

SACRED SOUNDS

A Publication of the Cantors Assembly

High Holidays 2015

The Click of the Gates

By Cantor Barbara R. Haimowitz, PhD

Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad.
Seven times.

Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuto L'Olam Va'ed.
Three times.

Hashem Hu Ha'Elokim.

Once.....



Once upon a time, as a girl, I stood under my father's *tallit*, with my younger brother David. The entire community in Amstelveen, The Netherlands, was bathed in a sea of white *tallitot*, covered in prayer shawls. There were no differences; everyone was equal and rendered anonymous by the sea of *tallitot*. We all stood before HaKadosh Baruch Hu, one for all, all for one. One last appeal, one last *tefillah*, one last introspection, the last minute of Ne'ilah. We had reflected, repaired, promised, forgiven, and replenished throughout the day.

Now the zenith moment was here, the culmination point of our prayers: "Shema Yisrael, Listen Israel"...listen carefully, you may be about to be inscribed into the Sefer Ha'Chayim and the gates of heaven are drawing near to a close, it is the 11th hour. As a child, I always imagined these enormous cast-iron gates, looming large and high, with little crowns on top. And as the Hazzan would chant the first of seven Shema repetitions, I imagined that the gates would begin to close. And, that at "Hashem Hu Ha'Elokim," they would click shut for another year.

Ne'ilah literally means "closing the gate." We turn to Hakadosh Baruch Hu to accept our repentance and new resolutions and to grant us a new year filled with goodness and happiness. The Aron Ha'Kodesh remains open for the entire Ne'ilah service, symbolizing that the Gates of Heaven are wide open to our supplications and prayers.

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Something Special in Columbus

By Cantor Jack Chomsky

This year, we created something special in connection with the upcoming holidays here in Columbus.

We call it ShofAround Columbus. Beginning on the 1st of Elul, when it is customary to sound the Shofar at the end of daily services -- until Erev Rosh Hashanah (except for Shabbat), we are putting out a video -- a different one for each day of the month.

Though somewhat lighthearted in nature, it really calls people's attention to the upcoming holidays. Each video begins with a beautiful photo of the Columbus skyline -- and the word *ShofAround* is drawn on the tops of the buildings -- followed by *Columbus* -- followed by drawing a shofar on the bridge crossing the Scioto River! This beautiful video montage is followed by a member of the congregation sounding the shofar. The videos were filmed in various locations around town, including around the synagogue and Jewish institutions, as well as others at the Ohio State House, at COSI (Science Museum), the Ohio Stadium (where 106,000 Buckeye fans gather on various fall Saturdays) and more.

That's followed by a message read by someone in the congregation -- sometimes a young person, sometimes a group of people, sometimes a rabbi or cantor -- about the upcoming holiday -- and about the program we'll have at the beginning of the holiday -- a 30-minute musical program before Erev Rosh Hashanah, to which the entire community is welcome.

To see what this is all about, visit our synagogue webpage on Facebook. We are tiferethisrael.org and you can find us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/CTIcbus>

Cantor Jack Chomsky is a past president of the Cantors Assembly and serves Congregation Tifereth Israel in Columbus, Ohio.



Word Painting with Music

By Cantor Frank Lanzkron-Tamarazo

One of my favorite professors at the H.L. Miller Cantorial School, Hazzan Brian Mayer, taught us that every note of music that we sing as "sacred singers of Israel" should be logogenic; that is, the music should derive from the deeper meaning of the text. The logogenic test is: "Does the music paint the text?" "Does the musical mode capture the essence of the text?"

During Shabbat services, if you hear your cantor sing an impossibly long melisma to *L'olam vaed* (forever and ever) or suddenly raise her voice to *Ra'ash Gadol* (a great thunderous sound of the angels), that music is logogenic. One of my favorite places that involves time instead of melody is found in the *Mimkom'cha* prayer of Shabbat Shachrit Kedusha. We chant and pray, "From your place, Our King, may you appear, and may you reign over us. For we wait for you!" After the word, *m'chakim*, "we wait," I pause suddenly. One of the greatest Hazzanim of my lifetime, Hazzan Jack Mendelson, taught me about pausing in the service. He was wont to say, "Make the Jews wait." He meant, if you're going to pause between phrases, make it meaningful. Don't rush it. So, after the word, we wait, I pause until I personally feel uncomfortable. Then I wait a bit longer until I'm truly uncomfortable. Then I wait a few seconds longer until I'm worried that it may have been too long. The logogenic point of this exercise is to remind us all that we wait for G-d throughout our lives. We hunger for conversation with G-d in our lives when we are depressed and when we're ecstatic. We are waiting for G-d to help us find our place in the world, to answer the question, "What does G-d want from me?" I pause because I want you to walk up to me after the service and ask, "Why did you pause after that word in the *Kedusha*?"

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- Cantor Frank Lanzkron-Tamarazo

Months before the *Yamim Noraim* I ask several questions, "Does this music bring out the text in a meaningful and understandable way?" "Are there other phrases or words that should be accented to remind the congregation about our past, future, or present?"

There are thousands of ways to chant Un'taneh Tokef, but which melody or interpretation will bring out the mystery and fear that we have in our conversation with G-d? In *Uv'shofar Gadol*, can we feel and hear the angels trembling? Can you hear the barely audible sound of the "still, small voice?" Does the music force you to understand how our lives are like, "withering grass, a fading cloud, scattered dust or a vanishing dream?" The High Holiday service is a microcosm of what it means to struggle with

G-d. The music of the Cantor should help accentuate the meaning and purpose of the prayers.

May the interpretation of your Hazzan assist with your acceptance of the past, your dreams of the future, and your understanding of the present.

Cantor Frank Lanzkron-Tamarazo is the Hazzan of Rodeph Emet in Oak Park, Michigan, the owner of Chazzano Coffee Roasters in Ferndale, Michigan, and the author of two books, "God Cries and An Angel Loses its Wings," and "You don't want dessert, do you?"

From Parent to Child

By Cantor Sara Geffen Geller



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One thing we are advised to do (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 26:22) is to instruct our children to observe a specific *mitzvah* or custom while we are alive, and to continue to do so after we are gone.

One such custom for me is the Lulav and Etrog. My father always obtained a Lulav and Etrog for Sukkot. He taught me memories of his childhood – one of his chores was to go to the Chatahoochee River in Atlanta and gather myrtle branches from the trees on its bank. He also learned how to weave the holders in which the myrtle, willow, and palm branches are carried. After their first visit to Israel, my parents brought home a sturdy wooden box in which the Etrog rested each season.

As I became an adult with my own household, I purchased a Lulav and Etrog each year prior to Sukkot. Once my father moved closer to me, I purchased a set for him too. Even as his health slowly began to deteriorate, it was imperative that I provide him with the Lulav and Etrog. I kept imagining my father as he looked thirty years ago – briskly walking to *shul*, Lulav and Etrog in hand – “Of course you should provide your father with one too,” I imagined him saying. Only last season did I reluctantly share my set with him, rather than purchasing the additional one for him.

My father passed away this spring. Looking forward to Sukkot, I will purchase a Lulav and Etrog. I will rest the Etrog in its beautiful wooden holder. I will think about my father and mother. The *mitzvah* of “taking the Lulav” will blend with the *mitzvah* of honoring my parents.

Maybe a lot of our High Holiday observances blend specific rituals with the general memories of our loved ones. If our grandparents emphasized that the entire family should attend services and then adjourn for dinner at their home, we take comfort in continuing that tradition. Observing our Jewish holidays and customs then becomes a way to honor the memory of our forebears and celebrate our family’s continuity.

That is what our sages wanted us to do – to be trained to observe a *mitzvah* and to continue to do it long after our teachers (our parents) die. Then we are always able to remember our parents as our teachers of Jewish living.

Cantor Sara Geffen Geller serves B'nai Shalom of Olney in Olney, MD

The Click of the Gates ...

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The end of Ne'ilah is a picture of contrasts. The solemn sea of white *tallitot* (as in my memories of my youth) is followed by the joyous “B'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim.” The Hassidic Kaddish is upbeat and happy and shakes us out of our fasting mode. We switch suddenly from the deep concentration during the last moments of Ne'ilah and the last plea for forgiveness to the more mundane, to the work day experience. The transition is marked for us by the piercing sound of the shofar's last Teki'ah Gedolah, and a community Havdalah, frequently sung by the community's teenagers. Never do you have a Havdalah ceremony that links so many people together, than after a long Yom Kippur day of shared prayers and heartfelt sincere moments. It is beautiful, it is uplifting and it is a real tribute to the continuation of our Jewish traditions and existence, across all generations.

In my *shul*, I hope to pull the *tallit* over my head at Nei'lah's last series of Shema Yisrael. I will invite my congregants to do the same, in utmost concentration and *kavannah*, in respect and memory of all the learning experiences of my youth, and in a gesture to equalize all of us...we are one for all, all for one.

Cantor Barbara Haimowitz is the Hazzan at the Bellerose Jewish Center, in Glen Oaks, Queens, New York. She was born and raised in The Netherlands.



Finding Prayerfulness in the Music of the High Holidays

By Cantor Lauren Phillips

The Chasidic master Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer, better known as the Baal Shem Tov, recounts a story of a boy who brought his flute to synagogue on Yom Kippur. The boy didn't know the prayers, but was moved by the music and the spirituality of the service. At first, he sat in quiet frustration, unsure of how to express his connection with the liturgy. Towards the end of Neilah, the final service, the boy took his flute out of his pocket and blew a long and powerful note.

The congregation was startled by the sound of the flute, staring at the boy disapprovingly. The boy's father was mortified. But the Baal Shem Tov continued to pray with more fervor than ever before addressing the congregation as follows, paraphrased by S.Y. Agnon in *Days of Awe*:

"With the sound of his flute this child lifted up all the prayers and eased my burden. For this child does not know anything but... the prayer's holy spark kindled an actual fire in him, and the flame of his longing burned higher and higher until his soul nearly expired. Because of the strength of his longing he played the note of his heart truly without any distraction, for the sole sake of the Name of G-d. Now, the clean breath of his lips was very acceptable to Him, and by this means all the prayers were lifted up."

The Baal Shem Tov's words teach us many things that can enhance our High Holy Day worship. Whether we are singing the prayers, reading the texts, or just simply being, our contributions matter. Even as individuals, we each have the ability to lift both our prayers and the prayers of the entire congregation to heaven.

Indeed, there are many ways to pray. Although the boy in this story was unable to pray in a conventional sense, his deep *kavanah*, or intention, allowed him to commune with the Divine. On Rosh Hashanah morning, we read the story of Hannah, which discusses the evolution of spontaneous prayer. Hannah's husband mistook her seemingly odd way of praying as a drunken stupor. Her heartfelt desire to be a mother, expressed through biblical song as opposed to prose, was finally met with the birth of her son, Samuel.

For both Hannah and the boy in the Baal Shem Tov's story, music was the conduit that facilitated their connection with prayer. Over the course of the High Holy Days, we sing many different styles of music that will evoke various memories and emotions. The diversity of our High Holy Day music allows us to look at our liturgy from many angles, both as individuals and as a community.

My hope is that the many sounds of the High Holy Days will give you a chance to raise your voices in joyful song and to explore the many different facets of our liturgy. Shanah Tovah U'metukah – best wishes for a sweet new year.

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