantorate are foregoing synagogue work in favor of more lucrative (and often less stressful) positions in other fields. Notwithstanding increased ritual participation by lay people, a dearth of trained American cantors is becoming a growing challenge for all movements.

<sup>19</sup> The opening paragraph has traditionally been known as *Avot* ("Fathers") after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who are mentioned; the opening-and-closing formulas of every ensuing *Amidah* blessing has specified *Eloheinu veilohei avoteinu* (our God and God of our fathers).

that beckons worshipers to join in the familiar responses and melismatic refrains: *Barukh hu u-varukh sh'mo* and *Amein* (“Blessed be God’s Name,” and “Amen”; see **Example 8**, next page).

In many ways, Aloni’s *Ahavat olam* setting summarizes all the possible permutations of American synagogue music while offering “something for everyone.” Cantor and choir lead, but the congregation is encouraged to sing along. The musical treatment is fresh and contemporary, while the tune is as universally traditional as any in the Ashkenazic rite. Seen from a broader perspective, the setting illustrates much of the history of Western synagogue music, and thus may serve as a model for congregations and composers.

*Dr. Marsha Bryan Edelman earned advanced degrees in general music, Jewish music and Jewish studies from Columbia University and the Jewish Theological Seminary, and has taught Jewish music to students of all ages for more than 40 years. Since 1971 she has been affiliated with the Zamir Choral Foundation, and currently serves as its Administrator. A Professor Emerita of Music and Education at Gratz College, she served on its faculty for 25 years, including nine years as Dean of Academic Affairs. Dr. Edelman now serves as Adjunct Professor of Music at the H.L. Miller Cantorial School of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. This article is reprinted from her book, **Discovering Jewish Music**, with permission of the University of Nebraska Press, copyright 2003, and published by the Jewish Publication Society.*

Solo

Choir

Ba - rukh a - tah, a - do - nai, — O - heiv a -

Ba - rukh hu u - va - rukh sh' - mo

*rubato*

*a tempo*

*rit.*

*rubato*

*a tempo*

*rit.*

mo - yis - ra - eil. A - men

Ah, A - men.

Example 8. Closing of Aloni's *Ahavat olam*, second blessing before the *Sh'ma* in High Holiday *Ma'ariv*.



## A Nearly-forgotten *Un'saneh Tokef*

*Ann Glazer Niren*

One of the most iconic sections of the Rosh Hashanah liturgy is the *U-n'taneh tokef* prayer, a dramatic and terrifying poem which depicts God as the ultimate Judge of all living souls on the annual Day of Remembrance (*Yom ha-zikkaron*). Because of its vivid textual imagery, it has served as musical inspiration for countless composers over the years. One such composer, the Russian-born Solomon Braslavsky, actually set two versions of this text. Although Braslavsky (1887-1975) is nearly forgotten today, during his lifetime he was highly regarded at his Boston synagogue, Congregation Mishkan Tefila, where he served as music director, choir director, and organist.<sup>1</sup> He was renowned throughout New England for his vast knowledge of Jewish musical practice as well as classical music in general. Of his compositions, most of which are for the synagogue, *Un'saneh Tokef* (1962)<sup>2</sup> is possibly the best and most extensive.

Braslavsky's compositional output in Boston focused mainly on the performing forces at hand: organ, choir (two- and four-part), and cantor.<sup>3</sup> His musical language was clearly influenced by late-19th century conventions, especially regarding harmonic progressions, chromaticism, and tritone emphasis, usually as part of a diminished seventh chord to create suspense. However, Braslavsky's experience with the traditional modes of synagogue prayer factors equally into his musical style. Braslavsky felt that music composed for the synagogue must "be based on our time-honored traditional chants or at least bring the spirit of the Synagogue and the prayer in question in such a way that the music be recognized at once as Jewish."<sup>4</sup>

This high-minded approach found a willing disciple in the young Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990), an extremely well-known American composer and conductor, who grew up at Boston's Mishkan Tefila, the Conservative synagogue where Braslavsky's meticulous direction of the services provided an important early Jewish musical inspiration.<sup>5</sup> In 1962, Bernstein helped Braslavsky publish one of two compositions called *Un'saneh Tokef*, known as the "long"

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<sup>1</sup> No full-length biographies of Braslavsky exist, although the current author devotes a chapter to his life in her Ph.D. dissertation, "The Relationship Between Solomon Braslavsky, Congregation Mishkan Tefila, and Leonard Bernstein" (University of Kentucky, 2013). Although Mishkan Tefila is a Conservative congregation, its board voted in 1914 to allow the use of the organ during worship services. There are several precedents for the organ in a traditional Jewish service. See Tina Frühauf, *The Organ and Its Music in German-Jewish Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> While scholarly usage prefers *U-n'taneh tokef* as the current standard transliteration, this article will defer to the published orthography of every excerpt cited from the Braslavsky composition under discussion; hence: *Un'saneh Tokef*.

<sup>3</sup> Braslavsky's early works include symphonies, overtures, psalm settings, and folk song arrangements; most of these remain unpublished. *Who's Who in American Jewry*, edited by John Simons (New York: National News Association, 1938), 130.

<sup>4</sup> Solomon Braslavsky, "National Jewish Music Observance," undated lecture at the Boston Public Library, Archive of Mishkan Tefila, Braslavsky box.

<sup>5</sup> Jewish musical motivic ideas abound in Bernstein's works, both sacred and secular. The best-known example is his first symphony, *Jeremiah*, which incorporates Haftarah chant and Lamentations. For a new look at this topic, see the present author's article, "Leonard Bernstein's *Hashkiveinu*" in *Journal of Synagogue Music*, Spring, 2016.

version, a piece Bernstein likely heard in his youth.<sup>6</sup> Historian Jonathan Sarna characterizes Bernstein's help as an act of professional gratitude.<sup>7</sup> Apparently, Bernstein recognized Braslavsky's contributions to his own success, and wished to thank him in an appropriate manner.

Braslavsky dedicated the work to his wife, Augusta. Although she died in 1961, Braslavsky likely composed the piece earlier. After her death, the Mishkan Tefila choir decided "that a unique and fitting memorial would be the publication of some of . . . Braslavsky's music . . . The choir pooled together some money toward the costs of publication" but they were still lacking in funds, according to choir member Aaron White.<sup>8</sup> White wrote to Bernstein without Braslavsky's knowledge, requesting Bernstein's assistance in raising the remainder of the money. Bernstein replied that he would like to help.<sup>9</sup> Braslavsky then wrote to Bernstein, apologizing for White's letter, of which he had no previous knowledge: "I am positively against solicitations of any kind"; but he did request Bernstein's advice on publishers.<sup>10</sup> Several biographies confirm Bernstein's aid in publishing this work by Braslavsky, but it should be noted that the effort to do so began with the choir.

The *Un'saneh Tokef* prayer serves as a vivid climax to the High Holiday liturgy. Rabbi Kazis, a former spiritual leader of Mishkan Tefila, observes:

The dramatic effect of (the) **UNESANEH TOKEF** [*sic*] at the High Holy Day Services is of such intensity that the Congregation is literally enraptured by its majestic grandeur and surpassing beauty. Its inspiring music is so perfectly adapted to the meaning of the prayer that one experiences what the late Abraham Joshua Heschel described as the essence of worship, "a sense of ineffable awe."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Congregation Mishkan Tefila, 1858-1983* (Stoughton, MA: Alpine Press, 1984), 82. This version is twenty-six pages long. Today, the somewhat shorter work, which, other than text, bears no resemblance to the above-mentioned piece, is usually performed on the second day of Rosh Hashanah at Mishkan Tefila. It is so popular that congregants grouse if another version is performed in its place. "The Music of Mishkan Tefila," Draft II, 21, Archive of Mishkan Tefila, Braslavsky box. Author Alexandra Scheibler incorrectly notes that Bernstein helped Braslavsky publish his *Priestly Blessing*. She does not state specifically which one she means, as Braslavsky wrote a few different versions, and she also confuses that title with *Un'saneh Tokef*. Alexandra Scheibler, "*Ich glaube an den Menschen*": *Leonard Bernsteins religiöse Haltung im Spiegel seiner Werke* (Hildesheim, Germany: Olms, 2001), 37.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Sarna, "Before *West Side Story*: Leonard Bernstein's Boston," Class interviews online, February 14, 2006, <http://my.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=bernstein>. Sarna also penned an article on the Braslavsky-Bernstein relationship, which served in part as inspiration for the present author's dissertation. See Sarna, "Leonard Bernstein and the Boston Jewish Community of His Youth: The Influence of Solomon Braslavsky, Herman Rubenovitz, and Congregation Mishkan Tefila," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 3, no. 1 (February 2009): 35-46.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Aaron White to Leonard Bernstein, August 18, 1961, Leonard Bernstein Collection, correspondence, box 9, folder 42, Library of Congress.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Solomon Braslavsky to Leonard Bernstein, November 8, 1961, Leonard Bernstein Collection, correspondence, box 9, folder 42, Library of Congress.

<sup>11</sup> Rabbi Israel J. Kazis, "Eulogy Delivered in Tribute to the Beloved Memory of Professor Solomon G. Braslavsky," *Temple Mishkan Tefila News* (June 1975): 11, Archive of Mishkan Tefila, Braslavsky box. Dr. Raphael Finkel observes that the *Un'saneh Tokef* prayer was written around the same time as the plainchant tune "Dies Irae" (thirteenth century) and shares similar themes ("*tuba mirum*" versus "*Shofar Gadol*"). See also Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 252-255, as quoted in Neil Gillman, "Reading

An explanatory note by Rabbi Morris Silverman inside the front cover of the published piece stresses the prayer's importance:

For centuries the *Un'saneh Tokef*, chanted on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (Jewish New Year and Day of Atonement) has stirred our forefathers. It epitomizes the central theme of the High Holidays and the Jewish philosophy of life. Tradition ascribes this prayer to Rabbi Amnon of Mayence who, it is said, uttered it in his last moments as he lay dying in martyrdom for affirming his faith in Israel's God. It makes us sense the reality of a Day of Judgment on which God opens the books containing in our own handwriting the complete record of the past year. He reviews our deeds and determines the destiny of every living soul.<sup>12</sup>

In view of the central place this text occupies in the holiest services of the Jewish year, composers who choose to set it to music do so in a solemn and reverential fashion.

Braslavsky's setting is often referred to as his "most acclaimed work."<sup>13</sup> While exhibiting a more mature style, it shares many characteristics of his earlier compositions, theatrically utilizing extremes of register and dynamics, a variety of textures, and a text-driven formal construction. Its serious and stately nature bring to mind a quotation by Jonathan Sarna regarding Jewish choral music in the twentieth century: "In America . . . choir music combined with grand styles of synagogue architecture, formal garb, and an enhanced emphasis on decorum to shape a refined, elevated atmosphere, one that reflected Jews' rising status in society and sought to bestir worshippers to high-minded thoughts, introspection, and moral improvement."<sup>14</sup>

Braslavsky's composition divides the lengthy prose into segments that are through-composed, often progressing from section to section without transitions. However, there are a few cases in which motives repeat, creating unity between portions. The most prominent of these motives, which opens the work, contains a classic chromatic descending bass line reminiscent of many laments dating back to the Baroque Period. It acts as a *basso ostinato*, and at first it seems as if the entire piece is constructed in similar manner. Although remnants of the motive will continue to appear occasionally throughout, Braslavsky gives up using it as an *ostinato* in measure 40, just before beginning a new section. The motive in fact shares the same harmonic structure as Beethoven's Thirty-Two Variations, WoO 80 (1806).<sup>15</sup> It seems quite possible that Braslavsky, with his vast knowledge of classical music, was aware of Beethoven's work, but it is unclear if this likeness is intentional or not (**Example 1**).

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Liturgy Through the Spectacles of Theology: The Case of U-n'taneh Tokef," *Journal of Synagogue Music* 33 (Fall 2008): 48.

<sup>12</sup> Explanatory note by Rabbi Morris Silverman, Solomon Braslavsky, *Un'saneh Tokef* (New York: Amberson Enterprises, 1962), n.p.

<sup>13</sup> "Temple Mishkan Tefila / Publications / Yearbook (1959-1960)," Folder I-462, American Jewish Historical Society, Newton, Massachusetts. There is only one known recording of this work, from High Holiday services, September 19, 1953, at Mishkan Tefila.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Sarna, "The Question of Music in American Judaism: Reflections at 350 Years," *American Jewish History* 91 (June 2003): 199.

<sup>15</sup> Per Dr. Richard Domek: WoO="Work Without Opus" in German.

Lento

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Organ

Ped.

Un-e-sa-neh to-kef k' du-shas ha-

Un-e-sa-neh to-kef k' du-shas ha-

Un-e-sa-neh to-kef k' du-shas ha-

Un-e-sa-neh to-kef k' du-shas ha-

mp cresc.

**Example 1.** Opening of Solomon Braslavsky's *Un'saneh Tokef*.<sup>16</sup>

Part of the appeal of Braslavsky's *Un'saneh Tokef* lies in its variety of textures, which range from cantorial solo to unison/octave choral writing, and from homophony to imitative counterpoint. When Braslavsky wants to make a bold statement, he either uses unison /octave choral writing at a soft dynamic (as in Example 1—reminiscent of Louis Lewandowsky's famous setting of Halleluyah--Psalm 150),<sup>17</sup> or he uses extremes of register with *fortissimo* dynamics and homophonic part writing. For classical music, the work is not overly challenging, but for the average amateur synagogue choir it is quite demanding because of its length, contrapuntal complexity and extremes of range and dynamic. One of its most complicated passages is a four-part fugue that illustrates both Braslavsky's compositional prowess and knowledge of earlier styles. It begins in measure 128 (**Example 2**).

<sup>16</sup> New York: Amberson Enterprises, 1962, now defunct, score available at HUC-Cincinnati Library.

<sup>17</sup> Louis Lewandowsky, *Todah W'simrah*, 1876-1882 in two volumes, no. 202.



Lif - kod al tze - vo , mo - rom ba - din ba -  
 Moderato

lif - kod al tze -  
 din lif - kod al tze - vo mo - rom ba - din al tze -

vo mo - rom ba - din ba - din lif - kod al tze -  
 vo mo - rom ba - din tze - vo mo - rom

lif - kod al tze - vo mo - rom ba - din ba -  
 vo mo - rom ba - din al tze - vo mo - rom ba - din  
 ba - din ba - din al tze - vo mo -

Ped.

Example 2. Braslavsky's *Un'saneh Tokef*, beginning of the fugue, measures 128-142.

This composition fuses Synagogue prayer modes with Western diatonic harmonies. Composed in the key of C minor with some chromatic inflections, it could have been written by a 19-century German composer, reflecting the influence of Braslavsky’s Viennese education. Again, it is worth noting here the similarity to Beethoven’s Thirty-two Variations of 1806. The middle section of *Un’saneh Tokef*, marked *Largo*, modulates to F harmonic minor, which, of course, bears some kinship to *Ahavah rabbah* synagogue mode on C. The latter makes a brief appearance immediately preceding the *Largo* section during an organ interlude (see **Example 3**). Note the presence of the lowered second and raised third scale degrees and the tritone between E-natural and B-flat throughout this example. Braslavsky will return to the *Ahavah rabbah* mode at the very end of the piece.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for an organ interlude. The first system consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) with a grand staff bracket. The music is in C minor. The first measure has a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second measure has a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking. The third measure has a piano (*p*) dynamic. There are triplet markings (*3*) over the eighth notes in the first and third measures. A marking 'Man.' is written below the first measure. The second system also consists of two staves. The first measure has a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second measure has a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic. The music continues with various note values and rests.

**Example 3.** Braslavsky’s *Un’saneh Tokef*, organ interlude in *Ahavah rabbah* synagogue mode on C, measures 109-114.

Approximately two-thirds of the way through, the piece modulates to F major in a section marked “*Pastorale*,”<sup>18</sup> which is entirely unlike anything that preceded it (see **Example 4**). This occurs appropriately, at the text *k’vakoras roei ed-ro* (“as a shepherd musters his flock”)—the key itself evokes a pastoral mood—as in Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony. Braslavsky’s use of a *pianissimo* dynamic, trills, triplets and flute-like grace notes reinforce the bucolic feeling. However, when the same words repeat in the next section with cantor and imitative choral counterpoint, the music has lost its innocent quality. Here it might still suggest sheep but resignedly, rather than happily, marching along to their fate. The music mirrors the text, which now states that God counts and records “the soul of every living being.” As if to emphasize the seriousness of what’s being described, the key returns to C, and the music’s employment of imitation and voice pairing seems to indicate the ovine quality of human nature: one person blindly following behind the next.

<sup>18</sup> This section also references the *Adonai malakh* mode, with its flattened seventh scale degree.

\* Pastorale

**Example 4.** Braslavsky's *Un'saneh Tokef*, section marked "Pastorale," measures 177-183.

A less dramatic example of word painting occurs in measures 56-59. The text states, *v'chosev v'chosem v'sofer umoneh* ("[God] records, inscribes, seals and counts"), accompanied by an *accelerando* and *crescendo*. Here we have an anthropomorphic image of the Creator, accelerating the pace of His writing in the Book of Life, seemingly overwhelmed by the volume of work that lies ahead (see **Example 5**). Braslavsky does not use this literalist compositional technique very often, but when he does, it tends toward the obvious. Other than the previously mentioned examples, there is a general sense of majesty, awe, and reverence. It is interesting to note that in an age when Ashkenazic Hebrew routinely imitated the penultimate stresses of colloquial Yiddish, Braslavsky studiously featured the final accents which are so typical of spoken Hebrew (*v-cho-SEV / v'cho-SEM / v'so-FER / umo-NEH*).

de - a vo - ed v' cho - sev v' cho - sem v' so -

fer u - mo - neh v' so - fer u - mo - neh v' so -

*accel. e cresc.*

*mf colla voce*

*a tempo*

*mf*

**Example 5.** Braslavsky's correctly accented Hebrew, *Un'saneh Tokef*, measures 56-59 (V'cho-SEV / v'cho-SEM / v'so-FER / umo-NEH).

A striking inclusion of what we might call High Holiday “onomatopoeia” appears in the organ part of measures 84-87 (see **Example 6**). Braslavsky clearly indicates this section as “Shofar,” and imitates the distinctive notes of that instrument, which are limited mostly to the intervals of a perfect fourth or a fifth. This music precedes the text *Uv'shofar godol yitoka* (“On the great *shofar* it will be sounded”). Braslavsky has left no doubt as to his intentions here, labeling the three different types of shofar calls (*Tekiya / Shevarim / Teruah*) and having the accompaniment quote each motive.

Shofar

Tekiya Shevarim Teruah

**Example 6.** Braslavsky's onomatopoeitic imitation of the three “Shofar” calls (*Tekiya / Shevarim / Teruah*), *Un'saneh Tokef*, measures 84-87.

It seems surprising that Braslavsky did not write more idiomatically for the organ, there are no registration indications in his compositions. Perhaps he omitted these markings because the organ was not his first instrument, or possibly so that *Un'saneh Tokef* could be accompanied on a piano if no organ were available. Moreover, Braslavsky may not have wanted to exclude

less experienced organists, knowing that more advanced musicians would most likely *improvise additional embellishments*. A more plausible explanation would be that Braslavsky played the organ while conducting a choir, and had no choice but to keep the organ part less complex.

Braslavsky indicates that the lowest bass pitch in *Un'saneh Tokef* is to be played by the organ pedal. The implication, at least to this writer, is that although he knew the composition will work nicely with piano accompaniment, the majesty and awe that it calls for really require organ. Only a few passages, such as the Pastorale section, are somewhat more virtuosic and require the occasional playing of sextuplet figurations.

In fact, the rhythm of this work is the least complicated aspect about it. Fairly square rhythms, such as ♩ ♪ ♪, are relatively common. However, as the texture and dynamics increase in complexity, the rhythm uses more triplet patterns, such as in the instrumental passage from measures 108-127; the key change to F minor also occurs here. Triplet eighth-note patterns serve to connect sections, the organ interlude to the Largo being a prime example. For Braslavsky, this triplet pattern seems to be closely associated with cantorial improvisational style, as he uses it in cantorial settings such as the *Birchat Kohanim* (Priestly Benediction, 1941). In *Un'saneh Tokef*, after returning for a while to more square rhythms in the Largo (measures 114-127), the rhythm again becomes complex at the Pastorale (measures 176-185). Most of the piece is written in common time, in the fugue, the meter changes to  $\frac{3}{4}$ , and in the finale, to  $\frac{3}{8}$ . For this pivotal moment of the High Holiday service, Braslavsky focused most of his attention on melody, harmony, texture and word painting, and less on rhythm and meter. Above all, this composition demonstrates his need to infuse an element of theatricality into liturgical music.

It is apparent that Braslavsky consciously chose specific prayer modes and Western tonalities because of their appropriateness to the underlying poetic text. His other goal was to include a variety of musical styles, as long as they were “good and consistently Jewish.” This exemplar of his synagogue settings is clearly Jewish, not just because of its Hebrew texts. Intended for use in public worship (*t'fillah b'tsibbur*), its choice of prayer modes reflects traditional Ashkenazic usage. As do most of his compositions, it meets the specific needs of his home synagogue, Mishkan Tefila, which primarily featured cantor, organ and choir.

Even though *Un'saneh Tokef* and other of Braslavsky's compositions are largely forgotten today, they remain important as remnants of a more theatrical style of synagogue composition in America, a time when the liturgy was rendered in a more classical performance style. While his *Un'saneh Tokef* may be overly challenging for today's synagogue choirs to perform and today's congregations to stand while the Ark is open, it is this author's contention that at least a portion of its music should be rotated once again into the liturgy of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, in order to properly reflect the awe and solemnity of its universal theological message.

*For over a quarter-century, Ann Glazer Niren has served on the Music faculty at Indiana University Southeast where she teaches all the Upper-level Music Literature/History courses. This article is adapted from a chapter of her 2013 dissertation at the University of Kentucky, which she plans to publish as a book in the not-too-distant future. Her article, “Jewish Elements in Leonard Bernstein's Hashkiveinu,” appeared in the September 2015 issue of JSM.*

# A New Look at the Mystery-word, *Selah*

By Daniel Tunkel

The *Tanakh* contains many words that are difficult to translate, and some which defy translation altogether. Generations of Midrash, scholarship and interpretation offer us suggestions for meanings in such cases. This article focuses on one such word: *selah*. The pretext for including this essay in a journal that is predominantly concerned with Jewish music is that prevailing views on the meaning of *selah* converge around the idea that it is a musical term of some sort. I will beg to differ. And in presenting what I think is a more logical way of looking at this word, I am going to indulge in some speculation as well. I expect readers to have their differences. But let's at least start a humble debate about an interesting idea that, so far as I am aware, is both original and plausible.

## Preliminaries

*Selah* appears 74 times in the *Tanakh*. Seventy-one of these are in the Book of Psalms, with the remaining three in the last chapter of the Book of *Habakkuk*. Because of the attachment of *selah* to so many of the Psalms, and because the Psalter was itself regarded from ancient times as a corpus of material performed as song (not merely as poetry or prayer) in the Temple, it might be logical to suppose that the text as we have it will contain evidence of music and musical performance from those ancient times.<sup>1</sup> Now, while this is a sound assumption insofar as expressions like *Mizmor shir*<sup>2</sup> or *Lam'natsei'ah*<sup>3</sup> are concerned, and it probably applies to vocabulary such as *al ha-gittit*<sup>4</sup> and *al hashminit*<sup>5</sup> as well, I do not see that this forces a conclusion that *selah* falls into the same category.

Incidentally, whether such vocabulary that has entered the Psalter, and which is now faithfully read along with each of these Psalms, was ever intended to be more than a marginal

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<sup>1</sup> Or it might not be, I suppose. Another point for discussion, though beyond the scope of this article, is the general proposition that our musical expectations of material in the *Tanakh* with which we presume a strong musical connotation is conditioned by what we would expect to find there, rather than what that material may have needed to support its supposedly musical purposes in ancient times. Today, we have staff notation for the majority of music (though even this is insufficient for much contemporary electronic material). Medieval monks made do with neumes, and for our Scripture readings we have *t'amim*: a system of symbols connoting fixed musical groupings in different modalities for each of the various Book-groupings, and although neither neumes nor *t'amim* would be particularly useful for notating classical music, they served their investors well enough. Maybe the same holds true for ancient texts as well, and we should not jump to conclusions about their musical value (or values) that are overtly based on our expectations of musical performance notation.

<sup>2</sup> *Mizmor shir* and *Shir mizmor* are very common openers to Psalms, and the conventional view is that they are likely to refer to a particular style of singing or performance.

<sup>3</sup> *Lam'natsei'ah* is conventionally understood to be a direction to the director or organizer of the Temple chorus and instrumentalists (many of whom played both roles). What it might mean in *Habakkuk* 3:19 is anybody's guess, given that you would expect a musical direction, would you not, to precede the material to which it relates (i.e., "stringed instruments").

<sup>4</sup> Found in Psalms 8, 81 and 84. Thought to be musical instrument of some sort, which Rashi opines to have come from the (Philistine) town of *Gat*, hence the name.

<sup>5</sup> Found in Psalms 6 and 12, and thus supposedly an eight-stringed instrument of some sort.

stage direction is also unclear. Again, Midrash and medieval commentary treats these terms as having as much interpretational significance as the core text. All of these words have *t'amim* provided for them, so that in days gone by when Jewish communities may have chanted Psalms using their own pertinent system of *t'amim*—those of the so-called Poetical Books *Sifrei emet* (an acronym for *Iyyov-mishlei-t'hillim*)—these were fully a part of the public reading.<sup>6</sup>

One other prefatory remark: we should not be misled into drawing conclusions as to the meaning of *selah* in *Psalms* (or *Habakkuk*) by the meaning that the word seems to have acquired by Talmudic times. It appears in a number of formulae in liturgical use from the end of the Second Temple period and through the period of the Talmud itself, where it is simply intended as an emphatic. Thus, for example, in the formula recited after the conclusion of study of a tractate from the Talmud, the response to the blessing is not a mere *amein*, but the very labored *amein-amein-amein, selah va'ed* (“amen-amen-amen, *selah* forever”).<sup>7</sup>

### Why do we have the Book of *Psalms* at all?

**P**salmody differs as text from the majority of the Books of the *Tanakh* in several ways. First, although certain Psalms refer in passing to actual or supposed historical events, the text is not narrative. Secondly, although there are in instances elsewhere in the *Tanakh* of prayer/petition,<sup>8</sup> and praise/thanks-giving<sup>9</sup> that read like Psalms. On the whole, however, passages in the *Tanakh* of what people said in prayer are either not documented at all,<sup>10</sup> or else very simply stated.<sup>11</sup> The idea of prayer as an approach to God through the medium of complex imagery, intended to stir the emotions (and, moreover, to stir the emotions of those who listen to or participate in *public* worship) is largely absent from the *Tanakh*—except in the Book of *Psalms*.

This underscores a further point. The Israelite worship rite (as distinguished from those of individuals in early Israelite history (such as the Patriarchs) commences with the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). Aside from the apparently spontaneous singing of Moses' Song (Exodus 15:1-19) at the Sea of Reeds,<sup>12</sup> there is no ritual activity among the Israelites under Moses until the

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<sup>6</sup> From which we may, perhaps, draw some conclusions as to the dating of the *t'amim* appended to these texts—if, as I suspect, the earliest versions of these texts would have been understood by their draftsmen as containing stage directions that were quite distinct from the core texts themselves. But this is a subject for a different article.

<sup>7</sup> For a perhaps better example, see the terminal paragraph of the *Hoda'ah* (Acknowledgement) blessing in the Daily *Amidah: ArtScroll Ahavas Shalom Siddur* (1984; p.114—with *selah* left untranslated on facing page 115); *Siddur Sim Shalom* (1985; p.176—with *selah* translated as “faithfully”); *Siddur Mishkan T'filah*, (2007; p.94—with *selah* translated as “forever”).

<sup>8</sup> For example, I Samuel 1:1-10 (Hannah's prayer while consecrating her son to God), or Jonah 2:3-9 (Jonah's prayer from the belly of the great fish).

<sup>9</sup> For example, David's two prayers in II Samuel 22:2-51 and I Chronicles 16:8-36 (victory over the Philistines and relocating the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem), which form the basis for Psalms 28 and 105, respectively.

<sup>10</sup> For example, in Genesis 25:21 we are told merely that Isaac prayed to (or entreated) God, not what he said (maybe this is axiomatic).

<sup>11</sup> For example, in Judges 13:8, Manoah simply asks that the “man of God” should come again.

<sup>12</sup> Literal meaning of *Yam suf* (Exodus 13:18), yet another subject for an essay in its own right. My view, in summary, is that aside from some of the opening words, the Song was perhaps created *after* the event—not long



*Mishkan* starts to function. And that rite, once it is inaugurated, is clearly the province of the family of Aaron, aided in its more menial respects by the other Levites. Indeed, there are numerous references to how the general Israelite mass was excluded from the standard ritual.<sup>13</sup> Once the Israelites entered the Promised Land the *Mishkan* abode at Shekhem for a while, but eventually (and for many years), at Shiloh. All the evidence that we have from the pre-Solomonic texts is that the *Mishkan* operated as a center for personal-or-private pilgrimage. The Ark remained there, except when needed to lead the Israelites into battle, when it was borrowed (and temporarily lost to the Philistines before its return), and we have a clear picture of how individuals would come to make their petitionary offerings under the supervision of the ministering priests.<sup>14</sup> The inference is that there was no public spectacle at Shiloh. And because there was no public spectacle, there was no need, yet, for public ritual either.

Inauguration of Solomon's Temple changed all this. The sacrificial ritual, the functions of the Priests and Levites and the general order of service probably transposed from Shiloh to Jerusalem easily enough. But for Jerusalem to become a true center of pilgrimage, to which Israelites would come because of the institution of commandments that they do so (in abeyance pending the confirmation that Jerusalem was to be the political and religious capital), demanded something far more grand than the limited personal rite of Shiloh. The Temple was to be a public place of worship, and this called for a spectacle worthy of the aspiration. Here is where, it seems to me, the need to dramatize psalmody first arose. Witnessing the public recitation of Psalms gave those coming to Jerusalem access to spirituality—in juxtaposition with the Priestly sacrificial rite—in which they were still only entitled to very limited involvement. So it was that a Psalter had to be assembled.

### What do we know (or conjecture) about the origin of the Psalms?

**T**he Book of Psalms has 150 chapters.<sup>15</sup> The shortest (Psalm 117) is two verses long, while the longest (Psalm 119) is 197 verses long. Apocryphal sources (including the Dead Sea Scrolls) offer parts, or all, of the text of several more which, for some reason, failed to

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after, but sufficiently so that a master poet could create a triumphant record in verse. Aside from knowing that the seventh day after the first Passover was the crossing day itself, and that the seventh day thereafter was a festival, we know nothing about how this major event in our forebears' history was marked. I would suggest that it was celebrated, maybe from as soon as its first anniversary, with this poem as a religiously composed verse in praise of the deliverance at the Sea of Reeds.

<sup>13</sup> The words *v'haz-zar hak-kareiv yummat* ("and the stranger that comes near shall be put to death"; Numbers 1:51, 3:10, 3:38 and 18:7) concerning aspects of the separateness of the *Mishkan*, could hardly be clearer. Professor Richard Elliott Friedmann in his *Commentary on the Torah* (2003; p.513) comments on Numbers 25:8, in relation to the zealotry of Pinchas, that the sinful Zimri and his Midianite consort were in fact performing their sexual act within the campus of the *Mishkan* itself, which would presumably have given Pinchas—an Aaronite Priest, or any of his immediate kin—the right to take the action that he did.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, I Samuel 1-2.

<sup>15</sup> Although various Midrashic sources wish to reduce this to 147—the number of years of the Patriarch Jacob's life), and find devices in the text to conflate certain Psalms in order to achieve this. See, for example, *The Living Nach: Scriptures* (xxxiv) and the sources given there.

find a home in the canon of the Psalter.<sup>16</sup>

According to some traditional sources, King David composed the whole Book of *Psalms* (even those not bearing his name, or those attributed to others). This view jars with other sources that honor all of the express attributions (finding characters in biblical history to attach to the names given in the preambles to some of the Psalms, and with yet others which insist that some Psalms were composed by earlier characters in biblical history (for example, Psalm 92 by Adam, Psalm 90 by Moses and Psalm 89 by Abraham).

There are clear historical problems with much of this. Leaving aside the fact that Adam and Abraham would not have known how to write anything because they lived in pre-literate times, those who would ascribe authorship of the entire Psalter to David cannot offer a plausible basis for his having had the prescience to compose Psalms like 126 or 137, which clearly relate to the Babylonian Exile and the hope for redemption from it. Of course, for those for whom faith in the prophetic powers of King David is a supreme value, mere historical observation of this sort are of little use. Anybody of that position reading this will find my suggestions rather disappointing.

Yet there may reasonably be some basis for David having composed some if not all of the Psalms that actually bear his name. Several Psalms are identified not only with his name but with an event in the course of his rather active life.<sup>17</sup> If there is a basis for ascribing *any* of the Psalter to the authorship of David, then this material existed as much as 50 to 60 years prior to the dedication by Solomon of the Temple.<sup>18</sup>

Of the 150 chapters in *Psalms*, 73 are attributed to David in their titles and two more contain text that one has to assume is intended to identify David as author. Of the remaining 75, it is worth noting that:

Psalms 42, 44-49, 84, 85, 87 and 88 (11 in all) are attributed to *B'nei korah*;

Psalms 73-83 (11 in all) are attributed to Asaph; and

There are a handful of others that are attributed to others by name (e.g. Psalm 127 to Solomon). However, a significant number of Psalms are not attributed at all. According to the tradition, the "*B'nei korah*" were, literally, the sons of Korah, who we are told were not swallowed up by the ground when their father and his followers were, after their unsuccessful opposition to Moses.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Whether, for its psalmodic qualities, we should consider the third chapter of Habakkuk to be another "missing" Psalm is an issue to which I shall return, since it is central to the argument of this article.

<sup>17</sup> See specifically Psalms 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57 and possibly 58, 59, 60, 63. Conversely, David is supposed to have composed Psalm 30 in expectation that it would be sung at the dedication of the Temple to be built by his son; and the same could presumably be said of Psalm 122.

<sup>18</sup> Historians are generally agreed that Solomon's reign commenced in c. 970 BCE, and that the Temple was dedicated in c. 965 BCE. David's reign commenced in c. 1010 BCE, though he was about 30 at the time and many of his tribulations (to some of which various Psalms are supposedly connected) took place before then.

<sup>19</sup> Numbers 26:12. Their names are given as Assir, Elkanah and Aviasaf. There is a somewhat farfetched Rashi explanation that they were in fact part of the contingent swallowed up by the ground, but that they survived this, through the expedient of singing Psalms to praise God, while the remainder of the family along with the followers were indeed consumed. A plausible alternative explanation to the assignation of the *B'nei korah* name to these

The “Asaph” of the Psalms is supposedly a prophet from King David’s time, who is named in I Chronicles 25:6. I have some alternative conjectures for both of these attributions.

### Where is *selah* found in Psalms?

This is a very important question as well, because its use is far from universal, and we should be able to draw some conclusions from the answer. There are 71 occurrences, which are divided between just 39 of the 150 Psalms (26% of the total), as follows:

Psalm	3	3 occurrences
Psalm	4	2 occurrences
Psalm	7	1 occurrence
Psalm	9	2 occurrences
Psalm	20	1 occurrence
Psalm	21	1 occurrence
Psalm	24	2 occurrences
Psalm	32	3 occurrences
Psalm	39	2 occurrences
Psalm	44	1 occurrence
Psalm	46	3 occurrences
Psalm	47	1 occurrence
Psalm	48	1 occurrence
Psalm	49	2 occurrences
Psalm	50	1 occurrence
Psalm	52	2 occurrences
Psalm	54	1 occurrence
Psalm	55	2 occurrences
Psalm	57	2 occurrences
Psalm	59	2 occurrences
Psalm	60	1 occurrence
Psalm	61	1 occurrence
Psalm	62	2 occurrences
Psalm	66	3 occurrences
Psalm	67	2 occurrences
Psalm	68	3 occurrences
Psalm	75	1 occurrence
Psalm	76	2 occurrences
Psalm	77	3 occurrences
Psalm	81	1 occurrence
Psalm	82	1 occurrence
Psalm	83	1 occurrence
Psalm	84	2 occurrences
Psalm	85	1 occurrence

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Psalms is that they were chanted by Levites descended from the Korah family. See generally the notes to the opening of Psalm 42 in *The Living Nach: The Sacred Writings*, p.78.

Psalm 87	2 occurrences
Psalm 88	2 occurrences
Psalm 89	4 occurrences
Psalm 140	3 occurrences
Psalm 143	1 occurrence

Looking at this list, we see that 16 of the 39 Psalms display the Mystery-word just once, while one Psalm does so four times. With just one exception, the word is always last in the sentence.

### ***Selah* and performance—a new approach**

Prevailing wisdom has it that the word is a performance direction of some sort. The inference drawn from its closing of sentences in all but one of the 71 occurrences in the Psalter is generally that it represented a type of musical cadence or *fermata* or accent point (say, a cymbal-clash). Maybe it did. Yet even if one considers that the theory I am about to propose holds water, there is no reason why *selah* might not have become a musical-or-performance direction once the Psalms themselves were pressed into ritual use. We have no way of knowing, because there are few if any records of musical performance in the First Temple, and these generally come from the *Tanakh* in parallel historical terms: I Kings and I Chronicles. We really have very little evidence of which Psalms were used in the First Temple, and such evidence as we have for the use of Psalms in the ritual of the Second Temple is itself likely to be quite late.<sup>20</sup> Merely because the Mishnah records a certain ritual or psalmodic usage does not even determine that the particular practice was consistent in the time of Zerubbabel’s Second Temple (late-6<sup>th</sup> century BCE) and it certainly can’t help in pressing a case for usage in Solomon’s First Temple (10<sup>th</sup> century BCE).

My suggestion is, I freely admit, no more likely to be substantiated than theories concerning *selah* as a musical-or-performance term. There are various things which drive me to consider a non-musical (non-performance-related) solution, however. Chief among these is that I think there has been a tendency to assume rather more structure, organization and above all, originality for the First Temple service than was likely to have been the case. Consideration of the significance of Temple music and ritual developed in a much later age when musical performance (as well as the ritual structure of most organized religions) was defined by structure. Although I cannot prove this, I think this must have influenced much of the thinking about the Temple and its service. While I subscribe to the idea of public spectacle as a basis for the Psalter, and would assume this reached an apogee during the heyday of the Second Temple in late-Hasmonean and Mishnaic times, I discourage the idea of rushing to any conclusion that this was the case in Solomon’s days. Musical performance most probably would have been much more free-form, and the music itself would have seemed quite chaotic and cacophonous by later standards (and our own more modern ones). It is doubtful that structured performance directions

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<sup>20</sup> See for example Mishnah *Tamid* 7:4, recording for posterity the Psalms associated by the Levites with the days of the week. When those Psalms were chosen (and by whom) is not known.

such as those that pepper the scores of contemporary classical music would have meant very much.

And even if these *selah* occurrences were used (or adapted) by Temple musicians as accent points or cadences, why would this not have been a more uniform matter? Why do we find these in only a small proportion of the Psalms (and what are they doing in Habakkuk, for that matter)?

I have already suggested that any credence given to Davidic authorship of any of the Psalms dates the texts in question to a number of years before the First Temple was built. But there is more to it than that. Solomon's exploits as a builder (and not just of his Temple) are well documented in the *Tanakh*. Allusions to his interest in getting singers together are found in Ecclesiastes (although this is only an attribution to Solomon, of course).<sup>21</sup> But generally, little of the other aspects of the project management that went into the Temple is addressed.

So let us conjecture what might have been involved as essential aspects of this novel and colossal project. As well as needing a building and a staff, a structure such as the Temple needed an order of service. Now consider also that this 10th century First Temple was a very late arrival on the cultic scene. Many of the Israelites' allies and foes alike had temples and cultic centers for hundreds of years by then. These would have had their own rituals and, I conjecture, their own psalmody, as well as their own deities (or manifestations of an El-deity as supreme in their pantheon).

Solomon and his advisers were charged with getting Israel's first-ever worship center ready for action, and I think it quite likely that to simplify the scale of this undertaking, they borrowed material in use in other cults' temples and sanitized it, making it ready for use in God's Holy Place. Much material would have been readily available (and, perchance, quite well known). It would also have given the Israelite Temple something of an ecumenical feel, so that visiting members of the non-Israelite nations would have had something with which to identify. And above all, texts that dealt with the philosophy and theology of gods in general, rather than with the God of Israelite history, could have easily been given a basis in the Israelite nation's songs. The transformation from "O Ashur, how wonderful you are" and "O YHVH, how wonderful You are" is achieved through the simple replacement of one name with another.

So my conjecture is that Solomon's editorial team collected materials which they could add to a psalter, ready for use on Day One of the Temple's life. And since these materials were neither from Israelite writers (David, perhaps, or Solomon himself) nor from received Israelite tradition, the advisers cleaned them up. And as they did so, they marked the texts in question with an *imprimatur* (if I may employ an anachronism to give clarity to my point), to confirm that they met the standard for inclusion. I think *selah* is that *imprimatur*, and what is more, I think we

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<sup>21</sup> Ecclesiastes 2:8, where the phrase *sharim v'sharot* intriguingly refers either to a mixed singing ensemble or to separate groups of male and female singers (unless you follow the *ArtScroll Tanakh*, which has deliberately and disgracefully mistranslated this as "musical instruments of all kinds," lest the text interfere with the narrow Orthodox Jewish dogma that women's voices should not be heard in song).

can find sufficient evidence in several of the Psalms that included the *selah* word to substantiate this theory.

### A first general (and reasonably familiar) example

From this point forward, I would recommend that readers use a Hebrew *Tanakh* as companion. This example is deliberately very familiar (at least to those readers who are also practitioners or followers of Daily Jewish prayer. I have kept the presentation simple here, by not including Hebrew type or direct quotations in Hebrew. I won't—and would not be able—to substantiate my theory by reference to each use of *selah*, but this one, from Psalm 84, is among the most obvious. The following verse opens the Psalm from daily Jewish use that is known as *Ashrei* (from its first word). Actually, the entirety of Psalm 145 is preceded by two verses that start with this word, including the final verse of Psalm 144. The practice of adding the verse I wish to examine—from Psalm 84—prior to this, is a long-standing tradition in Jewish private prayer and public worship, going back at least to Mishnaic times. Here it is (Psalm 84:5):

*Ashrei yosh'vei veitekha; od y'hal'lukha selah.*

Happy are they who dwell in Your house;  
they shall ever praise You *selah*.

In this instance I do not translate *selah*, just as traditional translation of the *Tanakh* also does not. But let us examine the syntax. The four middle words of this verse offer us a subject (*yosh'vei veitekha*—those who dwell in Your ((God's)) house), a verb with an object suffix (*y'hal'lukha*—shall praise You), and even an adverb (*od*—ever/always) for good measure. This is syntactically self-sufficient. It is reasonable that the opening word is ascribed a Hebrew meaning, and in Hebrew (i.e. in the final verse of Psalm 144, which immediately follows in the prayer liturgy), that meaning is “happy.” But is this a coincidence? For argument's sake I shall make the case for this to be a vocative of the deity name, Ashur (as in my “O Ashur, how wonderful you are”). And if this were so—and remember that that our context here is Psalm 84 (a Psalm from what I shall refer to as the *B'nei korah* sub-Psalter) from which this is taken—then might it have suited the editorship of the Psalter, taking on that entire text from an external source, to have emended the material by leaving us a palatable Hebrew meaning, and marked that emendation with *selah* at the end to demonstrate that the extraneous (heathen) meaning is duly forgiven? Could the original have actually meant: “O Ashur, those who dwell in your house shall forever praise you”? As a solitary example of this sort of occurrence, this alone would not found a theory; but there are traces of similar occurrences in other *selah*-Psalms.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> A good example is Psalm 48. The *selah* there appears early in the text, but the most interesting verse is the last, where the final words “... *al mut*” have not been satisfactorily explained. Most translations assume this means “surpassing death itself,” but that is the wrong form of the word taken from the Hebrew *mavet*, meaning death. Some commentaries suggest that the two words should be run together and rendered “... like children” (God leads us as if we were children); but that does not work either. What does work is if *Mut* refers to the Babylonian underworld deity, and the verse says that the God to Whom we (Israelites) pray carries us past *Mut*'s ministrations. Hence, *selah* is appended to allow the use of a Psalm originally intended for a rival cult which believed in a *Mut*-

### Some other thematic observances

Generally, Psalms that speak of Israelite experience do not include *selah*. Many Psalms mention specific events that are documented elsewhere in the *Tanakh*, and these, one assumes, were created by the Israelites (maybe by David, maybe not) to record their own past glories. *Selah*, according to my theory, does not belong to these texts as they come from within the fold; broadly speaking, one does not find *selah* used in these types of Psalms.

One does find *selah* in a range of Psalms that have no specific historical reference. They might mention a name of one of the Patriarchs, for example,<sup>23</sup> and they pretty much always have a reference to the name of God (either the YHVH form or one of the El-forms) that would have suited the purpose of Solomon's Temple service. But they are otherwise general statements of moral truth. While many Psalms falling into this category are likely also to have been of Israelite origin, others could have come from extraneous sources and simply been woven into the Psalter.

### A closer look at the *B'nei korah* and the *Asaph* Sub-Psalms

These two sections comprise 22 Psalms altogether, of which 15 carry *selah*, a total of 25 times in all (i.e. more than a third of all the usage the word gets). These merit a slightly closer look. If there is soundness to the theory that a Psalm with *selah* is lifted from other sects' worship rites, then possibly the material in some of these 22 Psalms can offer us guidance as to where they were lifted from.

Traditional commentary assumes that the Korahite family survived and were among the foremost Israelite Psalmists. Perhaps so. But here is a teasing sort of alternative. The first mention of the name Korah in the Torah is much earlier, where it appears in a genealogy of Esau. Esau has a grandson by this name (the name Korah, incidentally, simply means a person who is bald or balding). Genesis 36 affords a complex set of data for Esau's descendants, all connected with the development of the clan known to posterity as Edom. The Israelites are told not to interfere with the Edomites, whose destiny is as mapped out by God as their own. Yet, under Davidic rule, Edom was incorporated (by force) into the united monarchy of Israel. Later, the province rebelled.

If David absorbed Edom into Israel, did his son also absorb some of Edom's psalms and hymns? Might there have been a policy of such direct borrowing of psalms from other local cults, in order to give the Temple's rite a more universal appeal? Or does the taking over of one's former enemy's worship texts represent instead a form of intellectual subjugation?<sup>24</sup> Is the attribution to "*B'nei korah*" in fact a coded way of saying that this material—much of it replete

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deity. However, again, a Hebraicized reading of "... *al mut*", is just about transformed enough for the name not to require censoring as well.

<sup>23</sup> For a very similar example, see the two *selah* usages in Psalm 24.

<sup>24</sup> Perhaps akin to the manner in which a German army song called *Lili Marlene* was taken over (and somewhat rewritten) by the English army fighting the Germans in North Africa in 1942-43.

with *selah* usages that my theory would place with non-Israelite authorship—derives from cultic worship in Edom? Do the texts offer any clues in this respect? If so, what exactly might we expect from Edomite psalmody? Edom and Israel shared ancestry up to the point of Esau and Jacob parting. So references to Jacob of an ironic nature might be expected; references suggesting that Edom craves what Jacob was given by Israel’s successes under David and (especially) Solomon. Thus we find, for example in Psalm 44:5:

*Atah hu malki elohim tsaveih y’shu’ot ya’akov.*

You it is, my King, God, Who orders Jacob’s salvations.

To an ancient Israelite, this is a statement of the obvious: Praise to God Who dictates the successes of Jacob (personally or, by reference, to his descendants). That would make it easy to absorb into the new Psalter—indeed—so easy that this Psalm does not even need a *selah* to take it forward. But when spoken with the feelings of an Edomite who venerates his deity (perhaps an El-form deity similar, at least in sound, to Israel’s own), it would offer an ironic twist, reflecting an unmistakable disparity in the treatment of Esau and Jacob all those years before. And in the overtly militaristic Psalm 46, we find the following verse twice:

*Adonai ts’va’ot immanu misgav lanu, elohei ya’akov, selah.*

The Lord of Hosts is with us, Jacob’s God is our refuge, *selah*.

That is a fairly traditional translation. In reciting it, might an Edomite have intended it to mean something along the lines of: “May [God]<sup>25</sup> be with us as our refuge just as He is for Jacob.” Another familiar verse, which is recited in Jewish practice before the Shofar sounding on Rosh Hashanah, appears in Psalm 47:

*Yivhar lanu et nahalateinu, et g’on ya’akov asher aheiv, selah.*

He will choose for us our inheritance, the excellence of Jacob whom He loved, *selah*.

Again, from the mouth of an Israelite, this is classic and unproblematic praise. From an Edomite’s world view, it carries a distinctly ironic tone. Consider: Edom (Esau) understood that Jacob had indeed received excellence, whereas his own portion effectively amounted to whatever pickings remained.<sup>26</sup> Some further suggestions to support the theory are summarized in the footnote below.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Occurrence of the Israelite deity name, or the Israelite form of any universal deity name such as El, is to be expected, since this is the one thing that the absorption process would have been bound to address. The example above from Psalms 48 and 84, where the Hebrew usage appears to retain actual traces of the names of other deities, are exceptional. I can’t conjecture the Edomites knew their supreme deity (or any other deity they may have had), and in primary occurrences such as this, it would be inconceivable to expect them to be retained.

<sup>26</sup> As per the scene in Genesis 27, where Jacob famously masqueraded as Esau to dupe their nearly-blind father into inverting the priorities of his blessing.

<sup>27</sup> For other example, consider: the textual comparison between Psalm 49:6 and what Esau says in Genesis 27:36; Psalm 84:9 might be ironic interpolation of a reference by Edom to the potency of the God of Jacob; Psalm 85:2 looks like a specific reference to the manner in which Edom spectates as God delivers Jacob’s inheritance back to him (indeed, the entire Psalm 85 could be read as a moan by Edom that its own demerits be overlooked and its future be made to flourish (like Jacob’s); and Psalm 78, though a difficult one to read (offering material both



That Asaph sub-Psalter is more complex. Again, there is an Asaph who appears from face value to have been an important figure in the Levite clan at about the time when the Psalms were taking shape. But here is another teasing suggestion. For what might “Asaph” be a coded name? Perhaps for material which derived, in one way or another, from post-Solomonic times, when the Northern Kingdom split from Judah. Asaph is the first name that Rachel gives to the lad eventually known as Joseph.<sup>28</sup> When the kingdoms went their separate ways, two important things happened, probably quite quickly. First, Jeroboam, in rebellion from Judah and Jerusalem, set up his own cultic centers in Beth-El and Dan. He was faced in his age with the same problem that Solomon had been faced 40 or so years previously. These cultic centers needed worship material in order to develop their spectacle and importance. To use material from Jerusalem, with whom Asaph’s new kingdom was in an almost constant state of war, was difficult if not impossible.

Secondly, though, the severing of North from South after the death of Solomon left a significant number of Levites (in particular) who were citizens of the North, now unable to go to Jerusalem to fulfill their vocations. In time, Levites and Priests placed in this predicament gave rise to some of the earlier prophets of the Northern Kingdom, whose material is included in the earlier part of the Twelve Minor Prophets (*N’vi’m rishonim*) (as well as reflected in the exploits of Elijah and his period). If the Levites were Psalmists under Solomon (and even David), would they have ceased to be creative after the division of the Kingdom? I suggest that some of the Asaph material may have been the product of those very politics. After the fall of the North in 722 BCE, or perhaps at odd moments even before that date, this material possibly trickled southward and, as in the days of Solomon, the custodians of the Psalter and the Temple rite in Jerusalem found themselves unable to incorporate elements of this into the Psalter. They therefore added a *selah* or two in such cases. “Asaph” may have been a code name for material which started out in the Northern Kingdom, before being added to the Jerusalem rite.

When we look at the 11 Psalms in the Asaph sub-Psalter, it becomes clear that there are examples which suggest both of these creative approaches. What else should we expect of psalmody composed in the Northern Kingdom itself? The writers’ ancestors were also rescued from Egypt, and also acknowledged the Patriarchs as having inaugurated their heritage. So, thematic material which deals with these issues is certainly to be expected. Much of the very long Psalm 78 (not a *selah* Psalm) deals with the Exodus and the phenomena of the Wilderness years, but is expressly directed at the waywardness of the Children of Ephraim centuries later. The Psalmist is obliged to note that the Ephraimites—descendants of Joseph who peopled the Northern Kingdom—failed in the end, their society was destroyed and God showed manifest

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complex and terse that seems to be a sort of travelogue or comparison between states and nations). But here again, Jacob is mentioned with what I detect to be a flattering irony. We will never be able to reconstruct this with any sense of precision. We cannot know, now, the text that might have been censored out of this material and/or overwritten with text that suited the Jerusalem psalter and its context. But there are enough of these points in the majority of the B’nei Korah sub-Psalter for a pattern to emerge.

<sup>28</sup> Genesis 30:23. More accurately, perhaps, it is the first thought that pops into her head. Yet it is never clear why this name, rather than Joseph, did not stick.

preference for Jerusalem and David's line in the South. There is little here that a Jerusalemite Psalter would have to change.<sup>29</sup>

We have already considered Psalm 84 in relation to *Ashrei*, and this looks like a very general paean of praise for the relevant deity whose company is better to keep than just about anything else; so change the deity name and it works for Jerusalem as well. Psalm 82, which is recited on the third day of the week, is a *selah* Psalm which deals with the comparison between human (i.e. deficient) justice and divine justice. So again, if it started as a takeover from a heathen psalter, it converts very simply to Israelite use. Psalm 81, for the fifth day of the week, is a hybrid in that it includes *selah*, but from its context also tends to suggest Israelite history and self-appreciation, though in particular reference to Joseph and his spectacular career in Egypt. It is difficult to see how the use of *selah* reflects a change in deity name here, but the theory is not perfect and there are likely to be instances where the correspondence is not complete.

### Finally, a word about Habakkuk Chapter Three

**A**s noted at the outset, the only place in *Tanakh* where *selah* is found other than in the Psalter is in the last chapter of the short prophetic Book of Habakkuk. I am proposing to publish something at length dealing with that complex subject, and as this essay is long enough already and will have tried the patience of readers expecting to be informed about Jewish music; I will keep this section brief. My thesis in relation to Habakkuk Chapter Three is not that it is a stray Psalm (which has been used by others to explain how it comes to speak of *selah*, three times). But rather, that this chapter has been added by the prophet in question through a process—once again—of absorption of material from a non-Israelite source.

Habakkuk lived at about the same time as the more distinguished prophet Jeremiah, and felt obliged to tell his audience in late-7<sup>th</sup> century BCE Judah (i.e. Jerusalem and its environs) of the impending destruction of their civilization—both Southern and Northern Kingdoms—by Babylonia. The first two chapters are a prophecy of doom, followed by an assurance that Babylon is a means to an end for God, who cannot intend to destroy Judah and Israel forever, but merely to punish them for their current transgressions. Yet the Babylonians will not perceive this and will consider themselves God's favorites, only in the end to be undone by their own arrogance, as God comes through on His promise to renew His relationship with His people. The Book is thus self-sufficient without chapter three.<sup>30</sup> I consider that Habakkuk wanted to illustrate the divine purpose in destroying Babylon in the end by reference to a tale of the last such time

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<sup>29</sup> Psalm 73, which is highly introspective, is similarly not marked with a *selah*. Neither is Psalm 74, an even better example, whose writer expresses a sense of estrangement from God, perhaps meaning a combination of emotional estrangement and physical displacement from association with Jerusalem. If I am correct in assuming that these are evocations of feeling for the God of Israel amid the defiled inadequacy of the Northern Kingdom, there would have been an immediate acceptability of these materials into any canon of Psalms used in Jerusalem, for obvious reasons.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the oldest extant source for Habakkuk is the eponymous Commentary scroll found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, chapter three is not only missing, but is not even alluded to.

that happened: in the Great Flood. And to do this he used, in Hebrew translation,<sup>31</sup> a text that actually relates to Noah and the Flood. The speaker, at least in the verses that are written in the first person, is clearly Noah himself. And the locution *asher anu'ah*... (“that I might rest”—from the same root as the name Noah) in verse 16 is the closest we will get to an actual signature or claim of authorship. The chapter is replete with images of torrential water, violent storm, destructive force etc., and at the end the speaker emerges to see a waste-world in utter desolation, yet he is able give thanks to his god and savior.

### Concluding remarks

Interestingly, this study has taken scholarship and general thought as to the origin and purpose of *selah*, fundamentally away from the sense that it has to be a term of musical theory or practice. I firmly believe that the composite nature of the Psalter (*T'hillim*) is a matter which calls for further study in its own right. To ascribe the whole volume to David is the stuff of Midrash and nothing more, and the number of other attributions that we find, easily defeats that suggestion. But not a great deal of thought has been given to the liturgical, spiritual or, if I may, *political* purpose of the Psalms. At least some study and commentary that endeavors to treat these as matters of great First Temple (or Second Temple) performance art does, I feel, miss the point that these texts functioned on a variety of levels. As a narrow objective, I hope this essay has allowed readers to think fresh thoughts about *selah* itself and to appreciate that it very probably had a quite different original purpose from the ones traditionally ascribed to it. As a wider objective, I hope it may offer a basis for further discussion concerning Psalms and psalmody in general: its origins, character, purposes and uses in the millennium of the ‘Israelite’ First—and ‘Jewish’ Second—Temples.

*Daniel Tunkel is a lawyer who maintains keen involvement with Jewish musical activity in New York and his native London. His article, “Notes on the History and Origins of the Music of the Anglo-Jewish Synagogue Tradition,” appeared in the Fall 2008 issue of JSM.*

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<sup>31</sup> I believe this to be the function of the last two words; these are not an instruction to musicians, as some suggest, but a colophon of sorts—stating that Habakkuk has preserved this ancient text for posterity in his own translation and for his own prophetic purposes.

# *DIVREI K'RI'AH*

## Music and Meaning in Torah Cantillation

By *Hirsh Cashdan*

The cantillation of the Torah, the notation system of the music by which the Torah is chanted in the synagogue, codified an oral tradition which had existed for some hundreds of years before it was consolidated and formalized in writing by the Masoretes around the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. Each word, or group of words, has a musical rendition according to the *ta'am*, the symbol placed above or below it. These *t'amim* serve a number of well understood purposes apart from simply denoting the music to be used when the Torah is chanted. The Torah, as still written on parchment for synagogue use, has no punctuation at a lower level of granularity than the paragraph and the *t'amim* tell the Torah reader not only where each sentence begins and ends, but the detailed phrasing within it. This is achieved through the fact that some of the *t'amim* denote a major pause, others denote minor pauses; some have an inevitable close partner which joins it to the succeeding word or word group and some can only stand alone. Thus the 27 *t'amim* provide the punctuation and, by their exact placement on a selected letter of the word, also indicate where the stress falls.

As a by-product of the fact that the choice of *t'amim* determines the phrasing of the sentence, the *t'amim* clearly play a part in the interpretation of the text—a specific phrasing, as indicated by the *t'amim*, may make a difference to the meaning, as it can in other languages. For instance, the sentence “Most of the time travellers worry about their luggage,” means one thing if I phrase it “Most of the time, travellers worry about their luggage”—but something quite different if phrased, “Most of the time-travellers, worry about their luggage.”

In Exodus 4:23 Moses is directed to warn Pharaoh about the slaying of the firstborns.

וְאָמַר אֵלָיו שְׁלַח אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַבְדוּנִי וְתִמְאַן לְשַׁלְּחֹוּ הַנֶּה אֲנֹכִי הֲרֹג אֶת־בְּנֵךְ בְּכֹרֶךְ:

The phrasing of the *t'amim* translates to “And I said to you, let my people go and serve me, *but you have refused* to let them go; lo I shall slay your firstborn son.” Pharaoh has already refused, so the firstborns will be slain.

Had the *t'amim* been

וְאָמַר אֵלָיו שְׁלַח אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַבְדוּנִי וְתִמְאַן לְשַׁלְּחֹוּ הַנֶּה אֲנֹכִי הֲרֹג אֶת־בְּנֵךְ בְּכֹרֶךְ:

the meaning would then have been, “And I said to you, let my people go and serve me; and *if you refuse* to let them go, I shall slay your firstborn son”

Much work has been done by scholars such as Wickes, Price, Jacobson and Tunkel, showing how the phrasing of the sentence is achieved by the use of the *t'amim*, sometimes in an elaborate hierarchy four-deep. But however valid this is, it does not explain the specific choice of the *t'amim*, as there are multiple ways an identical phrasing can be achieved through the use of alternatives sets of *t'amim*—yet the musical sound will be quite different.

To illustrate this, here's how Genesis 20:4 could have been accented conveying the meaning straightforwardly, in a quite low-key way:

וְאַבִּימֶלֶךְ לֹא־קָרַב אֵלֶיהָ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי הַגּוֹי גַּם־צַדִּיק תִּהְרֹג:

“Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said: O Lord, Wilt Thou slay even a righteous nation?”

Here is how it is actually accented:

וְאַבִּימֶלֶךְ לֹא קָרַב אֵלֶיהָ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי הַגּוֹי גַּם־צַדִּיק תִּהְרֹג:

It sounds very different, very much more dramatic.

It is not possible to substitute similarly in every case, but even short half sentences which allow of much less flexibility, may achieve equivalent phrasing through quite a number of alternative *t'amim* sets. For example, the second half of Genesis 32:6:

וְאֲשַׁלְחָהּ לְהַגִּיד לְאֲדֹנָי לְמִצְא־תָן בְּעֵינַיָהּ:

could have been accented in the following different ways without altering the phrasing:

וְאֲשַׁלְחָהּ לְהַגִּיד לְאֲדֹנָי לְמִצְא־תָן בְּעֵינַיָהּ

וְאֲשַׁלְחָהּ לְהַגִּיד לְאֲדֹנָי לְמִצְא־תָן בְּעֵינַיָהּ:

וְאֲשַׁלְחָהּ לְהַגִּיד לְאֲדֹנָי לְמִצְא־תָן בְּעֵינַיָהּ:

וְאֲשַׁלְחָהּ לְהַגִּיד לְאֲדֹנָי לְמִצְא־תָן בְּעֵינַיָהּ:

So, the originators of our chant did have choices, frequently not wholly determined by the demands of producing a specific phrasing. This paper seeks to explore the question: “Can it be shown that the choice of particular *t'amim* indicate an intention to express meaning?”

From the reading for the Ten Commandments we learn it was understood the choice of *t'amim* influenced meaning. Two alternative sets are provided—*ta'amei elyon* (the upper *t'amim*) for proclaiming the Decalogue in the synagogue, and *ta'amei tahton* (the lower *t'amim*) for reading the Commandments privately. The *ta'am ha-elyon* has a much more powerful and dramatic sound than the *ta'am ha-tahton*.

Here is the commandment not to make a graven image—in the lower signage for reading privately:

לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה לָךְ פֶּסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ: הֵיאֵל־תִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם

Here it is in the upper accentuation for reading in the synagogue:

לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה־לָךְ פֶּסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם

We can see from this that the *t'amim* carry varying degrees of excitement--it is not just a individual reader's rendition that makes them sound that way.

The *shalsholet* is a very unusual *ta'am*, meaning ‘chain.’ The name reflects what it looks like and it is sung as a long, drawn-out note, usually up and down, three times. It occurs only four times in the Torah (Genesis 19:16, Genesis 24:12, Genesis 39:8, Leviticus 8:23) and each time would seem to reflect a meaning of hesitation. This is clear-cut in one case

where it occurs on the word וַיִּתְמַקְּלֵה--“and he hesitated”--fairly convincing in two more, and subject to rabbinical interpretation in the fourth.

But, does such a connection between music and meaning extend beyond *shalsholet* and the Ten Commandments? My contention is **yes, it does**, and indeed, I see a number of different phenomena at play in the specific choices of the *t’amim*.

**T**he first and perhaps the most interesting, is the choice of more elaborate *t’amim* to **intensify the meaning** of particular texts. Here is an example from Exodus 14:27. Moses stretches out his hand over the sea; towards morning, the waters come back full strength and the Egyptians chase after them. God shakes up the Egyptians in the middle of the sea. It could have been accentuated quite low-key:

וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יָדוֹ עַל-הַיָּם וַיָּשָׁב הַיָּם לַפְּנוֹת בְּקֶרֶךְ לְאַיְתָנּוֹ וּמִצְרַיִם נָסִים לְקִרְאָתוֹ וַיִּנְעַר יְהוָה אֶת-מִצְרַיִם בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם:

Yet the *t’amim* actually chosen are much more dramatic:

וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יָדוֹ עַל-הַיָּם וַיָּשָׁב הַיָּם לַפְּנוֹת בְּקֶרֶךְ לְאַיְתָנּוֹ וּמִצְרַיִם נָסִים לְקִרְאָתוֹ וַיִּנְעַר יְהוָה אֶת-מִצְרַיִם בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם:

Likewise, Genesis 50:17, when Joseph’s brothers fear that with Jacob now dead, he will wreak revenge on them, they send a message to him: “Thus shall you say to Joseph. ‘Forgive now, pray, the transgression of your brothers and their sin’-- which could have been simply accentuated like this:

כִּי-תִאמְרוּ לְיוֹסֵף אֲנִי שָׂא נָא פָּשַׁע אֲחֵיךָ וְחַטָּאתָם

Here is how the entreaty is actually accented:

כִּי-תִאמְרוּ לְיוֹסֵף אֲנִי שָׂא נָא פָּשַׁע אֲחֵיךָ וְחַטָּאתָם

It may be noted that the only other occurrence of the entreaty אָנָּה in the Torah--Exodus 32:31--also carries two *t’amim* on this very short word-- אָנָּה--again emphasizing the entreaty.

Exodus 33:13 creates the same effect of pleading, albeit with different words, by the choice of *t’amim*:

“Now therefore I pray thee, if I have found favour in your eyes”...

וַעֲתָה אִם-נָא מְצָאתִי חוֹן בְּעֵינֶיךָ

An example of which I am particularly fond, but where the intention is perhaps less obvious, occurs in the story of Balaam and his ass. Balaam’s ass sees the angel of God confronting them but Balaam does not realize what is going on. The same words are used each time for the ass seeing the angel but, the first time we find,

וַתִּרְא הָאֲתוֹן אֶת-מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה

indicative of the high drama and unexpectedness of an ass seeing an angel. The second time:

וַתִּרְא הָאֲתוֹן אֶת-מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה

is still pretty dramatic but not quite as much. By the third time, the angel is almost expected, so we find the simplest rendering of all:

וַתִּרְא הָאֲתוֹן אֶת-מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה

Another example I like for its heightened drama is Genesis 27:33 when Isaac realizes that the person to whom he has given his blessing may not have been Esau, as he was tricked into believing.

“And Isaac trembled very much, and said, ‘Who then is he who hunted venison, and brought it to me, and I have eaten of it all before you came, and have blessed him?’”

וַיִּתְרַד יִצְחָק תְּרַדָּה גְדֹלָה עַד־מָאֵד וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אֶזְוָא הוּא הַצֹּדֵד־צִיד וַיָּבֵא לִי וְאָכַל מִכֹּל בְּטֶרֶם תָּבוֹא וְאַבְרָהָם

Another phenomenon I have noticed in the choice of *t’amim*, I am calling “**theming**” – where a particular word or set of words recurs as a sort of theme—underlining whatever the text deems significant.

My first example of **theming** relates to the crossing of the Red Sea. In four separate sentences of the 37 that describe the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 13:17 to 14:31) the text states that the children of Israel would or did walk on dry land in the middle of the sea. The words are slightly different but try to imagine the sound:

וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא: Exodus 14:16

וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא Exodus 14:22

וַיִּבְגּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵלְכוּ בַיּוֹם הַהוּא בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם Exodus 14:29

וַיִּבְגּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵלְכוּ בַיּוֹם הַהוּא בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם Exodus 15:19

To me, the triumphal nature of each declaration is unmistakable.

A second example of “theming” seems quite convincing. During Moses’ long peroration to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy, eleven times the word בארץ occurs as the dying leader makes reference to things that should happen **in the land** which you are crossing to possess, or which God is giving to you, or other similar expression of the same sentiment. In three of the 11 occurrences the phrasing is such that “theming” is not possible (Deuteronomy 5:25, 6:1, 12:6). But in six out of the remaining eight occurrences (Deuteronomy 4:14, 12:1, 15:4, 19:14, 28:8, 30:16) the word בארץ has the same *ta’am--zakef gadol*--בְּאַרְץ--a disjunctive *ta’am*--one which does connect to a fellow *ta’am* or *t’amim* in the word or words following. It is one of the least common of disjunctive *t’amim* with just over one percent of the disjunctive occurrences in the Torah (Price, p.6). It is therefore noticeable that *zakef gadol* keeps recurring on this particular word in this particular context. For me this usage underlines Moses’ repeated wagging of his finger at the Israelites, warning them that it is a **special** land they are coming to--and their behavior must be equally special.

Here is another example of a particular set of *t’amim*—the relatively unusual *zarka-segol* combination—being used when indicating lack of financial wherewithal on the part of anyone bringing a sacrificial offering. Three such occurrences exist in the Torah, all notated similarly (Leviticus 5:7)

וְאִם־לֹא תִמְצֵא יָדְךָ גֵי שֶׁהָ

Also Leviticus 12:8

וְאִם־לֹא תִמְצֵא יָדְךָ גֵי שֶׁהָ

וְאֵם לֹא־מִצָּאָה יָדוּ דִּי הַשִּׁיב לִי

The key word is דִּי--sufficient—in whose only other occurrence—the text’s phrasing does not allow use of the *zarka-segol* notation (Deuteronomy 15:8).

**A**nother interesting phenomenon I have noticed, I am calling “**reinforcement**”—where the same set of *t’amim* is repeatedly used for equivalent or identical sentences or phrase-groups, indicating the consistent, repeated nature of the content. A simple example of this is Numbers 13:4-15, which details the names of the princes of each tribe chosen to be part of the delegation spying out the land of Israel

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹתֵם לַמַּטֵּה רְאוּבֵן שְׁמוּעַ בֶּן־זִכְרִיָּה: הַ לַמַּטֵּה שְׁמֹנֶה שְׁפֹט בֶּן־חֹרִי: וַ לַמַּטֵּה יְהוּדָה כָּלֵב בֶּן־יִפְנֹה: זַ לַמַּטֵּה  
יִשְׂשָׁכָר יִגָּאֵל בֶּן־יִסָּחַר: חַ לַמַּטֵּה אֶפְרַיִם הוֹשֶׁעַ בֶּן־נוּן: טַ לַמַּטֵּה בְנִימִן פִּלְטִי בֶן־רְפוּא: יַ לַמַּטֵּה זְבוּלֹן גְּדִיאֵל בֶּן־סוּדִי:  
יֵא לַמַּטֵּה יוֹסֵף מְנַשֶּׁה גְּדִי בֶן־סוּסִי: יִבַּ לַמַּטֵּה לֵוִי עֲמִיאֵל בֶּן־גַּמְלִי: יִגַּ לַמַּטֵּה אֲשֶׁר סֹתוּר בֶּן־מִיכָאֵל: יֵד לַמַּטֵּה  
נַפְתָּלִי נַחֲבִי בֶן־זַפְקִי: טוַ לַמַּטֵּה גָּד גְּאוּאֵל בֶּן־מִכָּי:

All but Ephraim and Menasheh—who are actually sub-tribes of Joseph and naturally therefore a little different--follow the exact same form.

Usage of the same *t’amim* for lists occurs regularly, as in reporting the result of the census in Numbers 26. Here the format of the text and the format of the *t’amim* are virtually identical for six of the tribes and with striking similarities in the detail for the others. I will illustrate this with the beginning of two of the six sets. Here first, is the tribe of Shimon.

בְּנֵי שְׁמֹנֶה לַמִּשְׁפָּחָתָם לְנִמְאֵל מִשְׁפַּחַת הַנְּמֹאֲלִי לִימִין מִשְׁפַּחַת הַיְמִינִי לִיְלִין מִשְׁפַּחַת הַיְכִינִי: יֵג לְרַח מִשְׁפַּחַת הַזְּרָחִי  
לִישָׂאוֹל מִשְׁפַּחַת הַשָּׂאוֹלִי:

The identical *t’amim* format is used to list the tribe of Gad.

בְּנֵי גָד לַמִּשְׁפָּחָתָם לְצַפּוֹן מִשְׁפַּחַת הַצַּפּוֹנִי לַחֲגִי מִשְׁפַּחַת הַחֲגִי לַשּׁוֹנִי מִשְׁפַּחַת הַשּׁוֹנִי: טז לְאֲזַנִּי מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאֲזַנִּי לַעֲרִי  
מִשְׁפַּחַת הָעֲרִי:

Equally interesting is how *t’amim* describe the various appurtenances of the Tabernacle *being made*, sentence by sentence, reinforcing the descriptions in earlier chapters concerning how they *should be* made. Here by way of a taster (Exodus 35:6-8), is Moses relaying to the children of Israel God’s detailing of the *materials* to be used:

And blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats’ hair,  
And rams’ skins dyed red, and goats’ skins, and shittim wood,  
And oil for the light, and spices for anointing oil, and for the sweet incense

וַ וְתִבְלַת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ וְעִזִּים: זַ וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאָדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים וְעֵצֵי שִׁטִּים: חַ וְשֶׁמֶן לַמָּאֹר וּבִשְׂמִים  
לְשֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְלִקְטָרֶת הַסַּמִּים:

It exactly parallels God’s actual words to Moses recorded 10 chapters earlier:

דַּ וְתִבְלַת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ וְעִזִּים: הַ וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאָדָּמִים וְעֹרֹת תְּחָשִׁים וְעֵצֵי שִׁטִּים: וַ שֶׁמֶן לַמָּאֹר בִּשְׂמִים  
לְשֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְלִקְטָרֶת הַסַּמִּים:

As to detail in the making of the individual items, the same repeated patterning occurs in most of the 100 or so verses that deal with the individual items. The text of the section that describes how the items were made (Exodus 35:1 to 38:20) might differ slightly from the text



of the section describing how they should be made (Exodus 25:1 to 27:19)--in the order of what is described--and occasionally in small details--and throughout in the tense (“and he *made*” rather than “and you *shall make*”)--but the *t’amim* used are identical.

A perhaps more approachable example is in Abraham’s negotiation with God, over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 18: 28-32

And he spoke to him yet again, and said, perhaps there shall be forty found there. And he said, I will not do it for forty’s sake.

And he said to him, oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak; Perhaps there shall thirty be found there. And he said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there.

And he said, behold now, I have taken upon me to speak to the Lord; Perhaps there shall be twenty found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for twenty’s sake.

And he said, oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once; Possibly ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten’s sake.

The *t’amim* reinforce the steadfastness of Abraham’s entreaty as well as of God’s response:

כט ויִסַּף עוֹד לְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אוּלַי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם אַרְבָּעִים  
 וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה בְּעָבוּר הָאֲרָבָעִים:  
 ל וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל-נָא יָסֵר לְאֹדְנִי וְאֶדְבָּרָה אוּלַי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם שְׁלִישִׁים  
 וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה אִם-אֶמְצָא שָׁם שְׁלִישִׁים:  
 לא וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה-נָא הוֹאֲלֹתִי לְדַבֵּר אֵל-אֹדְנִי אוּלַי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְׂרִים  
 וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶשְׁחִית בְּעָבוּר הָעֶשְׂרִים:  
 לב וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל-נָא יָסֵר לְאֹדְנִי וְאֶדְבָּרָה אֶדְבָּרָה אֶדְבָּרָה אוּלַי יִמְצְאוּן שָׁם עֶשְׂרֵה וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶשְׁחִית בְּעָבוּר הָעֶשְׂרֵה:

One final recurring phenomenon, I am calling **parallelism**. Here the text and the narrative move on, but the *t’amim* show the connection and establish a rhythm. My first example is taken from the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. At the beginning of their encounter there is a conversation that is in effect a negotiation. Judah sees her and thinks she is a harlot.

*And he said*, Now, I beg you, let me come in to you; for he knew not that she was his daughter-in-law.

*And she said*, what will you give me, that you may come in to me?

*And he said*, I will send you a kid from the flock.

*And she said*, will you give me a pledge, till you send it?

*And he said*, what pledge shall I give you?

*And she said*, your signet ring, and your bracelets, and your staff that is in your hand.

וַיֹּאמֶר הֲבָה נָא אָבוֹא אֵלֶיךָ בִּי לֹא יָדַע כִּי כַלְתּוֹ הוּא

וַתֹּאמֶר מַה-תַּתֶּן-לִי כִּי תָבוֹא אֵלָי:

וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֶשְׁלַח גְּדִיעֵי-עֵזִים מִן-הַצֹּאן

וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־תִּתְּנוּ עֲרֹבוֹן עַד שְׁלֹחַהּ:  
וַיֹּאמֶר מָה הָעֲרֹבוֹן אֲשֶׁר אֶתְּוֹלָהּ  
וַתֹּאמֶר חֲתָמָהּ וּפְתִילָהּ וּמִטָּה אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדָהּ

Each of the three “and he said and she said” pairs begin with the same *t’amim*.

*And he said...And she said—pashta*

*And he said...And she said—zakef gadol*

*And he said...And she said—r’via*

A similar sequence appears in Exodus 14:19 and 20, as the Children of Israel leave Egypt and are led to the Red Sea.

And the angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them;  
and the pillar of cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them;  
And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel;

וַיֵּטֶע מִלְאָךְ הַהַלָּהִים הַהַלֵּל לְפָנֵי מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּלֶךְ מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם  
וַיֵּטֶע עֲמֹוד הָעָנָן מִפְּנֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲמֵד מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם:  
וַיֵּבֵא בֵּין אֶל מַחֲנֵה מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל

Here we have a progression of *t’amim* that carries forward the momentum of the Israelites’ Exodus.

**W**e have offered examples of *t’amim* intensifying the text, pointing up **themes**, reinforcing **similarity** and indicating **parallelism**. But let me be clear; this relationship between the *t’amim* and the meaning, while occurring many times more than the examples I have quoted, is far from universal. I cannot say that it amounts to any consistent system. For the bulk of biblical text the *t’amim* simply play their part in delineating the phrasing and, through this, showing the meaning—though not without some quirks and anomalies which it is not my intention to explain here.

Concerning what all the foregoing says about how the music to chant the text was originally created, I can only speculate. Given that there was no written notation of this music for many hundreds of years from the time it was first performed—at best there were hand signals (Greek: Chieronomy) indicating the *t’amim* provided by a *someikh*, a person standing alongside the person who was doing the chanting—it would be a natural *aide memoire* technique to have the same sounds for the same text wherever it occurred.

There is no doubt also that the use of dramatic expression also aids the memory—as I know from my own preparation for chanting sections of the Torah in the synagogue. But why then is it not more consistent and more pervasive? Did the public reading of Scripture ever happen without such chanting? Was the music composed all at the same time or did it develop over a prolonged period? Was it composed by a mixture of different people or groups of people with different ideas? Was the musical rendition of the Torah ever

considered as an entity before its standardization by the Masoretes.? Knowing of no evidence to help us reach answers to such questions, I am left to speculate and ponder connections such as the ones I have suggested above.

*Hirsh Cashdan grew up in Liverpool, in an Orthodox family well known for its scholastic achievement. As the youngest of six children he had a particularly close relationship with his father who was a shoheit and teacher at the Liverpool Yeshiva and Jewish school, as well as a consummate ba'al k'ri'ah. After earning a Baccalaureate with Honors at London University in Hebrew and Aramaic, Hirsh enjoyed a long and fulfilling career at IBM before retiring in 2006 and devoting himself to voluntary work, much of it associated with Jewish Music. Hirsh has played a key role in programming and organizing eight international conventions of cantors under the aegis of the Jewish Music Institute, Tephilharmonic (which he co-founded) and the European Cantors Association. He now satisfies his personal musical passion by attempting to breathe klezmeric life into a clarinet and leading the kri'at ha-torah at his local synagogue, an ongoing practice from which the inspiration for this paper derives.*

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## English Leyning: Bringing New Meaning to the Torah Service

*By Jack Kessler*

**A** friend who is an active officer in a large New York synagogue attended a ritual committee discussion about the quality of services at the shul, and proposed that the Torah service be dropped. The shocked worthies wanted to know how he could suggest such a thing. He replied that Shabbat morning services in this shul



were indeed engaging, emotionally and intellectually satisfying experiences. Everyone sings, discusses, participates... that is, until the Torah service. Then, he observed, the energy in the room drops dead. Yes, the columns of Hebrew are nicely chanted and melodically correct, but hadn't everyone present on the ritual committee seen for themselves how during the Torah Service the participation and engagement dropped to near zero, how people zoned out, drifted to the back to chat... and disengaged. Yes, the aliyot are called, and those chosen march to the front to recite the b'rachot--dutifully or cheerfully--but as a whole, what might in earlier times have been a highlight of Shabbat morning, was now deeply dull. All in all, it was not working. And if that was so, perhaps it should be dropped.

The committee certainly was not about to approve the idea, and thus my friend arrived at his purpose. He challenged them. If they were unwilling to drop the Torah service--as he had anticipated--were they not, then obligated to discover and implement ways to make the Torah service come alive? If they had succeeded with the other components of the service, why couldn't the Torah service be re-envisioned and renewed to match the quality of engagement and participation of the rest of the service?

I relate this episode to address a crucial issue for our communities: we need Torah to be alive for us as a living source of wisdom--brimming with meaning, relevant to the challenges of our lives, informing our choices, inspiring our spiritual journeys. Yes, of course Torah will always have a default iconic status, but for Torah to be alive, it must speak to us in compelling and inspiring ways.

My friend was hardly the first person in our contemporary scene to raise this challenge. Others, too, have been hot on the trail of making Torah-engagement a participatory experience. Amichai Lau-Lavie crafted ‘Storah-telling’ which itself grew out of earlier experiments with bringing Torah text dramatically alive. ‘Bibliodrama’ was first championed by Peter Pitzele, his colleague Rivkah Walton, and others. The use of “theme-based aliyot” in which congregants self-selectedly come up to Torah in response to the message of the reading, as explained by the brief D’var Torah that is shared before the aliyah, is yet another part of the widening effort to renew our engagement with Torah.

For myself, I was already an experienced *Baal k’riah* (Torah reader) when I encountered a way of chanting Torah that changed my experience of Scripture reading forever. This has become not only my personal “new normal,” but also how I teach my cantorial students, the rabbinical students with whom I work, participants in the Davvenen’ (sic) Leadership Training Institute, and even my Bar and Bat Mitzvah kids.

Twenty years ago I first heard Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (ז”ל) *leyn* (read publicly from the Torah) in a flowing combination of Hebrew and English. His leyning with the traditional trop—the melodic patterns for chanting Pentateuch—moved seamlessly from Hebrew into English translation and back into Hebrew without breaking the melody. Moreover, he used the English--which he was translating directly from the open scroll--to interpret and dramatically teach the text on the spot. It was stunning. A tour-de-force! The text practically jumped off the page. I had never heard Torah so passionately alive, so powerful. I’d been leyning Torah my whole adult life, and I know the Hebrew reasonably well, but on this occasion others around me, for whom the Hebrew would typically be a blur without meaning, were riveted as well. They heard the ancient Hebrew, its inflections and rhythms, but interspersed with English in a way that brought all of them inside the experience. The public reading of Torah had come alive! For the first time, the words entered their hearts; the song of Torah became the carrier wave for the emotional power of the text. People who were hearing Torah read from the scroll and understood it for the first time, wept.

For me, this was one of those *aha!* moments. I realized that even for the non-Hebrew-speaking Jewish world, Torah could be made immediately to come alive. I too began leyning this way. Because not every synagogue is prepared for such a shift, I began with the Megillah (Scroll of Esther) on Purim, selectively and often humorously translating passages directly from the scroll as I went along. I’d watch as the crowd, typically restless waiting for the one word they understood –**Haman**–would suddenly wake up and actually pay attention in between these well-known cues for noisemaking.

After that, I began gradually to bring my “direct-from-the-scroll” translations to the Torah services on Shabbat. I’d wait for the ripple of surprise among those hearing Torah like this for the first time. The energy would shift in the room, triggering a marked elevation of attentiveness. People smiled, leaning forward in their seats to hear, as if to say: “Wait a minute, I *understand* this! It *means* something! Torah is speaking to *me!*”

There are any number of ways to *leyn* in Hebrew-and-English. Because every translation includes a midrashic, an interpretive rendering of the sense of the original Hebrew, the back-and-forth process opens up an opportunity to share the multiple layers of

meaning in the Torah text. And of course, the translation of a given text will not necessarily always be the same, but may vary depending on the reader's understanding of the text at that time, and what s/he wishes to stress on a given occasion.

The pattern I have developed is always to begin and end in Hebrew, no matter how much of a blend of Hebrew and English may fall within the section I am chanting. This puts the translation/interpretive reading squarely inside the frame of the original language—which still retains a unique power of its own. Inside that frame, diverse techniques may be put into play. One can alternate Hebrew and English sentence-by-sentence (less becomes too choppy) or in larger segments. One might translate all or only some of the Hebrew. Or the reverse: one can suddenly switch into *leyning in* English, feeding in as many isolated Hebrew phrases or entire verses as one feels appropriate. After that, I began gradually to bring my “direct-from-the-scroll” translations to the Torah services on Shabbat. I'd wait for the ripple of surprise among those hearing Torah like this for the first time. The energy would shift in the room, triggering a marked elevation of attentiveness. People smiled, leaning forward in their seats to hear, as if to say: “Wait a minute, I *understand* this! It *means* something! Torah is speaking to *me!*” For myself, I was already an experienced Baal Korei (Torah reader) when, about twenty years ago, I encountered my first experience with a way of chanting Torah that changed my experience of Torah reading forever. This has become not only my personal “new normal,” but also how I teach my cantorial students, the rabbinical student with whom I work, the participants in the Davenen' Leadership Training, and even my Bar and Bat Mitzvah kids.

**A**t this point, I wish to share a word about “trop.” Trop is a precise system for the public singing of Torah. It was developed for dramatic expression and to provide punctuation. As it is structurally linked to Hebrew grammar it is also a means of delivering the text with grammatical nuance. The current system we use was developed in the 10th century, and combines two earlier systems, a Babylonian and a Palestinian tradition. English is of course a very different language; singing English using trop means significantly disengaging the trop from its link to Hebrew. When singing English to the traditional trop, I suggest that you not try to apply the Hebraic melodic patterns overly rigidly, but rather take them as a guideline, and freely create an English version that does the job in that language.

My successful experiences with Hebrew/English Torah leyning have led me into other sacred texts. Based on my earlier experience with Purim services I went on to create and record an original abbreviated version of *Megillat esther* entirely in English, set of course to Megillah trop. Imagine hearing--***now this was the Ahasuerus, whose empire extennnded from India to Ethiopia...in the third year of his reign he threw a huuuge paaarty***--and your inner ear will begin to hear the trop at work! Next, I developed English *haftarot* (Prophetic pericopes), using my own English translation of the standard Haftarah texts, set of course to the so-called ‘Lithuanian’ Haftarah trop that is commonly used.

Then, going boldly where no hazzan had gone before, on a year in which July 4 fell on Shabbat, I set the Declaration of Independence to Haftarah trop and offered it in my shul as an alternative Haftarah. This text, drawn from the American revolutionary experience, came alive as a prophetic text in an extraordinary way. You can see-and-hear it on the Shalom Center website (<https://theshalomcenter.org/node/1735>). After that, using selections

of excerpts from several of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches, I crafted a Haftarah for the Shabbat of MLK weekend. The power of Dr. King's faith and his call to justice rolled into the room with a challenge to us to live the dream. While not officially part of the Jewish canon, from time to time alternative texts like these can be brought into our congregations in ways that honor our American and Jewish spiritual legacies.

I invite you to experiment and join me in this adventure! Torah, our Prophetic literature, the other scrolls and texts that we chant at holidays and festivals, and the classic musical carrier-wave of their respective trop systems, can come alive in ways that are both powerful and accessible.

*Cantor Jack Kessler served Conservative congregations for twenty years, and now directs the Cantorial Program of ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, instructing the Davvenen' Leadership Training Program. He also directs two touring ensembles: ATZILUT—CONCERTS FOR PEACE, a ten-member group of Arab and Jewish musicians; and KLINGON KLEZMER, which does Jewish music from other planets. This article first appeared in the September 2014 issue of KEREM, and is reprinted here with the kind permission of that publication's editors, Rabbi Gilah Langer and Professor Sara Horowitz.*

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**THE FREE RHYTHM OF BIBLICAL CANTILLATION TELESCOPES MILLENNIA, SO THAT LISTENERS MAY UNDERSTAND THE WONDER AS IF THE PROPHET WERE STANDING BEFORE THEM, FACE-TO-FACE. LISTENERS' TEMPORAL AWARENESS IS PSYCHOLOGICAL RATHER THAN CHRONOLOGICAL; AS EXPRESSED IN THE NAME OF RAV IN THE TALMUD (BT P'SAHIM 6): "THERE IS NO EARLIER AND LATER IN THE TORAH."**

Steven Lorch, *The Convergence of Jewish and Western Thought through Music.*

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# AN ARTISTIC GLIMPSE

## Scenes from the Great Synagogue in Kassel

*Wilhelm Thielmann (1897-1899)*

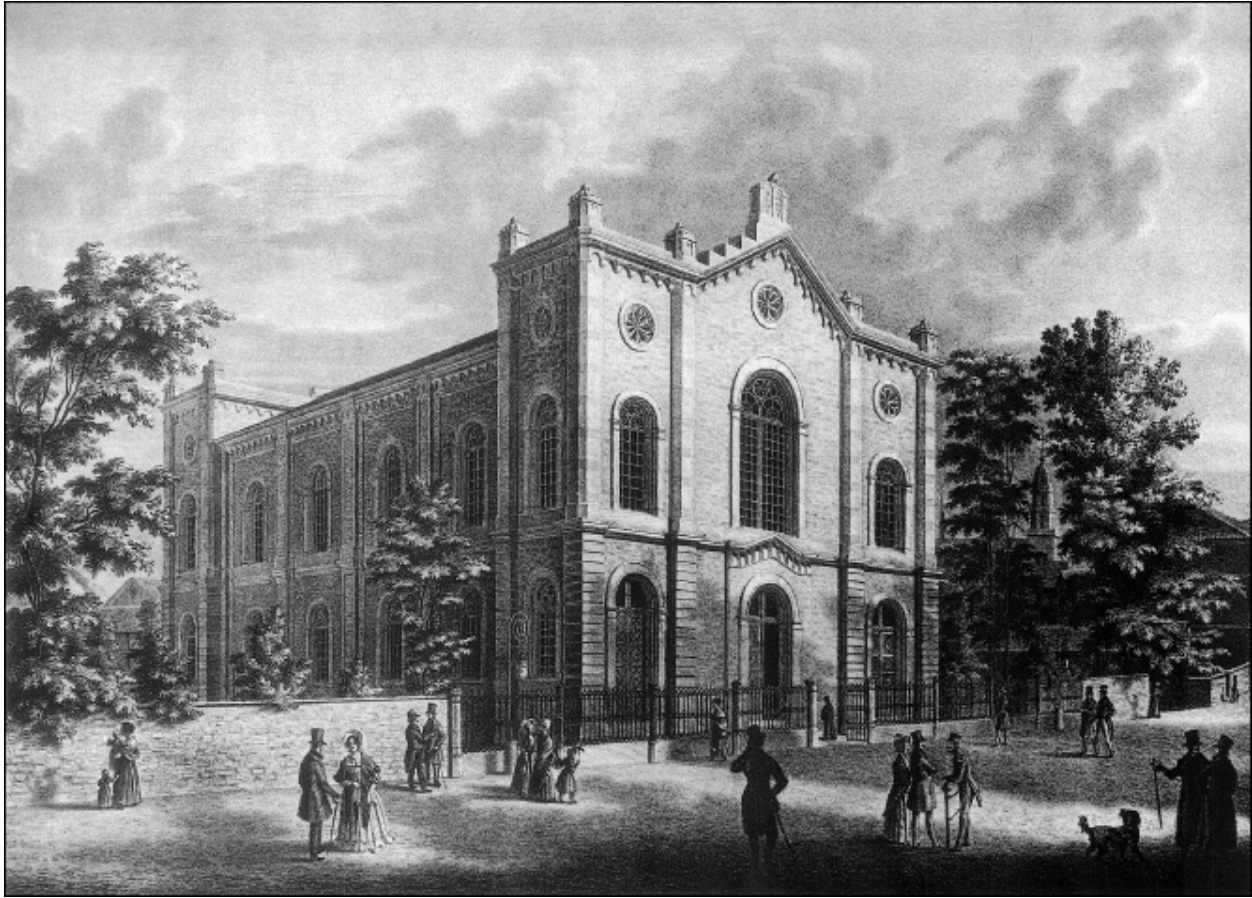
These rare artworks were first published in Kassel, Germany as *Bilder aus der Synagoge*, in 1900. They had been commissioned by the *Kehillah* (Jewish Religious Community) of that city to perpetuate the so-called *Liberale* (Liberal) ceremonies of their Great Synagogue on Unteren Königstrasse. It was a natural outgrowth of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Moderate Reform rite that had been promulgated in Vienna by Cantor Salomon Sulzer (1804-1890) and Rabbi Isaac Noah Mannheimer (1793-1865), with the addition of an organ, which Sulzer had advocated toward the end of his long career. To judge by artist Wilhelm Thielmann's faithful renderings of what took place in the Kassel synagogue a half-century later, the German Liberal version of Vienna's Moderate Reform practice still retained the traditional Hebrew liturgy together with all its ceremonies and appurtenances.

The original edition of *Bilder aus der Synagoge* appeared under the imprimatur of Kassel's Municipal Archive (which would signify substantial governmental support for the project) in the form of an oversized 14" x 19" folio of lithographs executed by Carl Loewer. The Great Synagogue, dedicated in 1871, had been designed by the Jewish architect Albrecht Rosengarten (1809-1893) and was the pride of Kassel's Jews. Built of stone, with an interior that featured a women's gallery along three walls, its elegant simplicity resembled any number of late-19<sup>th</sup> century European synagogues as well as several American counterparts a generation later. Beth Am Synagogue (formerly Chizuk Amuno) on Eutaw Place in Baltimore, completed in 1920, springs to mind.

The twelve lithographs in *Bilder aus der Synagoge* were supplied with accompanying texts compiled by Karl-Hermann Wegner, Director of the Kassel Stadtmuseum, based on information by Josef Prager (here translated by William C. Freund, from whose private copy of the publication these images were transferred), and included commentary by Abraham Sulzbach. From a copy that had survived WWII intact, the work was reissued in 1991 under the direction of Esther Hess, head of the Kassel Jewish community at that time, who also contributed an Introduction.

Wilhelm Thielmann drew these scenes "from life," using as his subjects the Great Synagogue's clergy along with some of its members and elected officials. In the absence of contemporary photographs, the drawings leave viewers with an impression of having seen remarkably life-like portraits of participants solemnly enacting religious rituals. They attest powerfully to the dynamic blend of tradition and modernity that flourished in the German-speaking lands of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Western Europe up until World War II. [JAL]





**1. The synagogue in Kassel**, on lower Königstrasse, was built by A. Rosengarten (1809-1893) and dedicated on August 8, 1871. The Kassel newspaper, *Allgemeine Zeitung*, wrote as follows:

The Façade, with its three doors, creates an inspiring impression, as does the rounded style of the windows and main entrance, which brings forth a lovely economy in the outer decorations. The entirety carries the stamp of complete restfulness and simplicity. The building's size and proportions, decorations and the like, all point in the same direction, towards a feeling of overriding beauty throughout. Honor is due to the accomplished architect who carried out his assignment so completely.



**2. In the lighted synagogue on a Friday evening**, we see the Cantor standing at the lectern with a filled wine cup in his right hand. It is the end of the service and the Cantor declares the Sanctification of the Sabbath (*Kiddush*) over a cup of wine. The two boys who stand behind him await the end of the *Kiddush*. The one wearing a *Tallit* (Prayer shawl) is ready to recite the *Kaddish* prayer for his deceased father or mother. The smaller youth stands with joyous anticipation for, once the *Kiddush* ends, that boy will be handed the cup to enjoy a sip of wine. What eagerness he must feel in anticipating one of the most pleasant tastes of his happy childhood! The officiating Cantor is Ludwig Horwitz, *Hazzan sheini* (Assistant Cantor) at the Great Synagogue and teacher at the Jewish religious school. He is author of numerous historical and cultural papers, including "The Kassel Synagogue and its Builder," 1907.



**3. The Torah is removed from the Holy Ark (*Aron ha-kodesh*) during the Sabbath Morning service, by the Rabbi, Cantor and *Shammash* (Sexton). The Ark's curtain and doors are opened, and we see inside a number of Torah Scrolls (*Sifrei torah*). Above the Ark appears the verse: *Da lifnei mi atah omeid* ("Know before Whom you stand"), an appeal to devotion and respectful behavior in God's house. In front of the Ark hangs a *Ner tamid* (Eternal Light). To the right and left below the steps leading to the Ark, are prayer desks for the Cantor and Rabbi. The scene shows *Landrabbiner* (State-appointed rabbi) Dr. Isaac Prager handing the Torah scroll--which is dressed in an embroidered mantle and carries a silver shield, silver crown and silver pointer--to the *Oberkantor* (Chief Cantor)--Konrad Kaminski. To his right is *Shammash* Levi Süssholz. On the front bench, seated to the right is *Kommerzienrat* (Commerce Minister) Gustav Plaut. [Editor's note: Congregants remaining seated while the Ark stood open would not have been consistent with normative *Liberale* synagogue practice.]**

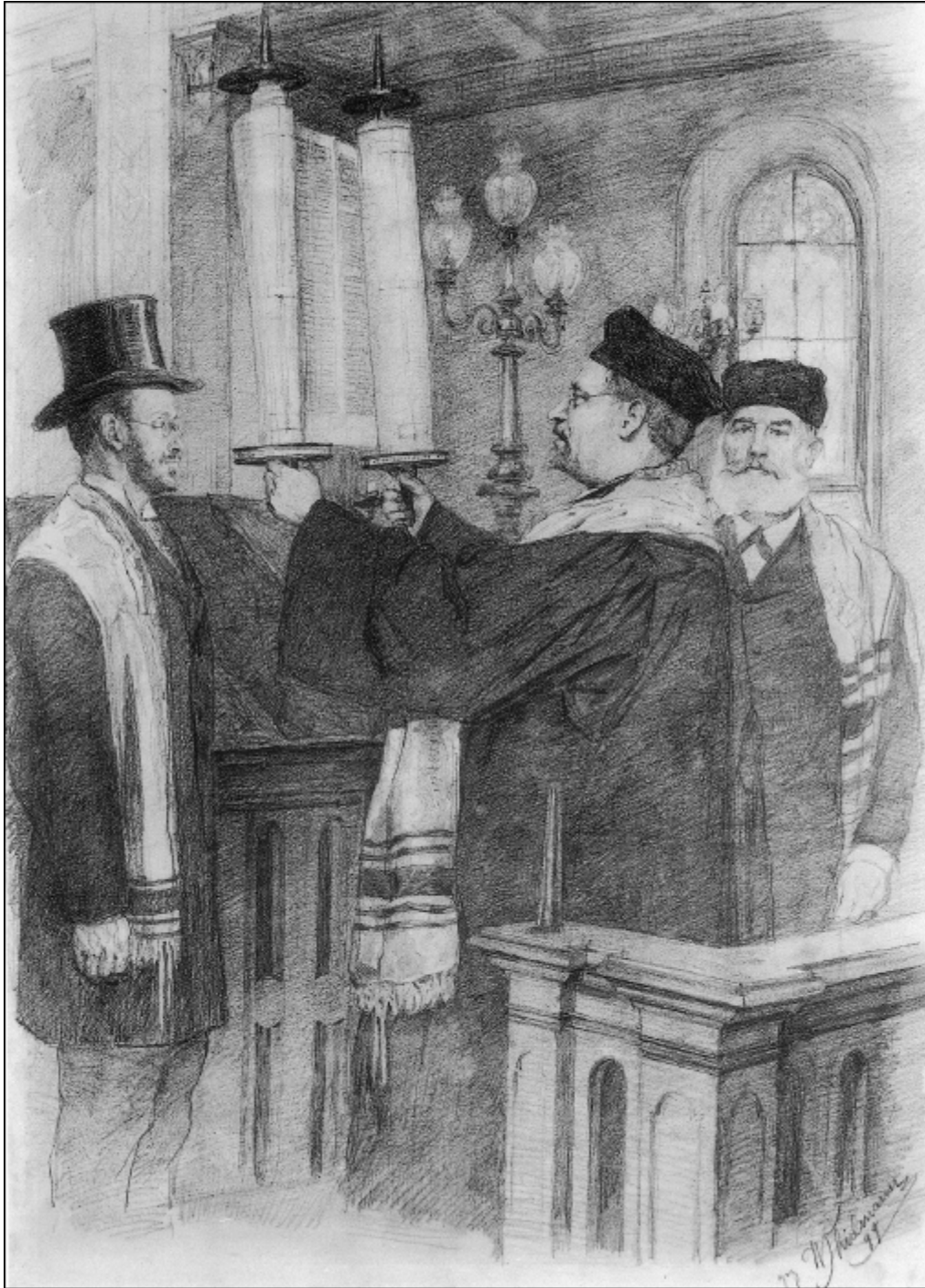




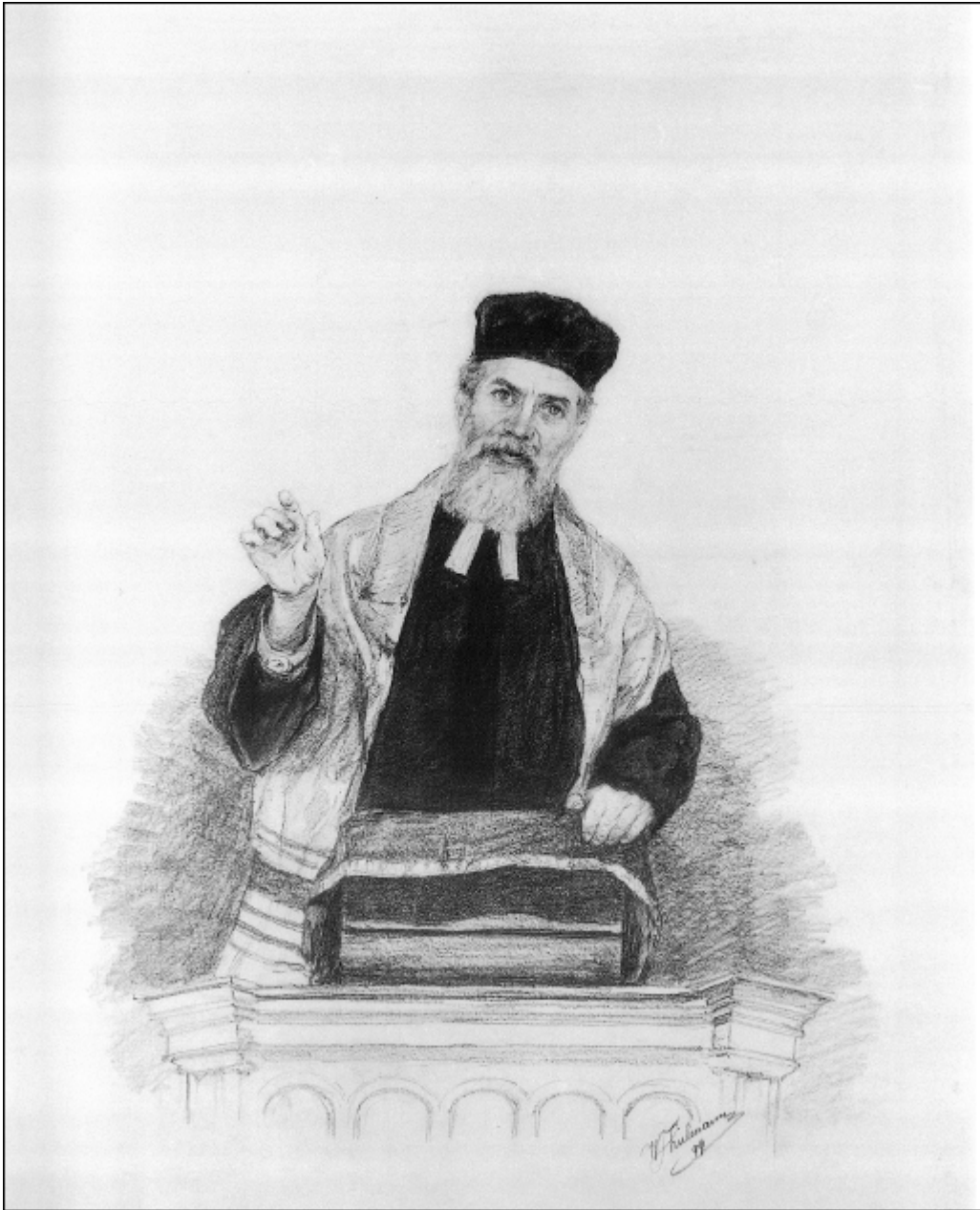
4. **The Holy Ark is closed** and it is once again covered by the richly embroidered velvet curtain. Cantor and Choir alternate with the congregation in singing a tuneful prayer as these synagogue officials carry the Torah scroll through the sanctuary to the centrally located reading desk. There, the scroll's mantle will be removed and the Torah reading begun. Shown in the rear are *Landrabbiner* Dr. Isaac Prager and *Shammash* Levi Süssholz. In the foreground is *Oberkantor* Konrad Kaminski, known for his mellifluous Baritone voice, who brought to the community many musical settings by Salomon Sulzer (Vienna's Chief Cantor from 1826-1881) and Louis Lewandowski (Berlin's Chief Choirmaster from 1876-1894).



**5. The Reading of the Torah.** We see three men on the *Almemor* (German for *Bimah* or raised platform). *Oberkantor* Konrad Kaminski holds a silver pointer in his hand, ready to begin the Torah reading. To his left stands the Synagogue President and behind both, the *Shammash*, whose duty it is to alert and assist all those who have the honor of being called to the Torah. Also, we see a man approaching the *Almemor*, who is called to the Torah next. The weekly portion is not read all at once but is divided into several smaller parts which are read separately for each person called to the Torah. These individuals represent the entire synagogue and, therefore, to be called up is one of the highest honors which the congregation can bestow upon a person.



6. **The scroll is lifted (*Hagbahah*)**, with the conclusion of the Torah reading. The ceremony is performed by *Oberkantor* Konrad Kaminski. Flanking him are synagogue President *Kommerzienrat* Gustav Plaut and synagogue Official Sigmund Mondschein. The congregation, which has risen, responds with the exclamation *V'zot ha-torah...* "This is the Torah presented to the children of Israel by Moses, according to the will of God!" The Torah scroll is replaced in the ark and the Rabbi mounts the pulpit. His sermon will conclude the Torah service, the second major part of Sabbath Morning worship.



7. **The Rabbi's sermon** was customarily confined to twice a year in earlier centuries: the Sabbath before Passover (*Shabbat ha-gaddol*—"The Great Sabbath"); and the Sabbath before Yom Kippur (*Shabbat shuvah*—"The Sabbath of Repentance"). Only in recent times has the sermon become more important, without officially becoming an established part of the worship service. *Landrabbiner* Dr. Isaak Prager (1847-1905) occupied his post in Kassel from 1885 till his death in 1905. The State Rabbinate included 107 independent Jewish congregations in the province of Hessen (similar to the territory covered by the Protestant Church). Dr. Prager was so widely regarded as an outstanding rabbi that many non-Jews came to hear him preach as well. He donated to the city of Kassel his extensive library, a singular collection of Judaica which has been preserved in the Murhadschen Library.



**8. A group of men and boys stand before the Ark and recite the Mourners Kaddish together.** The sermon has been concluded and the *Musaf* (Additional) part of the service has now reached the point where the congregation feels compassion for these unfortunates, especially the young ones, who have already experienced the pain and suffering of life. They attend synagogue daily for eleven months in order to recite Kaddish in the presence of a *minyan* (quorum) of at least ten adult males. Thus they celebrate the memory of their departed ones. We empathize when a white-haired man who is probably not far from the grave himself stands alongside an adolescent orphan as together they express the wish that God's name be magnified and sanctified, despite their loss, throughout the world that He created and commands. One who thus praises the Holy One while publicly memorializing their deceased, confirms that their parents have raised them to be God-fearing in their own lives. From right to left: businessmen Rosenthal and Holzapfel, locksmith Gruenthal, an unknown orphan boy, and wholesaler Abt.





9. On New Year's Day (Rosh Hashanah) and Atonement Day (Yom Kippur) the cantor wears a shroud (*Kitel*). This scene does not reflect any specific worship service during these Ten Days of Repentance. Rather, it shows one custom by which serious thoughts about life and death are engendered at that period of solemn observances. Shortly after the Days of Awe (*Yamim nora'im*), however, comes the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) which erases any enduring atmosphere of death. Here we see Cantor Emeritus Eliezer Gutkind (left) and an unnamed Emeritus Second Cantor (right) in their *Yamim nora'im* garb.



**10. The congregation is celebrating *Sukkot* (the Feast of Tabernacles).** The worshipers are reciting *Hallel*, the service of Thanksgiving and Praise (Psalms 113-118). Each person holds in his hand Four Species: the Palm frond (*Lulav*), Citron (*Etrog*), Myrtle (*Hadas*) and Willow (*Aravah*), waving them toward the four corners of the earth as well as up and down (heaven and earth) while chanting:

*Hodu l'adonai ki tov, ki l'olam hasdo*

Give thanks to all-merciful God, whose goodness is everlasting.

*Sukkot* reminds Israelites that their ancestors camped in simple huts (literal meaning of *Sukkot*) during their wanderings in the Wilderness of Sinai. It is often called *Z'man simḥateinu* (Our time of Rejoicing), the congregation's joy finding expression in waving Four Species, each of which signifies a human type. The stately *Lulav* represents the wealthy; the fragrant *Etrog* represents the saintly; the *Hadas* represents the average; and the *Aravah* represents the lowly. Together they stand for the entire community, which collectively offers praise and thanksgiving for all of God's blessings. The congregation's *Mohel* (Ritual Circumciser), Stern, is in the foreground.



**11. It is the eighth (final) night of Hanukkah, the Feast of Lights**—in the dead of winter. When the sun stands at its lowest on the horizon, when the shadows reach their widest point, when the days shorten and cold and ice appear, in Jewish homes the light of an eight-branched *Menorah* (Candelabra) celebrates a notable past, the time of the Maccabees (2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE). Nor is this holiday ignored in the synagogue. Here we see eight candles which the *Hazzan sheini* has lit. Despite this ceremonial farewell, normal day-to-day affairs are not interrupted by this eight-day observance. In Jewish homes each night of Hanukkah, an appropriate number of candles are lit in the presence of the entire family. Present-day misfortunes are seen in the broader perspective of triumphs over the forces of evil in Israel's national past. This holiday brings with it special games for the children (Spin the *Dreydl*) and culinary delicacies for all (potato *latkes*)--cheerful diversions amidst the gloomy darkness.



**12. The organ and choir** were not traditionally a part of the Jewish worship service in Kassel. Their introduction into the ritual of the Great Synagogue on lower Koenigstrasse divided the community, to the point where an Orthodox service was held in a second synagogue located on Grossen Rosenstrasse. In fact, the Sabbath "work" of the organist—accompanying the Cantor's prayer chant and reinforcing the congregation's singing of responses--had to be delegated to a Christian. This individual's duties included supervising the authenticity of the community's liturgical songs. The choir pictured here consisted primarily of young boys from the Israelite Orphan Home on Giessbergstrasse. They sang Soprano and Alto, while adult members of the congregation filled in the Tenor and Bass parts. Cantor Emeritus Eliezer Gutkind was appointed Choirmaster after his retirement from the position of *Hazzan*. Also depicted are a young girl and various ladies who occupy an adjoining section of the Women's Gallery.

## ***N'GINAH L'MA'ASEH***

### **Abba Weisgal's Hazarat amidat shaharit l'pesah**

(CLICK ANYWHERE ON THE FIRST PAGE OF MUSIC TO ACCESS THE AUDIO FILE)

**T**his excerpt comprises Track #6 (“Ya’aleh V’yavo... Sim Shalom”) on a jubilee retrospective CD of private recordings made at Baltimore’s Chizuk Amuno Synagogue 1959-1963. The Cantor, Abba Yosef Weisgal (1885-1981), who was in his late-seventies at the time, uncannily blended disparate folk elements into an artistically unified prayer chant. His singing was rock-solid, with no trace of a quaver. The musical inspiration never seemed to falter, whether in a simple Weekday morning *Kaddish d’rabbanan* or an elaborate High Holiday composition like *B’motsa’ei m’nuhah*, in which he and the male choir interacted with full voice. The CD is titled *Emunat Abba—The Sacred Chant of Chazzan Abba Yosef Weisgal*, and here is how it came about.

When Jeffrey Harris, a former Bar Mitzvah student of Hazzan Weisgal, queried the Cantors Assembly in 2008 about the possible existence of his old teacher’s davening on tape, he was referred to the Journal’s editor, Joseph A. Levine. The latter, who had served as Weisgal’s Assistant Cantor from 1958-1960, dusted off a dozen reel-to-reels whose contents he had transcribed and analyzed in his dissertation on Hazzan Weisgal in 1981, at the Jewish Theological Seminary. He and Harris, a sound engineer by profession, produced the *Emunat Abba* CD, with 19 tracks that ranged from the *S’lihot* Penitential service to the blessings chanted at a *B’rit Milah* ceremony.

**R**eactions to the recording, particularly the *Hazarat amidat shaharit l'pesah* on Track #6, were ecstatic:

- *This recording is a revelation—if he were a tenor he would have been counted among the g’dolim!*
- *He packed more davening into the Amidah repetition—in less time—than anyone I can think of.*
- *I’m a New Yorker who has heard the best, but I’d never heard anyone who did what Weisgal does.*
- *The character of this man’s delivery of nusah is astonishing. It simply cannot be taught.*
- *After listening to Weisgal’s Repetition of the Festival Amidah, I felt transformed and liberated.*
- *His amazing rendition gives us, I believe, a glimpse into a European experience that has been lost.*

**H**azzan Weisgal had earlier donated over 900 copies of his 1950 book, *Shirei Hayyim Ve-Emunah*, to the Seminary as a gift to its cantorial students in perpetuity. With the support of his grandchildren, Deborah Wilder and Jonathan Weisgal, the producers of the 2009 CD have followed his example by donating all of its 1,000 copies to the Cantors Assembly as a gift to its members, Cantorial Interns, and students of the H.L. Miller Cantorial School. Most of the recitatives on the CD appear in a collection of transcriptions by Joseph A. Levine, that bears the same title, published in 2006 by the Cantors Assembly and available at: [caoffice@aol.com](mailto:caoffice@aol.com) [JAL]





# Hazarat amidat shaharit l'pesah

*Emunat Abba--The Sacred Chant of Abba Yosef Weisgal—J. Levine, ed.*  
(NY: Cantors Assembly), 2006:369-376

(CLICK ANYWHERE ON THE FIRST PAGE OF MUSIC TO ACCESS THE AUDIO FILE)

## **YA'ALEH V'YAVO**

Clearly enunciated

*mp* E - lo - hei - nu <sup>6</sup>vei-lo-hei a-vo-tei - nu, ya - a - leh v'-ya-vo, v'-ya gi - a v'-yei-ra -

4 eh, v'-yei - ra - tseh v' - yi - sha - ma, v' - yi - pa - keid v' - yi - za -

5 kheir, zikh-ro-nei-nu u-fik-do-nei-nu, v-zikh-ron a-vo - tei - nu, v'-zikh-ron ma-shi-ah ben da-vid av -

7 de - kha, v'-zikh-ron y' - ru - sha - la-yim ir kod - she - kha, v'-zikh-ron kol a - m' - kha

9 beit yis-ra-el - l' - fa - ne - kha, lif-lei - tah u'-l'-to-vah, l' -

12 hein u'-l'-he <sup>3</sup>sed u - l' - ra - ha - mim l'-hay - yim u - l'-sha-lom

15 b' - yom hag (.....) ha - zeh. Zokh -

18  
 rei - nu, a-do-nai e-lo-hei - nu bo l' - to - vah, u-fok-dei-nu

21  
 vo liv-ra - khah, v'-ho-shi - ei - nu vo l'-hay-

24  
 yim, u-vid - var y'-shu-ah v'-ra-ha - mim *f* hus v'-ho - nei - nu, v'-ra-heim a -

27  
 lei-nu v'-ho - shi - ei-nu, ki ei - le - kha ei-nei - nu, ki eil me-lekh ha- *cresc. poco a poco*

31  
 nun v'-ra-hum a - tah. *mf rit.* *mp* **V'HASI'EINU** Quickly, with feeling

34  
 de-kha l'-hay - yim u - l'-sha-lom, l' - sim-hah u - l' - sa - son, ka-a-sheer ra-tsi-ta v'-a-mar - ta l' -

36  
 vor - kheï - nu. Ka-d'-shei-nu b'-mits-vo - te-kha v'-tein hel - kei nu b' - to - ra - te - kha, sab - *mf accel.*

38  
 ei-nu mi-tu-ve-kha v'-sa-m'-hei - nu bi-shu-a-te-kha, v' - ta-heir li-bei-nu l'-ov-d'-kha be-e-met; *f* *mf*

40  
 v'-han - hi - lei - nu, a - do - nai e - lo - hei - nu, b'-sim-hah u - v' - sa - son mo - a - dei kod - *mp*



42 she - kha, v'-yis-me-hu v'-kha yis-ra-eil m'-ka-d' - shei sh'-me - kha. Ba-

45 *dim.* rukh a-tah, a-do-nai, *mp* m'-kad-deish yis-ra-el v'-ha-z'-ma-nim. *rit.* *mp* R' -

48 **R'TSEIH** Very fast 5 tseih, a - do - nai e - lo - hei - nu, b' - a - m' - kha yis - ra - el u - vit - fi - la - tam; v' - ha -

50 sheiv et ha - a - vo - dah lid - vir - bei - te - kha, u - t' - fi - la - tam b' - a - ha - vah t' - kab -

52 beil b' - ra - tson, u - t' - hi l' - ra - tson ta - mid a - vo - dat yis - ra - el a - me - kha. *mf* V' - te - he -

55 ze - nah ei - nei - nu b' - shu - v' - kha l' - tsi - yon b' - ra - ha - mim Ba - rukh a - tah, a - do - nai, ham - ma - ha -

58 *mf* **MODIM** Freely recited *mp* zir sh' - khi - na - to l' - tsi - yon. Mo - dim a - nah - nu lakh. Hat -

63 tov ki lo kha - lu ra - ha - me - kha, v' - ha - m' - ra - heim ki lo tam - mu ha - sa - de - kha, mei - o - lam ki - vi - nu

65 lakh. V' - al ku - lam yit - ba - rakh v' - yit - ro - mam shim - kha, mal -

67 **V'KHOL HA-HAYYIM** *f* In declamatory style

kei-nu, ta-mid l'-o-lam va-ed. V'-khol ha-hay - yim yo-du-kha se-lah, vi-ha-l'-lu et shim-

69

kha be-e-met, ha-eil, y'-shu-a - tei-nu v'-ez-ra-tei-nu se - lah. Ba - rukh a-tah, a-do-nai hat -

72 **BIRKAT KOHANIM** *mp* Slowly, with feeling

tov shim-kha, u-l'-kha na-eh l'-ho-dot. E-lo - hei-nu vei-lo-hei a - vo -

75 *mf* *mp*

tei - nu, bor - khei-nu vab-ra-khah, vab-ra - kha ham-shu-le-shet ba-to - rah hak-tu-vah al y'-

79 *p*

dei mo-she av-de-kha, ha - a-mu-rah mip-pi a-ha-ron u - va - nav, ko-ha-nim am k'-do-

82

she - kha, ka - a - mur: Y'-va - re - kh'-kha a - do - nai v' - yish - m' - re - kha.

85 *f*

Ya - eir a-do-nai pa - nav ei-le -

88 *rit. subito p* *f* *accel.*

- kha vi-hun - ne - ka. Yis - sa a-do-nai pa - nav ei-le - kha,

92 *mp* **SIM SHALOM** Intimately  
 v'-ya-seim l'-kha sha-lom. Sim sha-lom, to - vah u-v'-ra-

95 *rit.*  
 kha ba-o-lam, hein va-he sed v'-ra-ha - mim, a-lei-nu v' - al kol yis-ra-el am-

98 *accel.*  
 me - kha. Bor - khei-nu a-vi-nu ku - la-nu k'-e-had, b' - or pa-ne

102 *f* *a tempo*  
 kha; ki v' - or pa - ne - kha na-ta-ta la - nu, a-do-nai e-lo-hei - nu, to -

105 *accel.* *mp* *rit.*  
 rat hay - yim v'-a-ha-vat he - sed, u-ts'da-kah u-v'-ra-khah v'-ra-ha-

108 *mf* *con moto*  
 - mim v'-hay - yim v'-sha-lom v'-tov b'-ei-ne-kha l'-va-reikh et a-m'-

111 *f*  
 kha yis-ra-el b'-khol eit u-v'-khol sha - ah bish-lo-me - kha. Ba-rukh a-tah, a-do-

114  
 nai, ham-m'-va-reikh et am-mo yis-ra-el ba-sha-lom.

## REVIEWS

*Shira Chadasha: The Music of the Independent Minyan*, ed. Jeffrey Shiovitz

*Reviewed by Matthew Austerklein*

On a Monday morning, I sit and watch several hundred young Jews in a room, singing one melody. There is energy, there is longing, and there is harmony. The melody continues--on and off--for over twenty minutes, uplifting and rhythmically strong, ebbing and flowing with the energy of the crowded room. The many repetitions of the melody mature as the movements of a symphony—some paced and deliberate, some advancing to ecstatic feeling, and some retreating into a meditative largo, resolving in silence. Unexpectedly, some even reveal a bridging interlude of *hazzanut*—the leader improvising until he rests upon known chords, supplied instinctively by this choir of hundreds (most who have never even heard the word *m'shor'rim* before). At the end of each movement, the melody once again brings the ensemble home.

What I have been witnessing are the concluding moments of the Mechon Hadar Shabbaton in Manhattan, a weekend of learning and music celebrating the organization's tenth anniversary. The melody *Ana B'choach*, by Joey Weisenberg, is led by the composer in a circle of hundreds of people, mostly young, and streamed via Facebook live. Such a moment reveals the promise of communal singing, as well as the important questions that we must all face as we lead our own singing communities, in an attempt to help them attain Jewish spirituality. Perhaps nowhere can we do so more thoroughly than through the Cantors Assembly's newest publication, *Shira Chadasha: The Music of the Independent Minyan*, edited by Jeffrey Shiovitz, 2016.

The volume transcends its title. The term “Independent Minyan” often refers to a number of quite different, post-denominational Jewish communities (often referred to as emergent communities). These include: Havurot, Jewish Renewal groups like Romemu (NYC) and Nava Tehila (Jerusalem); B'nai Jeshurun and her post-denominational descendants, IKAR & Mishkan Chicago; and the dozens of traditional-egalitarian, Independent Minyan groups sprinkled throughout the American Jewish landscape. Thus, the music featured in this book represents not one strand of the phenomenon known as an “independent minyan”, but many interwoven and diverging strands of post-denominational Jewish music. Compositions featured in *Shira Chadasha* include:

- Melodies and chants from Jewish Renewal figures like Daphna Rosenberg & Yoel Sykes (Nava Tehila), Rabbis Marcia Prager and Shefa Gold, *Hazzanim* Jack Kessler & Jessi Roemer, Shir Yaakov Feit, and Reb Zalman Shachter-Shalomi;
- Transcriptions of definitive CD recordings of minyan repertoire, such as *Pri Etz Hadar* (from Kehilat Hadar, 2004), the two-disc set of melodies from Shira Chadasha minyan in Jerusalem, and the prolific recorded (and written) works of Joey Weisenberg;
- Melodies from Hillel Tigay, music director of IKAR, and transcriptions from Rabbi Lizzie Honeyrose Heydemann of melodies used by Mishkan Chicago;

- Hassidic *niggunim*, including, most prominently, a large selection of popular melodies composed by Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, with permission from his estate.

It is fitting that Jeffrey Shiovitz, who edited *B’Kol Echad* (the Conservative movement’s longtime *Bentcher* and mainstay of its communal singing tradition) should be the one to put this important volume of communally-oriented music together. Of particular note are the legal permissions that Hazzan Shiovitz obtained from the Carlebach estate in order to publish so many of Shlomo’s melodies—which pervade nearly every community featured in this book. (Note: many publications of Carlebach’s music have been made without permission of his estate; Jeff Shiovitz recounted to me that he spent countless hours on the phone with Shlomo’s daughter Neshama Carlebach, going through her father’s melodies note by note with her approval). For the broad range of music that he has collected for this publication, and for his fine attention to detail—due to the close relationships he has cultivated with emergent Jewish song leaders and composers—Hazzan Shiovitz is to be commended.

*Shira Chadasha* has had an immediate impact as one of the Cantors Assembly’s most successful publications. Buoyed by a strong Facebook campaign, the CA sold 325 copies within 10 months of circulation. To put this in perspective, the CA’s next highest seller, *Zamru Lo—The Next Generation*, Volume I, has sold 380 total copies over the last seven years. *Shira Chadasha* has also brought almost one hundred never-before-seen customers to the CA online bookstore. My own experiences in sharing the book have been similarly positive. At the OHALAH clergy conference, a rabbi from Montreal approached me, ecstatic to find that I had several copies to sell (She had heard about the book, but had initially balked at the high shipping costs to Canada). On another occasion, my cantorial intern, a fifth-year cantorial student from Hebrew College, remarked to me, “Wow! This book has all the melodies that I wish I could remember in shul!”

One cannot help but notice the application of a single Niggun across different texts of the liturgy. A simple example is Carlebach’s “L’ma’an Achai,” used for “Lecha Dodi” (p46) and for “Mikolot Mayim Rabim” (p57). A more complicated example involves a tune originally ascribed to Reb Shlomo for “Shir HaMa’alot,” but whose true origin still remains a mystery to this reviewer. This same melody appears four different times in the book, for: “Ashrei” (p82), “Hallel HaGadol” (p89), “Eil Adon” (p104) and “K’vakarat” (p141). Puzzlingly, the tune is attributed differently at almost every iteration (Traditional, Sephardic, & Chassidic).

Such ignorance of origins is endemic to emergent Jewish communities—a result of their predominantly oral culture. For over two centuries, the cantorial world has transmitted melodies via written music. In contrast, *shul* tunes in the post-denominational world are passed orally, via actual services, community singalongs, online recordings and videos. In such an environment, the provenance of melodies may become obscured. I experienced this first hand while researching melody origins for Mechon Hadar’s “Tefillah and Music” website; many of the tunes that are standard in the minyan world had either unknown authors or were lovingly (if inaccurately) attributed to Shlomo Carlebach. The publication of these melodies serves as a useful work of ethnography—a snapshot of emerging Jewish spirituality in the 21st century as expressed through the music of these new communities.

The melodies of *Shira Chadasha*, while diverse in style, actually represent an increasingly shared repertoire among emergent communities. In 2008, I attended a packed S'lihot service at Kehilat Hadar, a well-known Upper West Side Independent Minyan. Held in the basement of a church, the service was led by Rabbi Ebn Leader, one of the superstar daveners of the Minyan world. The evening began, after a word of Torah, with a ten minute, "dirge-to-dveykus" chant of "Galeh K'vod" (*Shira Chadasha*, p. 181). "Galeh", a very popular tune at the Rabbinical School of Hebrew College in Boston, was written by Orthodox rabbi Moshe Shur, an activist, professor, longtime director of Queens College Hillel, and founding member of the Diaspora Yeshiva Band. The service continued with two competing melodies for "Ashrei"—one by Jewish chant composer and Renewal rabbi, Shefa Gold (p. 81) and one by Reconstructionist rabbi Jamie Arnold (p. 83). Both melodies have a similar opening motive, which created divergent perceptions of which tune had been chosen, resulting in a surprisingly beautiful dissonance that resolved eventually into the Arnold melody. Other melodies included: Carlebach's "Eliyahu HaNavi;" "Ki Hinei Kachomer" (p. 154), by Yigal Calek (of the London School of Jewish Song) & Israeli singer-songwriter Boaz Sharabi, as well as and other chant-like, anonymous yeshiva tunes for "Hu Ya'aneinu" and "Shomer Yisrael." Such a variety of styles--all poured into one Minyan's repertoire--points to a musical permeability between emergent communities.

One of the reasons for this convergence is their shared emphasis on communal singing. This occurs often in a meditative approach that continually builds until an emotional tone has been set. Leaders seeking to successfully apply this repertoire should consider the technique of "leading and receding," allowing the congregation's voice to take the lead once it has 'gotten' the tune, and encouraging successive repetitions until an appropriate mood is reached. Independent *minyanim*, which daven a full traditional liturgy, work particularly hard to be time-efficient through straight davening sections and the Torah service, in order to provide space for the energetic music that is their hallmark. To that end, *sh'lihei tsibbur* may choose to teach these melodies in an extra-liturgical context, such as a weekday evening singing circle, a "melodies class" or an Alternate Minyan. All of these alternatives provide opportunities to cultivate a singing community that will provide a harmonic and *kavvanah*-filled foundation for actual worship.

The book itself is not without its enigmas. It is unknown what Minyan groups are using Turkish melodies within their repertoires (p. 99, p. 144), nor how certain melodies became mashed together (Carlebach's "Uvnei Otah"-plus-"Im Eshkachech," for "L'dor Vador," p145). In addition, the sheet music, as is too often the case with *hazzanut*, often does not communicate the norms of performance practice. "Ivdu et Adonai" by Moshe Shur (p. 86), for example, is more commonly sung as *Ivdu et ha-shem b'simḥah* with eighth-notes on the last two words. "Veye'etayu" (p. 148), made famous by Kehilat Hadar on their 2004 CD, features a performance practice in which scattered members of the Kahal are each given different lines of the acrostic to sing, creating a call-and-response between individual worshipers and the congregation, until all join together energetically for the chorus. Finding a live davener (or a recording of one) could be infinitely more instructive on how to approach the music than simply reading the notes on the page. (The *S'lihot* davening described above can be found on the "Tefillah and Music" page of the Mechon Hadar website, [www.mechonhadar.org](http://www.mechonhadar.org)).



This leads us to the question of the moment—how do cantors, masters of nusah and guardians of a sacred Jewish musical tradition—approach this neo-Hasidic, post-denominational music? After I had finished leading a singing circle at a recent Cantors Assembly Executive Council meeting, an older colleague recounted to me his experience of singing with Shlomo Carlebach many years ago. He had realized that the goal of this type of singing was to *empty* the mind and not to refine it. In his words, “it was a drug.” In point of fact, the Cantors Assembly’s publication of *Shira Chadasha* was initially suspect to many of my colleagues, even those serving in emergent communities. Rabbi Elie Kaunfer of Mechon Hadar described this book as “like Amtrak publishing a guide to airline travel: both modes get you there, but [they are] very different.”

In our fast-moving era, to move people emotionally--as well as intellectually--we may require different tools than did past generations of cantors. Ours is an age of diminished Jewish literacy and spiritual self-confidence. The communal engagement provided by the way this repertoire is sung can provide the space for expressive davening and building faith. Remarks made at the Cantors Assembly’s 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention in 1955 by its longtime executive director Samuel Rosenbaum (ז”ל), might be pertinent here. Although Sam had little love lost for the liberalities of New-Age congregational singing, the words of his final report still ring true:

We *hazzanim* must be more concerned with singing *with* people than singing *at* people, for when we do the latter, we are preaching, not teaching. When rabbis pontificate, they increase the distance between themselves and their congregants. We must lower our voices so that we can hear more clearly what our people are thinking and saying, so as better to appreciate and understand their needs. There is an urgent need for warmth, caring; for honest, not synthetic, emotion, for gentle leadership in prayer and in thought; for comfort and understanding, and not so much for ringing pronouncements on high, nor of ersatz nostalgia.

*Shira Chadasha* is a wonderful volume that espouses Sam Rosenbaum’s advice, offering us music that opens a channel for Sam’s “gentle leadership.” The music builds a bridge that helps close the “distance” between generations, and carries a message (however imperfect) that speaks to our time.

A final note: Whereas in past generations, the cantor’s *m’shor’rim* constituted a select choir, the music of *Shira Chadasha* creates a worship environment in which all the worshipers are *m’shor’rim*—empowered singers with a musical stake in the service. This is a blessing—and also a challenge. Once we actively engage the entire congregation there is more support for us as cantors. However, to sustain that level of worshiper involvement through stretches of the liturgy that are chanted by either the cantor or a *Ba’al k’ri’ah*, will take creative planning on our part. *Shira Chadasha* gives us the tools with which to renew an approach to congregational singing that is expressed in the prayer *U-v’mak’halot* on Shabbat morning: “Thousands of Your people, the house of Israel, joyously glorify Your name in every generation.”

*Matthew Austerklein is Hazzan at Beth El Congregation in Akron, Ohio. His articles and reviews appear regularly in the Journal of Synagogue Music. His chapter on the early modern cantorate will be part of*

the anthology, *Jewish Musical Cultures in Europe: 1500-1700*, to be published by Brill in 2018. His article “*The Jewish Cantor in Jewish History*,” is scheduled to appear in the Journal’s March 2019 issue.

## **Hankus Netsky’s *Klezmer: Music and Community* in Twentieth-century Jewish Philadelphia**

*Reviewed by Jack Kessler*

**I**t is with no small degree of trepidation that I review this masterful and comprehensive work, reflecting first upon the passion poured into it by the author, who has devoted his entire career to engaging with that magnificent genre of Jewish music we call Klezmer.

The book is a panorama. Situated in the larger picture of Jewish experience in the last century, it offers multiple perspectives on the way Klezmer has mirrored the American Jewish experience. As the twentieth century began, the arrival here of two million Eastern European Jews brought them inevitably into contact with the pull of assimilation into a vast new arena of cultural influences. Their struggle to maintain foundational elements of their own folk culture is reflected in the persistence of Klezmer, through decline and eventual efflorescence as a creative form of musical expression.

In seeking to understand klezmer as an artifact of Eastern European Jewish culture, we must look at the larger context of what culture was all about. For largely assimilated American Jews who neither live in a Jewish culture nor speak its language, the memories are scant. Despite the continuing popularity of *Fiddler on the Roof*, much of the rich culture of Eastern European Jewish life lies almost beyond our comprehension. As our living links to that life have been broken through the drying up of mass immigration and then the devastation of the Shoah, we must deal with how it all changed in America and look to see what the future may hold.

The Philadelphia Jewish story, with which Hankus Netsky is most intimately familiar, is a slice of the larger American Jewish story. Klezmer I Philly is illustrative of the “European klezmer meets America” experience. Klezmer came over on the boat, rooted in the rich musical traditions of the old world. It thrived for decades in the music of virtuosic players. It lived long and prospered, and then as its prime time passed, it withered in the New World, and something new started growing out of what was left. Hankus Netsky tells that story.

He looms large in Jewish music of the last few decades. When Hankus reads this, he may laugh at my choice of the word 'loom'--as he is an easy-going, and humble human being. He’s also an amazingly brilliant musician both as performer on several instruments and arranger, who has worked with some of the musical greats of our time, including Theodore Bikel and Itzhak Perlman. He is typically not the ‘front man’ in these performances. In the Bikel project—a first-rate documentary video—Hankus is the pianist with his back to the camera; you never see his



face. A viewer might never realize that he is the glue holding everything together, in fact he is one of the driving forces behind the contemporary renaissance of interest in klezmer.

Klezmer is the 500-year-old (give or take a few weeks and some schnapps) tradition of Eastern European Jewish celebration music. Klezmer modes are the same as the classical Ashkenazi liturgical modes—*Freygish*, *mi-shebeirakh*, *adonai malakh*--along with Western major and minor. From my perspective, both as a hazzan and as a Klezmer performer, Klez is sister to *hazzanut*. The liturgical musical traditions and the nusah (modalities) of the synagogue were the music with which Jewish secular musicians were familiar, and the quasi-vocal style of Klezmer instrumental playing mirrors that genre. One could say that Klezmer is the “party side” of the *hazzanut* coin. Klez is also something of a patchwork quilt (ok, I cannot resist: *ungepatchwork*) of melodies absorbed and borrowed from adjacent cultures, as were synagogue melodies as well, over the centuries of Jewish dispersal. Klez tunes import and adapt melodies from a range of other musical cultures, including Roma, Greek and Balkan.

The great wave of Jewish immigration from Eastern European persecution to the sought-after *Goldene Medina* of America in the late-19th and early-20th centuries included the musicians. For decades, they played the rich literature of *Freylakhs*, *bulgars*, *doinas*, *hongas*, and *khusidls*--for which there was a long tradition of specific applications--music for accompanying the bride or that were well known and woven into the fabric of the culture. This music, while still popular with the immigrant generation in the first half of the 20th century, fell largely out of fashion by the 1940s due to pressures of assimilation on the Jewish community. It lived on in a rather dormant way in recordings made earlier, in some sheet music collections, and in the minds and hands of veteran players.

Hankus Netsky was a Philly boy: he comes from a family of Philadelphia klezmerim, immigrant players who were active in the first half of the last century, who boasted a pronounced local style of performing klezmer, noticeably different from its klezmer cousin in the Big Apple, two hours up the interstate highway. The Philly klezmer style, which included unique melodies in idiosyncratic arrangements, maintained its Eastern European roots more consistently and longer than did the larger New York klezmer scene, as the intensity of the NY musical world and musicians’ need to find work led to more and faster crossover with American musical styles.

Comedian W.C. Fields once joked about a contest in which the first prize was a week in Philadelphia, and second prize was two weeks. Clearly, he didn’t know about Jewish Philly in the first half of the 20th century. South Philly was where the immigrants went straight from the boat. A spectrum of communities lived elbow to elbow: Greek, Lebanese, Italian, Polish... and a strong, vibrant Jewish community with its own rich cultural life. While Jewish Philly lacked the sheer numbers of its counterpart in the Big Apple, the community was tightly knit, and supported a large number of Jewish musicians who developed a Klezmer scene with a unique style.

Hankus’ contact with older veteran players yields rich anecdotes (and many direct quotes) that contribute to the picture he paints of dedicated old-time artists doing their music for a living. Many of these intimate recollections sound like the kind of things that guys in a band will tell each other on the bandstand: the well-known player who thought he was going to

Argentina and took the boat to Philly by accident, or players griping about the sometimes rough competition between bandleaders for work, or the leader whose diminutive wife dragged all the gear, or how the eternal question of ‘do we eat on this job?’ gets answered in various ways—and many more. All this is woven together with the skill of a master raconteur who is also a master musician and a superb musical scholar.

In the late 70s, Hankus, then on staff in the Third Stream Department at New England Conservatory of Music--a project created to experiment with musical crossover (jazz to classical, etc.)--brought students together to form the Klezmer Conservatory Band. Some went on to have notable Klezmer careers of their own: Frank London (trumpet), Jim Guttman (bass), Grant Smith (drums), and others. With this sprawling big band as his instrument (12 to 14 players was not unusual), Hankus almost singlehandedly created the near-explosive revival of Klezmer music.

All the klezmer bands that formed thereafter—among many others the Klezmorim on the West Coast, Maxwell Street in Chicago, the Klezematics in New York, Yid Vicious in Milwaukee, my own group, Klingon Klezmer in Philly—owe Hankus a debt we can never repay for what he started, or more exactly, re-started. The Klingon Klez CDs for example, most particularly the infamous one, “Blue Suede Jews,” are significantly influenced by the sense of instrumental balance and interplay that Hankus brought to the music.

This renaissance is the positive side to the life of a rich cultural artifact that, unfortunately, has tragically declined. All the rich, specialized applications of the various musical pieces that were the standards of the literature lost their function as Jews assimilated into the secular American world. What remains extant are sheet music collections that players can access to create their own programs, and the popularity of mainly up-tempo *Freylakhs* for the ‘Hora’ set at parties. In our conversations, Hankus called it the ‘rubble of klezmer’ and quoted Brecht: “I feel like a man who carries a brick around to show people what my house looked like.”

**T**he “Klezmer renaissance” of the past two decades has brought some Klez back into popularity, but has its downsides as well. Despite our delight in Klezmer’s contemporary musical growth, there has occurred alongside it a natural crossover. Ever since legendary clarinetist Dave Tarras *et al* set foot on American soil, the eternal osmotic relationship with the majority culture has been changing Klez. Being the musical sponge that it is, Klezmer absorbed Swing, Rock, Middle Eastern, Hip-hop, and all the other musical influences you can imagine. The upside has been growth and enrichment; the downside, dilution and entropy. The other dilemma that Hankus points out is that a brilliant tradition that has scaled the heights of virtuosity is now the domain of more and more entry-level local amateur players and fewer artists, and so loses its emotional potential.

Also, while originally an instrumental phenomenon, Klezmer inevitably had to include Yiddish vocals in its Wedding and Bar Mitzvah repertoire. As the vernacular spoken by our people’s first wave of immigration here, everyone understood the words. One aspect of the modern revival is that while Yiddish vocals are frequently employed, outside the super-observant *Haredi* world, Yiddish has become an art language. The result is that when performing Yiddish



material (almost always in concert, not at parties), detailed program notes are needed, and even then, it takes almost as long to explain the song as to perform it. The only alternative is to perform in our English vernacular, to somehow craft new lyrics that capture the flavor of the original Yiddish. But that gets tricky, since the pungency of Yiddish references to the squalid conditions of daily life in tenements on the Lower East Side of a century ago is lost when sung to suburbanites accustomed to luxury Westchester homes--in a totally different language.

Hankus Netsky discussed all of the above with me, pointing out that his conscious decision to work with Itzhak Perlman was his way of bringing Klezmer as a virtuoso musical language back to the general public. Perlman's superb playing, combined with Hankus's brilliance as an arranger and ensemble conductor, have enjoyed spectacular success on recordings and in major concert venues like Ravinia in Chicago and the Hollywood Bowl. I believe we can conclude that this is a win/win development: good for the Jews and good for the world.

If you love Jewish music, Hankus Netsky's *Klezmer: Music and Community in Twentieth Century Philadelphia* is a must read. It offers a guided tour, opening with a section describing the Klezmer life in the old country and then moves on to an extensive description of the Klezmer scene with its many gifted, sometimes outrageous players in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A recounting of the ensuing decades and the way musicians had to adapt to the shift in the Jewish community as the new generation became more Americanized than their immigrant parents brings us to a description of what an old-style Philly wedding was like (delicious!). Included is a section with sheet music and detailed explanations about the style, structure and variations of the unique dance medley called the "Philly Sher."

In addition to being an enjoyable read, this book is a deep and thorough work of scholarship. Hankus brings us his own intimate glimpses supplemented by interviews with both seasoned Philly players and the newer folks. He also references a vast range of scholarly articles on Jewish culture and music (his list of sources at the back of the book is nine pages single-spaced).

Whither Klez? Whither Jewish music? Whither Yiddishkeit? Whither us, and our children? The future has potential in many ways. Jewish life, which has been grappling with variants of a spiritual crisis for over 100 years (one could say since the ghetto walls came down), may yet rise again to become a significant force for the betterment of the world. Hankus says we need to move from post-ethnicity to post-modern ethnicity. To quote Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, "our music is a carrier wave of our message." Thank you to Hankus Netsky for being part of that wave.

*Hazzan Jack Kessler (JTS 1969) directs the ALEPH Cantorial Program, training the hazzanim of the future. He received a Master's degree in Voice from Boston Conservatory, and served in Conservative congregations for 20 years. He teaches Nusah and Voice in the Davenen' Leadership Training Institute (DLTI) and directs two touring ensembles: ATZILUT—CONCERTS FOR PEACE (comprised of Arab and Jewish musicians playing together), and KLINGON KLEZMER (Jewish music from other planets). Jack Kessler writes regularly for the Journal (see his article, "English Leyning," in this issue's DIVREI K'RI'AH SECTION).*

**A Scent of Honey—Ladorot Habaim: For Generations to Come, Music for A Sabbath Eve—Composed and Produced by Michael Isaacson.**  
A work co-commissioned by 22 congregations and intended to be premiered simultaneously, on *Shabbat Shirah*, February 13, 2017.

*Reviewed by Charles Davidson*

#### MILLENNIALS: A PERSONAL OVERVIEW

It is generally known that American millennials are more interested in secular and political issues than in the state of Jewish prayer. An opinion shared by many of them is that the European model, its liturgy and its music, is old fashioned and no longer relevant and should best stay in Europe. There have been wide-ranging changes in the American synagogue experience that may or may not have come about as a reaction to this millennial disinterest. An example of such change is the movements-wide restructuring of rabbinic and cantorial roles: young rabbis have become more active politically than before and many have taken over the musical leadership in their communities; as well, many cantors have also become more politically active and also have changed their traditional image by assuming the mantle of religious leader, in many cases receiving rabbinic ordination. Some congregations no longer feel it necessary to claim association with national organizations. In many instances services that took place in large sanctuaries are now held in smaller and more intimate spaces. In some communities, locations understood to be secular (bars, gymnasiums, etc.) are considered as suitable for communal prayer as any other. Prayers in Hebrew have been revised or shortened to accommodate a congregant who is Hebraically limited. There have been musical innovations as well: organs and choirs have been replaced by guitars and percussion; sung Hebrew is balanced by sung English; table-thumping tunes of the summer camp share the podium with melodies rooted in musical theatre; irrepressible rhythms from South America have entered the repertoire as well as the exotic filigree of *Sephardi* song. How best to attract the millennial worshipper must surely be one of the challenges of the American synagogue composer. Michael Isaacson here faces that challenge after years of composing in the field.

## ABOUT THE WORK

**#1 *Hinei Mah Tov***--From the onset there is a feeling of unconstrained movement and it continues throughout the piece. The composer calls it a “propulsion” and a remedy towards decreasing the “static quality of our worship.” There is a melange of percussive motives and off-beat syncopation with short choral (unison and 2-part) punctuations on the words *Hinei Mah Tov*. Program notes declare it is Intended as a processional to the *Bimah* and that choreography is also an option. It is very effective and immediately captures attention (sung by the Ensemble).

**#2 *Candlelighting***--Program notes are provided which explain some of the musical devices employed in the work. They also give an insight into the composer’s intent. For example, in this setting he envisions that “. . . the shimmer of the *Shabbat* flame ascends to heaven.” The transparency and instrumental color of the accompaniment does evoke an ethereal mystery, and the constant upward progression of an accompaniment motive points toward a celestial goal (sung by Lonee Frailich and Seth Borowski).

**#4 *L’chu N’ran’nah***--The composer declares “It’s not enough to set the text [‘Come let us sing’], the music itself has to sing and dance and express the joy of the *Shabbat*.” A lively dance indeed, alternating between Cantor and Chorus with A and B sections. These are cleverly handled with upward modulations that satisfy the ear and keep the repetitions fresh. Compressing prosodic Hebrew texts to fit neatly into four square melodies has always proven to be difficult. Here one is aware of the problem but it is well managed, given the astute attention paid to enunciation by the Cantor. As far as the Jewish character of the music is concerned the listener might be forgiven for hearing a connection with the jolly melodies of Christmas (sung by Marcus Feldman, Teri Bibb).

**#5 *Shalom Aleichem***--An elegiac lyricism permeates this delightful setting, here well sung by a young performer, simply and without artifice. (Sung by Judy Greenfield).

**#6 *L’cha Dodi***--Isaacson explains: “In this [setting] each entrance respond(s) to a ‘beckoning’ of the preceding musical gesture as if to say ‘come’ follow me.” This is a love song to the Sabbath, a call and response between the Cantor and Chorus. The accompaniment and vocal lines derive from modules of thirds. The upward modulations are welcome. Stylistically identifiable as contemporary American musical fare, it may be a bit sugary for some (sung by Phil Baron and Faith Steinsnyder).

**#7 *Chatzi Kaddish***--Although the phraseology of the Hebrew is correct the compression of Hebrew phrases to fit into a four-square tune seems forced (sung by Don Gurney).

**#8 *Barechu***--Includes a *niggun* that the composer intended to serve as “a musical *midrash*.”

**#9 *Ahavat Olam***--With an English lyric by Doug Thiele, this is a simply constructed song reflecting the love relationship between Israel and God. It might be appropriate here to give credit to Lyricist Doug Thiele, acknowledged by the composer as a long-term collaborator and friend who has often supplied Isaacson with English prose (sung by Chayim Frankel and Teri Bibb).

**#10 *Sh'ma***--Quartal harmonies and tropal figurations grow climatically into a strong conclusion (sung by Don Gurney and Chorus).

**#11 *Mi Chamocha***--A successfully bouncy and joyful setting of the triumphal text, with English reworked by the composer. It is rhythmically interesting largely due to the alternating 4/4 and 7/8 measures. The idiomatic accompaniment is appropriate and well-constructed, and supports the vocal lines effectively (sung by Marcus Feldman and Lori Reisman).

**#12 *Hashkiveinu***--Because of the multiple themes in the prayer itself, the composer's solutions deserve close attention. In the traditional synagogue service the prayer *Hashkiveinu*, with its varied requests for a night of untroubled sleep, guidance for good counsel, protection from danger and then peace for all Israel, has been sung with passion by generations of cantors. Does the composer draw upon that cantorial history in his attention to the prayer? Although harmonically and structurally this setting is at odds with tradition, it is nevertheless, an homage to Jewish tradition. The dark mood of the piece is established from the onset with bowed *tremolando* notes in the cello whispering under spoken English. It establishes an uneasy yet intended "anxiousness:" "the restlessness suggest(s) as we retire for the evening (that) our thoughts need to be quieted from the anguishes of the day." The sudden turn toward the dramatic at the text "*V'hagein ba'adeinu, v'haseir mei'aleinu oyev dever, v'cherev v'ra'av v'yagon*" (Shield us from enemies and pestilence, from starvation, sword and sorrow) with boldly clashing harmonies, effectively transmits the meaning of the text; while the serene melodic line and the subtle harmonies at its conclusion look toward a hopeful future.

**#16 *R'tzei***--According to the composer, this request that our prayers be answered is filled with a sense of joyfulness - Isaacson notes: "If we pray with *kavannah*, focused intent, we should be in good spirits when making requests." The solo line is here first sung by the bass voice part and then passed on to the chorus. To this listener, the setting references *opera buffa* with an overly pompous instrumental accompaniment and a silly repetitive phrase bandied about between solo and chorus. Understanding the intent, perhaps different musical ideas might have worked better (sung by David Perper and Teri Bibb).

**#17 *Shalom Rav***--An organ accompaniment under English readings by the congregation is followed by solo sections which balance English and Hebrew phrases, continuing and extending a gentle 6/8 motive. It's delivered artistically and with a simple beauty (sung by Arianne Brown).

**#18 *Yih'yu L'ratzon***--Serene and peaceful, the piece is propelled by a simple accompaniment that incorporate motives from preceding settings in this work and acts as a unifying element to the whole. Beautifully constructed and sung, its connection to musical theatre is undeniable.

**#19 *Mi Shebeirach***--A gracefully arched octave-encompassing theme is repeated three times and linked by smaller motives of thirds and fifths. The accompaniment here, as in all of the settings, has an independent and well-conceived role that is interesting in itself (sung by Kerith Spencer-Shapiro).

**#20 *Aleinu***--Rhythmically related to the opening setting (*Hinei Mah Tov*), the piece celebrates its Near Eastern heritage with the exuberant singing of a male chorus heard first in unison and then divided into three parts. The movement slows and ends quietly with an English-Hebrew overlay.

**#21 *Bayom Hahu***--The expected Hebrew conclusion to the *Aleinu* prayer is sung at the beginning and again at the end of the setting, serving as book-ends to the body of the piece which looks to a time when the world will be in a messianic state of peace: "One clear day we'll know You in a new light . . . No more hate, no more greed. . . no more war, no more need, a world united on that day." It is well constructed and rooted deep within the fabric of musical theatre.

**#22 *Memorial List***--Program notes refer to the return of a *niggun* first heard in the *Bar'chu* and now sung by the Chorus under the reading of names and recitation of the Mourner's *Kaddish*.

**#23 *Threefold Benediction***--A forthright exposition by the Cantor and responses by the Chorus. First appearing in the accompaniment and then in the Cantor's part, is a clear quotation of the ascending motive of the High Holiday's *Birkat Kohanim*, adding to the solemnity and import of the setting (sung by Phil Baron and Chorus).

**#24 *Adon Olam***--Isaacson takes a bold and vastly different approach to this concluding hymn than do other composers' settings of this text. He acknowledges his intent to set it in a manner that reflects its deeper philosophy more than the settings we are accustomed to hearing. Sung with a joyful vigor, the soloist and chorus lead us through a clever series of variations in the accompaniment, punctuated by a choral *ai yai yai yai* motto "to leave everyone in a festive mind for the *Kiddush*," that follows (sung by Nathan Lam and Men's Ensemble).

**#25 *Recessional***--Repeating the motives of the opening Processional and the concluding *Adon Olam*, in the composer's words, "creates musical bookends to the larger service structure as the congregants and participants exit the sanctuary."

#### SOME COMMENTS IN CONCLUSION

Even at first glance it was obvious that an enormous amount of work had been invested in *Ladorot Habaim* after the actual composing was completed: choosing and rehearsing the singers; creating an appropriate orchestration; producing and printing copious program notes and other material; and then recording the entire work including the "rabbinic" voice (Isaacson) and devising a way to enable even congregations with limited resources the ability to mount a performance. It is a complete and fully realized project. Throughout *Ladorot Habaim*, one is aware of a warm and inviting lyricism. Regarding the bi-lingual structure of the pieces, Isaacson acknowledges that in writing for many of today's worshippers he must assume a lack of basic Hebraic knowledge and he therefore sets both Hebrew and English for most sections. The reviewer wonders if he addresses mostly Reform congregations? Isaacson also asserts that the rhythmic accents of the Hebrew have given rise to most of his musical ideas. Since much of the music fits neatly into a song format, at times it required the squeezing of Hebrew words together in a manner which was not natural to the prosody. As for "traditional" musical motives as used

by the *Ashkenazi* European communities for several hundred years there is little trace of them. One wonders how the work will be used by congregations following its premiere; perhaps in selected sections?

*Ladorot Habaim* reasserts Michael Isaacson's position as a talented American Jewish composer who has already made significant contributions to the *genre* (*Hegyon Libi*, *Maasei V'reisheet* are among his six "sacred services") and from whom more music of quality can be expected.

*A distinguished cantor, composer and former editor of the Journal, Charles Davidson, DSM, is Professor Emeritus at The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and Hazzan Emeritus of Congregation Adath Jeshurun, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania. His article, "A Bibliography of Selected Jewish Worship Services Written for Cantor, Choir and Organ, during the Years Following World War II," is scheduled to appear in the March 2019 issue of JSM.*



## MAIL BOX

**Re: “Yiddish Dance Songs” article (JSM 2010)**

*January 13, 2015*

Excerpted memoir from the “Kehila Links Jewish Gen” website for “Stavische / Spector

*Submitted by: Helen Winkler*

Toronto, ON

### **Mother’s Father: A Special Man**

*After Max Trachtman*

**M**y grandfather Laizer Mendi Spector (1812-1896) lived in Stavisht (Stavische), Ukraine. He held a patent for mixing snuff, which was more popular at that time than smoking tobacco would later become. He knew how to prepare it just right, and that was how he made his living. For spiritual satisfaction he played clarinet in his own band, which included a fiddle and drum. Every Saturday night they would go to the Rabbi’s house where a number of townspeople gathered, and between the herring and the borscht they played and entertained the folks. The Rabbi would tell them their music was divine, and that more than compensated them for their effort.

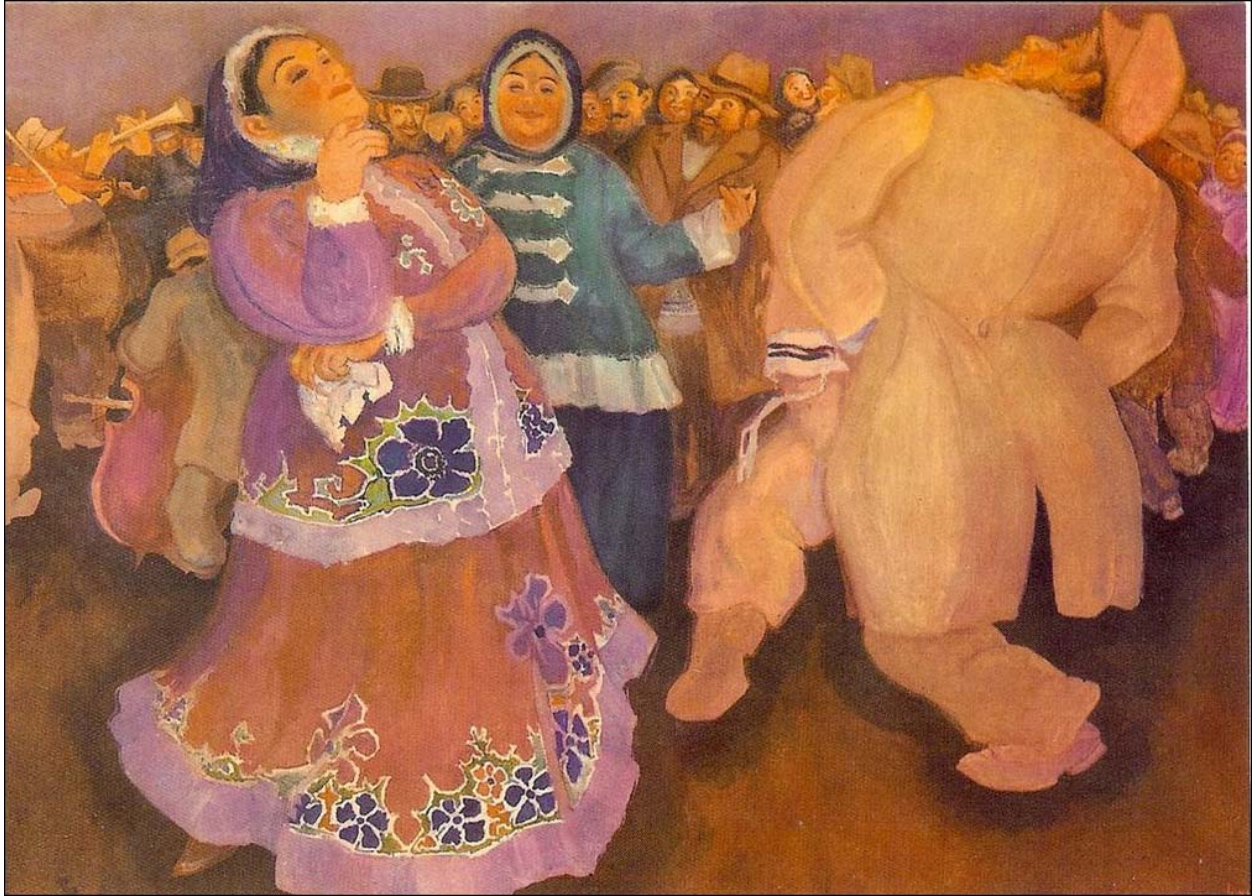
For local weddings, professional musicians were brought in from the big city, which Laizer Mendi did not mind. In fact he was glad that these interlopers had the chance to earn a night’s pay. Families of the bride and groom did not have to pay the musicians, who operated on a piece-time basis. The band would sit at a table upon which sat a plate. As the first guest arrived, the leader would call out “Welcome” and “Mazeltov” and they would play a few bars. The guest then went over to the table and dropped a coin or two. As other guests arrived, the procedure was repeated.

General dancing followed the dinner. A guest would ask the musicians to play a *Kazatzke*, a *Kamarske* or a *Sher* (square dance), and put a couple of coins in the plate. The square dance was unlike the kind we see here—a barn dance with a caller. Instead, everyone in the circle told everyone else what to do, and nobody knew which way to turn. Each one danced his own way. As long as people kept dropping coins in the plate the band kept on playing. When it was all over the band leader would count out the money. Generally there would be about 10 or 15 rubles. In case of a rich wedding there could be 20 or 25 rubles.

The only weddings where Laizer Mendi’s local *Kapelle* (band) played were for poor and orphaned girls, where the guests were equally poor and not very numerous. That was when they really showed their talents. Afterwards, he would count the money (which came to about three or four rubles), put it in a kerchief, and hand it over to the bride as a wedding gift... That is why my grandfather was so honored and loved by all who knew him.

The relevant paragraph in JSM's 2010 article quoted Jewish folkdance instructor Steve Weintraub (*Posting to Helen Winkler's Yiddish Dance website 1/15/06*):

The calls [embodied in the song lyrics] seem to combine actual instruction with funny / nonsensical rhymes and formulas. It's interesting that the lyrics make fun of the dancers and expect them to mess up. This might be because dancing a *Kadril* [Yiddish for Quadrille] was "putting on airs" in a way, and was made more acceptable by being made fun of (we're Jews, we don't take this dancing thing too seriously).



Saul Raskin, *A Jewish Wedding*, 1945

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**SINGING IS SPEECH MADE MUSICAL—  
DANCING IS THE BODY MADE POET**

Ernst Bacon, *Notes on the Piano*, 1963

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**Re: “Joseph Shlisky, 1894-1955” (JSM Fall 2011)**

February 23, 2016

**R**e-reading the Journal’s biography of this virtuoso cantor with his mysterious childhood, spurred me to make a few internet investigations of his early years. A lengthy article appears in <http://torontoist.com> dated 13th December 2014, which also notes the vague and conflicting information concerning his early life. The generally quoted birth year is 1894 and birth location is given variously as, “Ostrowce or Vochosk” ...or “near Lodz, Poland.” The date of his virtual kidnapping to Canada by an unscrupulous Cantor/Choirmaster is given as “1901 at age seven. A number of possibly reliable official documents are now available online. His Toronto marriage documents from 1911 say he was 22, implying birth in **1889**. His graduation from Toronto Conservatoire seems to be undisputed at 1917, followed by his emigration to New York. His US military draft registration document shows place of birth as **Vonchock** in Russian Poland. This is today the town of Woichock near Ostrowiec and Radom, in SE Poland. The same card gives his date of birth as November 5th **1891**. A later border crossing document from 1919 shows his year of birth as **1893**. More recent documentation, the 1940 NYC census gives his birth year as **1894** and this is the same date as is used in his *New York Times* obituary: 1955.

Regarding his journey from Europe to Canada, there is one reference on the previously mentioned US border crossing document from 1919, stating his original arrival in Canada to have been on SS Montrose in 1904 (the same ship on which the first murder suspect to be apprehended by telegraphed messaging, Dr. Crippen, left Europe in 1910.)

David Prager  
London, UK

**Re: Jacob Adler’s “...Correct Pronunciation...” (JSM March 2017)**

March 16, 2017

**W**hat a great opening article! I always thought it an especial *meshugaas* to end Rosenblatt’s *Rachem na* with “boneh b’raha**MAV** y’rusha**L**Ayim a**MEIN**,” when it should have Yossele’s naturally flowing East European pronunciation and stress. I think the schools of Shlomo Ravitz and Shlomo Zalman Rivlin were politicized by 20<sup>th</sup>-century events in the Holy Land, and as a result, *Ivrit*-speaking *hazzanim* there find Ashkenazi-inflected Hebrew hard to stick to when davening, practically or even ideologically. Thus, one of the themes rehearsed a few times in *JSM* is that the hasidified *hazzanut* of Yaakov Yosef Stark, Yanki Lemmer and Ben-Zion Miller represents a most welcome example of ‘cavalry to the rescue’ (albeit on a small scale). I sent Professor Adler’s article to my academic *haredi* brother, Rabbi Joseph Prager in Israel, who told me he’ll now stop jolting the congregational flow in *Yigdal*, by no longer singing loudly from the pews the self-righteously ‘correct’ “tsofeh v’yo**DEI**’a s’ta**REI**nu”—recognizing that *ahdut* is more important—and indeed the *ikkar* of congregational singing.

David Prager  
London, UK

## FROM ALL THEIR HABITATIONS

### An Island-based Cantor: Avery Tracht

Reprinted with permission, after Nicole Pieternella, “Singing Is Everything to Me,” *The Saturday Night Newspaper*, October 29, 2016, Curaçao, Dutch Caribbean, translated by William Restemeyer.

**H**e has studied at conservatories in New York and Cincinnati, spent time in Germany to try his luck as a professional classical singer, and, with his imposing voice, given concerts since his youth. Ultimately Jewish music won out and led him, by way of Jewish seminaries in New York and Jerusalem, and synagogues in America and Amsterdam, to Curaçao. Since 2004, Hazzan (Cantor) Avery Tracht has stood at the helm of the oldest continuously functioning synagogue in the Western Hemisphere: the religious gathering-place of the Liberal Sephardic-Jewish congregation on the island of Curaçao.

I entered the beautiful courtyard of the synagogue Mikvé Israel-Emanuel on the Hanchi di Snoa (“Street of the Synagogue”), having traveled our always atmospheric inner city one weekday morning, especially curious about who Cantor Avery Tracht is, how he came to Curaçao, and how he fulfills and experiences his function as a religious leader on our island. “Between 1700 and 1800,” he began, “there were several synagogues on Curaçao—in fact, attracting more Jews to the island than lived in the entire United States at that time. The oldest and most famous synagogue in America—The Touro Synagogue in Rhode Island—received help with its founding from the Curaçao Jewish community, such that Curaçao is well known among American Jews. However, at present the local Sephardic community numbers only 250, and this number continues to fall. Our children routinely leave to study in another country and remain there. This year three babies were born in our community, but the previous baby had been born nine years ago.”

We are sitting in his small study, which was completely stuffed with Hebrew sacred books. Before the interview actually began, Hazzan Tracht explained the difference between a Cantor and a Rabbi: “Large congregations who can afford it often have both functionaries in service, whereas smaller ones—like here—choose one of the two. Rabbis usually serve as teachers and preachers who educate their congregants about Jewish Law and tradition, and often play the role of spiritual leader in their community.”

Since singing the Hebrew liturgy occupies primacy of place in Jewish worship, congregations have often relied upon the religious leadership of a professional cantor who led services, trained Bar-and-Bat Mitzvah candidates, and taught Scripture to adults. Says Tracht: “Before coming to Curaçao, I mainly filled the role of *Voorsanger* (Prayer Leader) in the various synagogues where I served. Here on Curaçao I’m sort of a centipede. I do everything necessary to keep our congregation active and inspired—from leading services, visiting the sick and burying the departed, to teaching Scripture and organizing a monthly Jewish Film Evening at my residence.”

## Comparing Communities

**T**hough tiny, the Jewish community is in fact less insular on Curaçao than in other locations. “In Europe and even in parts of the US,” says Tracht, “antisemitism is still common. Because of that, Jewish people look more to each other for support and protection and take a more active part in Jewish life. On Curaçao, antisemitism has never appeared, and you notice the effect of that on the Jewish community. Last year, a *Beth Din* (Legal Panel) which I had convened with rabbinic colleagues, converted eight people to Judaism, all of whom continue to participate faithfully in my adult classes at the Hebrew School. Out of the existing community, however, practically no one comes to lessons. They are busy with their businesses and sometimes, only five people will show up for services, whereas ten are required to constitute a Minyan (quorum) for reading the Torah. I don’t know if Judaism will have an important influence on the island in the future. It used to be that we even took part in the island’s politics, but that has not been true for a long time.”

Then Hazzan Tracht tells his life story, which includes his love of music, singing, traveling, learning new languages and most important—forging strong friendships. He grew up in the American Midwestern state of Ohio, in an Ashkenazic community. After high school he finally was able to pursue his lifelong ambition of becoming a singer, attending the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, New York. The venture stalled after one year; he was a bit young to deal with the prolonged homesickness for small-town USA. He transferred to the Conservatory of Music at the much closer University of Cincinnati.

As luck would have it, this second attempt at becoming a professional singer was also derailed—by the opportunity to begin earning a living. Avery was offered a position as part-time Cantor at a 2,000-member congregation in his hometown of Dayton, Ohio. Without really knowing what he was doing, he accepted. In his own words: “My first service as cantor was terrible! Although being Jewish had always been an important part of my identity. I had done very little with either the religion or the language following my Bar Mitzvah—a strong singing voice was not nearly enough to compensate for a lack of knowledge.”

## Unexpected Help Arrives

**O**ne Shabbat morning when Tracht was leading services during his tenure as part-time cantor, a well-known older colleague from Detroit, Michigan happened to be in attendance. This colleague approached him after the service and told him in no uncertain terms that, despite Avery’s lack of experience, it was obvious that he had the makings of a professional hazzan. Tracht began visiting this individual on a regular basis, auditing his various functions as both prayer leader and personal counselor to the hundreds of families that comprised his flock. It was the only way for a novice to gain true insight into a multi-functional profession for which there were as yet no official training programs.

During his final year at the Cincinnati Conservatory, on the doorstep of earning his Bachelor of Music degree in Opera, Tracht applied to the Jerusalem branch of Hebrew Union College, with the intent of taking courses in Hebrew Language and Liturgy. After one month he

realized that the only curriculums offered in these and allied subjects were geared for prospective rabbis—rather than cantors.

Hebrew Union College in New York did offer a five-year cantorial program, at the newly established School of Sacred Music, and that is where Tracht headed next. After one year, he was offered the financial wherewithal to return to Jerusalem and study privately with the School's aging cantor there. Ironically, the fact that his mother strongly opposed—convinced him to take this take this decisive step.

“The ‘stereotypical Jewish mother’ can easily be compared to the Italian Mamma who is especially over-protective and dominant with her sons,” Tracht says smiling. “The more opposed my mother was to my going to Jerusalem a second time after it had gone so badly the first time, the more attractive the plan appeared to me. Worse still, at first, she seemed to be right; I simply could not adjust. It was unbearably warm, and I missed America. But after six months I began to value the society there more and more. No one waits in line in Jerusalem. An eighty-year-old woman will unceremoniously push you aside so that she can move ahead. On the other hand, if a pregnant woman needs a seat in a public place, everyone will stand up. No one says ‘please’ or ‘thank you’—but if something happens on the street, the whole neighborhood comes out to help. And it was wonderful to be living for the first time in in a society where the majority was Jewish. In Jerusalem all the streets were quiet and empty on Yom Kippur; everything revolved around the Holy Day. That alone deepened my experience of Judaism for all time.

When his magical year ended, Tracht returned to his cantorial studies at the School of Sacred Music, where he realized that he was not yet ready to settle down to life as a full-time congregational cantor. He'd had a taste of traveling, and still needed to develop his musical and vocal skills. He'd been told he had a “German” voice, which prompted him to take leave of the congregation in Brooklyn that he'd been serving, and look for a good voice teacher in Berlin. Numerous auditions there at first led nowhere—until the Protestant minister at whose home he'd been staying asked Avery to give a Jewish Music concert at his church and to remain afterwards while answering any questions the audience might have about Judaism. So successful did the evening turn out that Tracht decided to expand the material into a Holocaust program. During the fiftieth anniversary year of *Kristallnacht*—the fateful night in November 1938 when Hitler set out to destroy everything Jewish—Avery gave a series of concerts throughout Germany. Performed with piano accompaniment, the concerts drew full houses of the general public, politicians and the media. He realized that whereas the energy he'd invested in opera and classical music had brought no return, his lone venture into Jewish music was proving very successful.

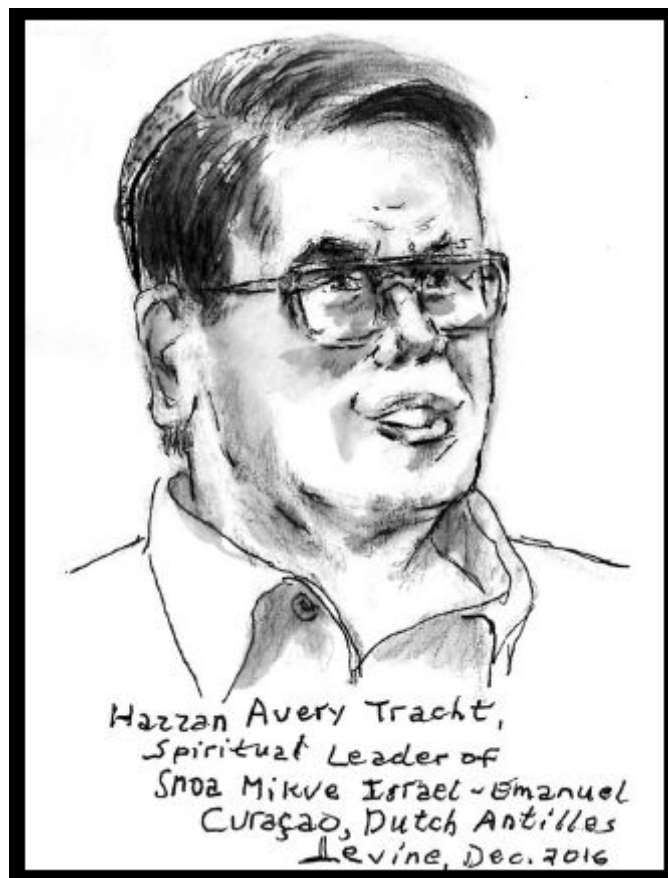
“I had wanted a career as a professional singer, but now began to feel that God had destined me for the role of cantor. I decided to follow that destiny and accepted a cantorial position at the Liberal Synagogue in Amsterdam.” It turned out to be an excellent choice. Avery Tracht enjoyed living and working in Holland, and learning the Dutch language would soon prove useful halfway around the world.



## An Unexpected Challenge

**B**ack in the US a decade later, he fainted one day, and when he came to, it was discovered that the vertebrae in his neck had collapsed. He attributes his eventual recovery to the care and loyalty of a group of devoted friends. “I never married. Traveling was very important to me. My entire life revolved around my singing. Learning new languages was my great passion. But that crisis taught me that true friendship came first. I cannot imagine how I would have survived without the help of my closest friends.”

And still the wanderlust had not diminished. It led him to accept the spiritual leadership of Curaçao’s Sephardic Jewish community, in whose midst he has found fulfillment at last. When he retires in a few years, he will return to his life in New York. But meanwhile, he feels very much at home here and is quite committed to keeping alive the 365-year history of the island’s Sephardic-Jewish community.



*Editor's note: A saving grace for Hazzan Tracht is the musical accompaniment provided by Mikvé Israel-Emanuel's pipe organ, installed in 1866, as a way to staunch members' defection to the newly formed rival Sephardic group, Emanuel. Almost a century later the organ remained out of use for four decades until being refurbished in 2001 for the congregation's 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This juxtaposition of Reform practice (the congregation is officially Reconstructionist)--with the Western-Sephardic custom of covering the Sanctuary's central area with sand (commemorating Spanish-Jewish Conversos' attempts to deaden the sounds of worship from prying agents of the Inquisition), reciting a prayer in Portuguese on behalf of the Dutch Royal Family, along with singing the Hebrew words of Psalm 104 (Borkhi nafshi et adonai...) to the 16<sup>th</sup>-century "Canon" of English composer Thomas Tallis (introduced the year before Hazzan Tracht's arrival)--lends a uniquely cosmopolitan atmosphere to the Shabbat Morning worship at this remote yet much-visited outpost of Judaism located a mere 35 miles off the coast of Venezuela. [JAL]*

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**AN UNNAMED MUSIC CRITIC ONCE WROTE: "GREAT SINGING IS LIKE A BEAUTIFUL DUCK SWIMMING ON THE SURFACE. IT IS ALL GRACE PERSONIFIED, BUT UNDERNEATH, THE SON-OF-A-GUN IS PADDLING LIKE MAD!"**

**Daniel James Brown, *The Boys in the Boat***

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The Journal of Synagogue Music is published semi-annually. Current and past issues are accessible through a link on the website: [www.cantors.org](http://www.cantors.org)

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ISSN 0449-5128