

SACRED SOUNDS

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I Thank My Lucky Stars By Cantor Arianne Brown

“Did you know that the earth is so big that fifty moons could fit inside it?”

Actually, I didn't know. I've never gravitated toward learning about outer space until lately, when our five-year-old son became fascinated with the solar system.

“Jupiter is so large that over one thousand earths can fit inside it! And the sun is even more humongous! One thousand Jupiters can fit inside the sun,” he continued.

“And God is the biggest of all, because God *fills* the entire solar system!”

I stopped in my path and looked at my son, filled with the spirituality that comes so naturally to small children, and said “*k'vodo malei olam* — God's glory fills the world.” All of a sudden, my understanding of this beloved, well chanted phrase that we recite in our *Kedushah* took on a different meaning, as I pictured the vast expanse of the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars.

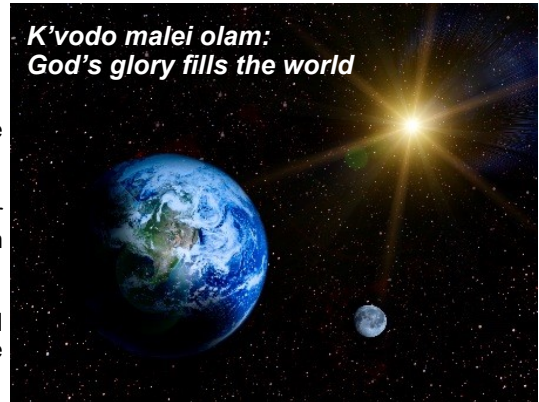
We celebrate *Sukkot* this month. Together with friends, family and community, we spend time in our *sukkot* — flimsy structures, with no protection from the elements, through which we must be able to view the stars. Each evening, in our *Hashkiveinu* prayer, we recite “*ufros aleinu sukat sh'lomecha*” — spread over us a *sukkah* of Your peace.” Sometimes, instead, I would like to pray for a tarp, a dome, or a shield. I wish for something that offers better protection to us against the outside elements that threaten our peace. Then I lift my eyes upward, while enjoying company on a cool autumn evening in our *sukkah*, and I am reminded of the vastness of the universe, and of the limitations of my own comprehension.

Soon after *Sukkot*, we celebrate *Shemini Atseret*, on which we continue to celebrate time together, and we recite *Yizkor* prayers of remembrance. There is a poem by Hannah Szenes that I love to add to our *Yizkor* service, entitled *Yeish Kochavim*. She writes, “there are stars up above so far away we only see their light long, long after the star itself is gone. And so it is with people we have loved. Their memories keep shining ever brightly, though their time with us is gone. The stars that light up the darkest night, these are the lights that guide us.”

We complete the cycle of reading our *Torah* on *Simchat Torah* and begin again with the reading of Genesis. After miraculous stories of creation, we narrow our focus and relive God's promise to Abraham that his descendants will become as numerous as the sands of the sea and the stars of the sky. I can just imagine Abraham, joyfully running home to Sarah, looking down at the earth and up at the sky to revel in this incredible promise of unending legacy.

K'vodo malei olam — God's glory fills the world. I wish each and every one of you a wonderful holiday season — a season in which you feel embraced by the *sukkah* of peace, guided by the shining stars of your life, and connected to the eternal legacy of our heritage.

Cantor Arianne Brown serves Adas Israel Congregation
in Washington D.C.



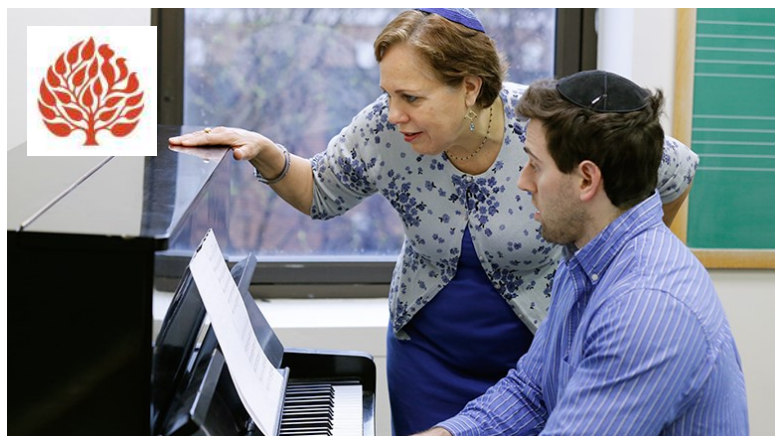
*K'vodo malei olam:
God's glory fills the world*

In This Issue

- I Thank My Lucky Stars
- What's New at the H. L. Miller Cantorial School
- Support the CA
- All in the Family: Our Patriarchs and Matriarchs
- All About the Punctuation: Another View of *Avinu Malkeinu*

What's New at the H. L. Miller Cantorial School

By Cantor Nancy Abramson



It is now the eighth year of my tenure as director of the H. L. Miller Cantorial School, and I continue to build on the work of my predecessors, Cantors Henry Rosenblum and Robert Kieval. My overarching goal in educating our students is to provide a strong foundation in liturgy, music, and Jewish studies, complemented by innovative approaches to prayer, all preparing students to shape joyful and soulful Jewish communities. The curriculum, which was revised a year ago, brings together musical creativity and spirituality, historic texts and cutting-edge professional training, with a focus on developing cantors who can meet the evolving needs of today's Jewish communities.



One area that has been strengthened is the meaningful interaction of cantorial and rabbinical students. They now learn together in seminars during their first, fourth, and fifth years, studying prayer and liturgy, grappling with experiences encountered in their student internships, and honing their roles as emerging clergy. They daven together and plan joint services in our prayer space, the Women's League Seminary Synagogue.

An ongoing project of which I am especially proud is the John Leopold and Martha Dellheim series of Shabbat visits and concerts. Through a generous endowment, several concerts are

offered around North America each year. Students work with me and guest cantor-mentors to organize, program, and present a concert. They also lead services at the host synagogue and have the opportunity to observe different shul models.

Cantors today must have excellent pastoral care skills. All the H. L. Miller Cantorial School students now participate in a full unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), generally during a twelve-week summer program. The students are placed in residence at a care site and then process their experiences within a mentoring group. Based on feedback, we know the students feel that CPE is one of the most valuable experiences of their cantorial training.

Working in a Ramah camp is also an important element of our program. Students may choose to attend any camp they wish, and to work in an area that interests them. In recent summers students have held positions as counselor, division head, music staff, teacher, mashgiach (kitchen kashrut supervisor), and even ocean exploration specialist. The Cantors Assembly provides a stipend to each student who is on staff in a Ramah camp.

The Cantorial School produced a video this past year, highlighting aspects of our program and showing the students in action. The video is an excellent tool to show potential students our program and for them to experience more of what the H. L. Miller Cantorial School has to offer. It can be viewed at <http://www.jtsa.edu/cantorial>. I welcome your feedback!



Cantor Nancy Abramson is director of the H. L. Miller Cantorial School and College of Jewish Music of The Jewish Theological Seminary, helping JTS shape cantorial arts and practices for the 21st century.



Please consider joining the Cantors Assembly on the sacred journey of tradition and innovation.

Through your tax deductible contribution to the Cantors Assembly, you will help to build bridges between the past and future through the heritage of Jewish music, assuring the continuation of our traditions and legacy.

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All in the Family: Our Patriarchs and Matriarchs

By Cantor Sara Geller



Beginning in October, on Shabbat mornings, we are reading from the book of Genesis. We read about the founders of the Jewish people — Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Rachel, and Leah. God created a relationship with each of them as individuals and as a clan; we always refer to them in the *Amidah* when we pray. When is the last time you thought about these men and women? If it has been a while, take another look.

They had a lot of adventures, sometimes showing bravery in tough situations, and sometimes bringing misfortune upon themselves. Abraham realizes that there is one force, greater than nature, which has created our world and made possible our existence. Being in a relationship with One God is so special that it must be transferred to the next generation. I agree with commentators who feel that the story of the binding of Isaac teaches that children should not be sacrificed; rather they should be nurtured and educated to receive the lessons learned by the first generation.

Neither Isaac nor Jacob were the firstborn sons in their clans; neither are most of the protagonists we encounter throughout the Bible (*Tanach*). In some societies, the oldest son inherited all the father's property. The other children inherited little or nothing. Whoever put together our Genesis stories wanted us to realize that our Jewish heritage is not the old-fashioned kind of heritage, passed arbitrarily down from father to oldest son. Rather, it was to be a special, spiritual portion passed to those who would cherish it.

Our Patriarchs and Matriarchs are portrayed as so very human with their good qualities and their weaknesses. When Abraham provides hospitality to three strangers (undercover angels), we admire and seek to emulate him. When Abraham lies about his relationship to Sarah ("She's just my sister") to protect himself over her, we sheepishly look the other way, embarrassed by our hero's lapse.

We will never know what kind of person Isaac was, or could have been, if he hadn't been traumatized by his near-sacrifice. We will never know what went through Rebecca's mind when she encountered her presumptive husband for the first time. But we can always imagine what we would do in those circumstances, and we can admire the fortitude and ingenuity that it took to transmit the special heritage to a next generation.

Jacob's biography is an anthology of classic "trickster" tales. He outwits his father and father-in-law. His father-in-law tricks him. And Jacob's wives trick their own father. Are we to learn that the ends justify the means? Or that bravery takes many forms? Or did some ancient editor just want us to enjoy a good story?

Our Torah is part of our ritual; we read from it every Shabbat morning. But you are different every time you read the stories in our Torah. Maybe this year, some of these stories will resonate differently for you than in previous years. You may find you identify more with some characters than with others. Perhaps you have experienced some heartbreaks or achievements similar to those of our ancestors.

What we share with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Leah and Rachel is a special relationship with God and God's laws. We share, also, a commitment to transmit that special relationship to the next generation (our own children or our community's children). May our own stories be just as inspiring to our descendants.

Cantor Sara Geller serves congregation B'nai Shalom of Olney in Maryland.

All About the Punctuation: Another View of *Avinu Malkeinu*

By Cantor Hinda Eisen Labovitz

Avinu Malkeinu — “our Father; our King.” In the modern world, where sensitivities move us to address our God in gender non-specific language when possible, this phrase might be translated, “our Parent; our Ruler”. Some contemporarily published liturgies, including the Conservative Movement’s *Mahzor Lev Shaleim*, even introduce alternatives. But *Avinu Malkeinu* — “our Father; our King” — in its most traditional sense, strikes me as the most descriptive, most poignant frame for the theology of High Holy Day liturgy.

It’s all about the punctuation. *Avinu Malkeinu* might be translated, “our Father; our King,” two separate descriptive attributes for our divine Parent and Ruler. In the traditional interpretation of this text, God’s status as parent is seen as God’s heavenly throne of *rahamim*, of mercy, but is juxtaposed with God’s status as ruler, which is represented by God’s throne of *din*, justice. God is thus balancing between two separate “seats” and approaches: one of black-and-white justice, the other mitigating the hard-and-fast rules with compassionate response.

But, perhaps, if we understood this phrase as “our Father *who is* our King,” we’d understand ourselves and our relationship with God in a completely different way.

Avinu Malkeinu, understood as “our Father *who is* our King,” puts us in a very different position with respect to the Ruler-Parent. If our Father *is* our King, that makes us royal children. We are then not lowly subjects prostrating ourselves on a cold tile floor before the Ruler, but toddling princes and princesses sitting on the lap of the benevolent Ruler-Parent toying with the shiny jewels in the heavy (or heavenly) crown. We have the ear of the Ruler-Parent, able to make requests that the average subject might not have felt entitled to make, and expect compassionate response. If we believe our Ruler-Parent is a fair governor, then we can anticipate our requests be heard in earnest, and God’s role as adjudicator of justice will be balanced with God’s role of merciful parent.

It is with this intention, this *kavanah*, that I enter High Holy Days this and every year. As I recite *Hineni*, a text confessing my own unworthiness to represent my congregation, I know that God as parent is responsible for building me up and helping me grow into that ideal *shelichah*. As I chant *Unetaneh Tokef*, the climax of each High Holy Day musaf service acknowledging that only God decides “Who shall live and who shall die,” I realize that only the Ruler and Judge on High, with a far broader view into time and space, can make decisions about mortality I couldn’t begin to understand. As we recite *Kol Nidrei*, asking God to dissolve the vows we’ve made, whether intentionally or in error, I know that God sees a fuller picture of me than I see of myself, as I see my own children deeper than they know themselves.

The prophet Malachi foretold a day in which God would “turn the hearts of fathers on their children and the hearts of children on their fathers” (Malachi 3:24). As we enter this High Holy Day season, may we have renewed commitment to our relationship with our God, and may we consider how we, in the image of God, can reflect that relationship on our own parents and our own children.

Cantor Hinda Eisen Labovitz serves Ohr Kodesh Congregation in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

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CANTORS ASSEMBLY
Every Jewish Soul Has A Voice

Our members seek to elevate and transform the Jewish soul so that people can forge meaningful connections to each other, to the source of meaning in their lives and to their own best selves. We use our voices to help others find theirs.

We combine modern melodies with our authentic, sacred tradition to give voice to the dreams and aspirations of our people through musical interpretation of Jewish liturgy. As clergy, we establish deep and abiding relationships with our congregants, shepherding both families and individuals through all the joys and heartbreaks of the Jewish lifecycle with compassion and sensitivity. We attract and engage children and adults alike with compelling learning opportunities and eagerly engage with our clergy partners to enable our communities to thrive.

In short, the hazzan, as clergy, provides essential musical and spiritual leadership that enlivens and enriches all aspects of communal life. Our mission at the CA is to promote the profession of the cantorate so that our members and their congregations to grow and prosper together in spirit and in strength.