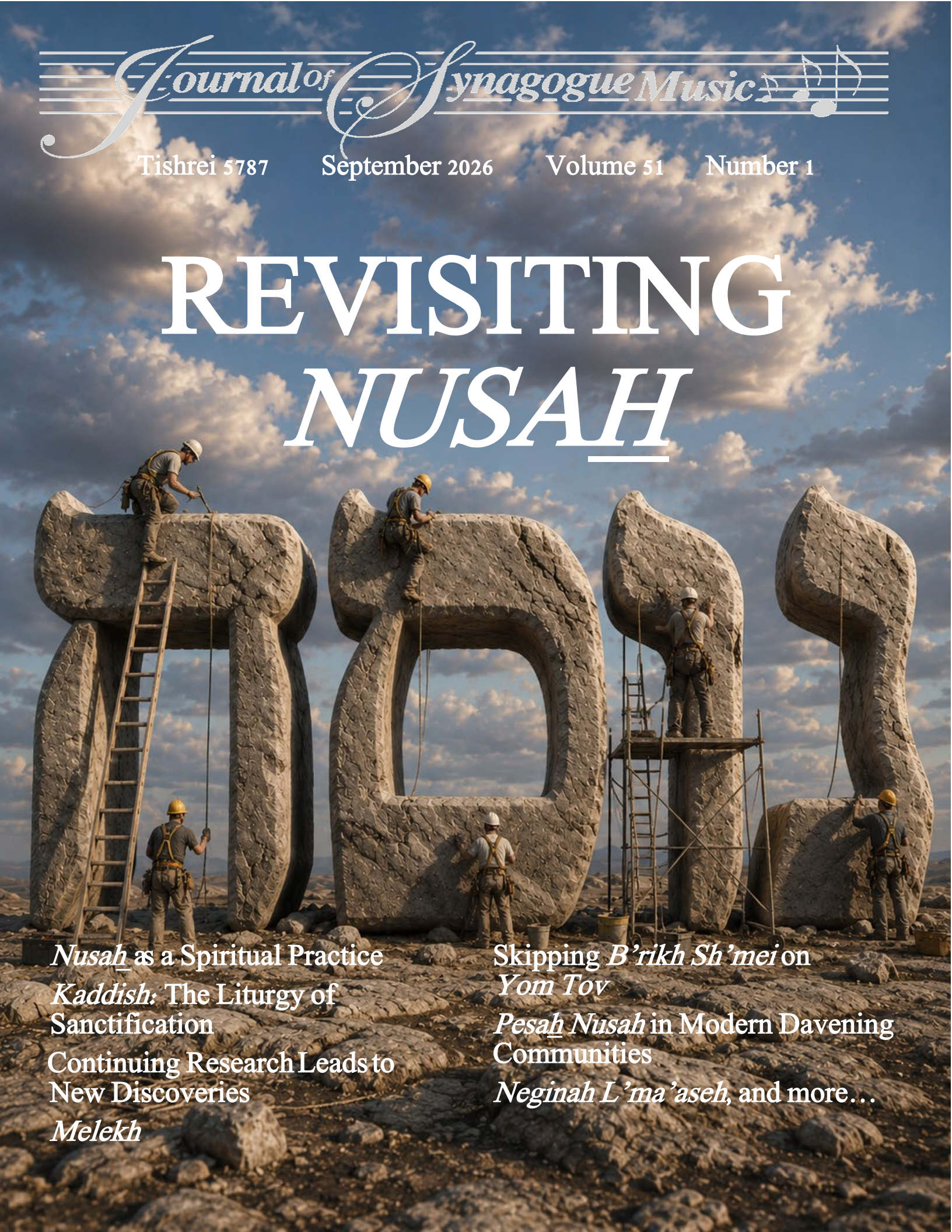


# REVISITING NUSAH



*Nusah* as a Spiritual Practice  
*Kaddish*: The Liturgy of  
Sanctification  
Continuing Research Leads to  
New Discoveries  
*Melekh*

Skipping *B'rikh Sh'mei* on  
*Yom Tov*

*Pesah Nusah* in Modern Davening  
Communities

*Neginah L'ma'aseh*, and more...

# Journal of Synagogue Music

Tishrei 5787

September 2026

Volume 51

Number 1

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## GREETINGS FROM THE EDITOR

We did not set out to create an issue devoted to *nusah*, but it is not at all surprising that so many of our authors were drawn to the topic. Despite the wide range of popular melodies that fill our sanctuaries and stimulate modern worshipers, *nusah*, remains at the core of Jewish prayer.

The lengthy excerpt from Carl Sayres' recent Masters' essay which opens this issue takes a fascinating look at the potential discoveries available to the focused student of *nusah*. Beyond the well-established link between *nusah* and "Jewish time," Sayres points to the benefit of understanding the hidden meanings implied by the modes and urges cantors and other connoisseurs of *nusah* to develop their chanting into a spiritual practice.

Scott Sokol's essay on the nature and liturgical functions of the *Kaddish* offers a useful review of this important text, especially welcome at this time of year when the *Kaddish* will appear so frequently, in all of its forms. (A companion essay on the many musical chants for the *Kaddish* is anticipated for next year's issue.) In a similar examination of text (rather than music) Margaret Wenig's poetic essay on the use of the term "*Melekh*" examines the many ways in which our liturgy uses that appellation, as well as the challenges it poses.

The regular "features" in this issue are also infused with *nusah*-related items. *Neginah L'Ma'aseh* offers Ravel's setting of *Kaddish*, based upon the traditional chant that precedes *Musaf* on the High Holy Days. Our "Mailbox" also includes two related items: Sam Weiss' trenchant tracing of the confusion surrounding the recitation of "*Brikh sh'mei*;" and David Tilman's encouraging view that Festival *nusah* remains alive and well among contemporary davening communities.

Two recent books also bear varying relationships to the subject of *nusah*. Dale Gordon's examination of *Ben-Zion Shenker and Hasidic Song in America* provides a fascinating study of the world of Modzhitzer *Hasidism* of which Shenker was so much a part. Shenker's work not only helped to share the legacy of *Hasidic* song beyond the confines of that community, but his own compositions, especially his settings of *Eishet Hayil* and *Mizmor L'David* have become part of the "tradition" of Jewish song throughout the Western world.

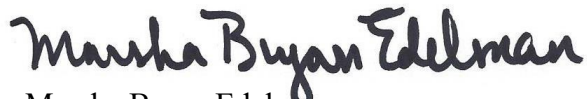
Charles Heller's monograph, *The Life and Death of Nusah: Conservation and Innovation in the Transmission of Synagogue Chant* addresses the question of Jewish traditional music head-on. He describes the form and function of the ancient Ashkenazic tradition and the challenges it faces in the modern era, while offering a fervent defense of *nusah* and the benefits it continues to offer to the synagogue service.

Notwithstanding the passions of its advocates, there is more to the Jewish musical world than *nusah*. Daniel Katz offers a strong argument for the value of musicological research in a variety of areas. In addition to summarizing his ongoing work on Kashtan (a.k.a. Salomon Weintraub), he hints at future projects in which he is engaged, including one aimed at revisiting one of the most venerated melodies in our tradition, the *Kol Nidre* tune.

Unfortunately, it is also our sad duty to recall the lives and work of too many colleagues who have gone to their eternal rewards after lifetimes spent in the trenches of *nusah* and the

synagogue. We join the families and friends of Baruch Blum, Nathan Chaitovsky, Irving Grossman, Mitchell Kowitz, Martin Leubitz, Leon Lissek, Linda Semi and Pharrel Wener in mourning their passing as we celebrate their memories and their valuable contributions.

We wish all our readers a happy and healthy New Year. May it be filled with new discoveries, satisfying accomplishments, and faithful adherence to the music and traditions of our people.

  
Marsha Bryan Edelman



כִּי־טוֹב וּמְרָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

כִּי־נְעִים נִאֲנֶה תְהִלָּה:

*It is good to chant hymns to our God;*

*It is pleasant to sing glorious praise.*

Psalm 147:1



# REVISITING NUSAḤ

## *Nusaḥ* as a Spiritual Practice

By Carl H. Sayres<sup>1</sup>

If you ask knowledgeable synagogue-going Jews, “Why is studying Torah important?” you’ll get many meaningful answers. Similarly, if you ask, “Why is learning Talmud important?” or “Why is studying rabbinic literature and *halakhah* important?” these questions will evoke thoughtful answers, passionate debate, and discussion. Now ask a knowledgeable, synagogue-going Jew “Why is *davening* with *nusaḥ* important?” and you will find very few who could supply a meaningful answer. Sadly, most rabbis cannot answer it. Tragically, many cantors can’t answer it either. For those that can answer, the answer is usually some variant of “This is how it has always been done” or “This is how I remember hearing it in my grandparents’ *shul*.” Those might have been sufficient answers in past generations, but for modern liberal Jews—who listen to folk and pop and rock music in every other aspect of their lives—they’ve never been given a reason to prioritize *nusaḥ* over those musical genres when they *daven*. This problem is well documented by Charles Heller in an essay subtitled “The day the music died.”<sup>2</sup> He quotes Shalom Kalib as saying

“...the gradual attrition of the older congregants from Eastern Europe, succeeding American generations with little and often no Jewish education lacked the background and knowledge to fully participate, and in many cases to even follow a traditional Hebrew service ... The artist-*hazzan*, the central figure within the musical tradition of the eastern European synagogue for over three centuries, has in essence ceased to exist in today's orthodox as well as liberal synagogues ... Today's bleak status of synagogue music ... is at its lowest ebb in a number of essential aspects since the Middle Ages.”

He quotes Cantor Robert Kieval as saying “*Davening* is an alien function to most of our congregants today ... we don't hear it at the daily *minyan* any more ... that hum of people *davening*, *murmuray*. All you hear is silence.”

Michael Isaacson identifies what is missing today in our synagogues:

During the first half of the twentieth century, a Golden Age for the *hazzan*, the congregation was encouraged to listen to both the rabbi and even more to the cantor, as much as participate. The great *hazzanim* taught us midrashic musical lessons on a weekly basis. We were less in a hurry for instant gratification. One or two cantorial solos (*hazzanut*) were always object lessons in midrashic text settings as we patiently and actively listened to the cantor's artful improvisation. Unfortunately, cantorial excesses

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from his Master’s Thesis for the Academy of Jewish Religion, submitted December, 31, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Heller, Charles. “A Friday Afternoon in Detroit, 1970: The day the music died.” In *Shul Going: 2,500 Years of Impressions and Reflections on Visits to the Synagogue*. Resource Publications, 2019. P.114-116.

and a lack of *hazzanic* in-service growth forced the pendulum to swing in the opposite direction. Active listening was replaced with passive participation.<sup>3</sup>

The cantorate needs to teach congregations about *nusah*, teach them to *daven*, and most important, they need to provide a reason why a congregant should care about *nusah*. Just like Torah, why is studying *nusah* important in your life? Why should Jews care deeply about *nusah*? The goal of this essay is to provide answers to those questions. I want to show the typical synagogue-going Jew how valuable *nusah* can be in their lives, and how much it would enhance their experience in the synagogue. I want to start a movement of *daveners* who study *nusah* the way Jews study Torah and Talmud, who can listen and analyze and imagine, and can also improvise and expand and create. I want every bar- and bat-mitzvah student to be learning *nusah*, long before they learn trope for their *haftarah*. I want to take *nusah* out of the seminaries and academic classrooms and put it where it belongs - in the hands (and mouths) of Jews.

### Understanding Nusah

**N***usah* is a term which is challenging to define and is often misunderstood. At its core, it is the traditional manner in which we chant Jewish liturgy. Joey Weisenberg calls *nusah* “...the free-flowing musical pattern that is sung solo by the *ba'al tefilah*, that changes in different sections of the service. As you learn the *nusah*, pay attention to how the *nusah* changes for different services; thanks to *nusah*, Jewish prayer has the power to—quite literally—tell time with song. Learn the proper *nusah*, sing it with confidence with the text, and you will give the congregation an immediate snapshot of the time of year, time of week, all the way down to the time of day. For example, by just listening to the way the *hazzan* chants the half-*kaddish*, we are reminded that it is Rosh Hashanah morning, or Sukkot evening, or Shabbat afternoon, or many other times of the Jewish year.”<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Lawrence Hoffman calls *nusah* “the record of musical syntax—the association of certain sounds with certain events and seasons in the sacred calendar.”<sup>5</sup> For each service (or section of a service), there are characteristic motifs (short melodic phrases) which are used to open or close a text (known as *פתיחות* and *חתימות*), additional common motifs used to develop the text or reserved for certain words of a text, and a general manner (known as a musical mode) in which the text is chanted. This can be done in a simple way or expanded by a skilled practitioner into elaborate recitatives.

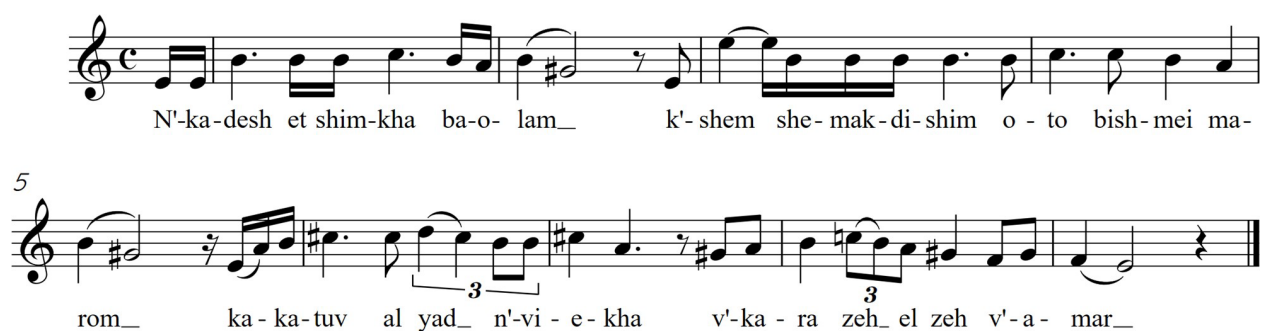
For example, the opening of the קדושה on Shabbat morning can be sung using a simple chant, familiar to regular synagogue attendees:

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<sup>3</sup> Isaacson, Michael. *Jewish Music as Midrash: What Makes Music Jewish?* ECM, 2007, p.186.

<sup>4</sup> Weisenberg, Joey. *Building Singing Communities*. Mechon Hadar. 201, p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> Hoffman, Larry, *The Art of Public Prayer: Not For Clergy Only*, Skylight Publishing, 1999, p. 262.



**Figure 1: *N'kadesh***

The *musah* above is easily learned, and is used by lay leaders, *ba'alei tefillah*, and even *b'nei mitzvah* students. We can identify several characteristics in this example. It is sung using a musical mode called *Ahavah Rabbah* (described in detail in the next section). It opens to the 5th scale degree (a common reciting tone for *Ahavah Rabbah*), and rests on the 3rd. It momentarily pivots on the 4th into a major tonality, and then returns to *Ahavah Rabbah*, resolving with its most notable feature—the augmented 2nd between the 2nd and 3rd scale degrees—and ends with a strongly resolving cadence from the lower 2nd to the tonic.

Here is the same prayer, as composed by Cantor Noah Schall:

**Figure 2: Schall *N'kadesh***

To the untrained ear, the above two examples might appear entirely different, and melodically they are. But the *nusah* is the same. Just like in the earlier example, Schall opens to the 5th, chants in the *Ahavah Rabbah* mode, and uses the 5th and 3rd as places of temporary rest, resolving strongly back to the tonic. He does the same pivot on the 4th into major, however his version is far more elaborate and intended to be sung only by someone with advanced vocal technique. And after an extended recitative, he resolves strongly back to the tonic, leading into the next word, *Kadosh*, indicating to the congregation that it is time for them to respond with the *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh* phrase that they know well:



**Figure 3: Kadosh...**

The typical explanation for how cantors have come to sing this text with these common features is just to say “This is how it was done.” One can also point to groups of cantors coming from the same parts of the world, who have heard and learned from each other, and especially the formation of cantorial schools, where the teaching of *nusah* was formalized into a curriculum, and student cantors were taught to sing from manuscripts, rather than by listening. However, I believe these ethnomusicological arguments miss something important. These cantors, who are each composing for the text in musically different ways, are all arriving at the same conclusions. I believe that these cantors know something. They are trying to tell us something. The challenge for us is to learn to hear what they are saying.

The קדושה text (which varies in different services and on different days of the year), takes the *davener* on a fantastic journey into a spiritual realm of angels, calling to each other in a heavenly choir. The פתיחה on the word נקדש (we will sanctify) invites the *davener* to join the journeys of Isaiah and Ezekiel, leaving our earthly realm and entering a holy one. We sing this using a musical leap from the tonic, the “home note,” our starting point here on earth, all the way to the 5th, as we shall discover, a place of holiness. From there we explore the realm of the angels, exploring the lowered 6th, the octave, and pathways to the major 3rd. These musical filaments re-imagine the sights and sounds that Ezekiel experienced. The pivot on the 4th to major gives us the opportunity to hear the heavenly choir that Isaiah heard. And all of this is our invitation to share in these experiences.

The sealing, or concluding passage, (the חתימה) strongly resolves back to the tonic. The cantor, who has just embarked on this journey, doesn't stay in the heavenly realm. He comes back to earth for an important reason—to get the congregation and bring them with him. The cantor resolves to the tonic so that we can sing with him.

Having heard the cantor's example of how to musically ascend into God's heavenly domain, the congregation gets their chance to join in the same journey, ascending in upward leaps. The congregational response is simpler, designed to be singable in unison by all Jews, regardless of singing ability. Thus, *nusah* is many things, including:

- A traditional form of Jewish liturgical chant
- An art form
- A type of vocal performance
- A method of leading a congregation
- A way to interpret liturgical texts
- A way to distinguish the time of day and day of the year

My purpose here is to add another option to this list:

- A spiritual practice, enabling the practitioner to make deep discoveries about their relationship with God.

### How Can *Nusah* be a Spiritual Practice?

Understanding *nusah* first requires learning each of the motifs and musical modes that are used in our services, and how they apply to the text of the liturgy. How those combinations vary at different times of the day (מוסף and also מוסף, שחרית and מנחה) and how they vary on different days of the year (חול, שבת, שלש רגלים, ימים נוראים) (נעילה). A person who has learned this knows the mechanics of how to *daven*.

But this is only a starting point. As a listener, we need to become sensitive to what the cantor is telling us. We need to hear the subtle phrases that inform us about the meaning of the text. We need to become open to how *nusah* can transform the meaning of the text.

We can apply the criteria for a spiritual practice to this process.

● **It is regular** - As *nusah* is a manner of chanting the daily prayers, it is naturally a regular practice. Through *davening* the same text with the appropriate *nusah* three times each day, every day, we have the opportunity to visit over and over again the same phrases and the same motifs. Through that repetition we notice things over time. How do things change in the morning and evening? Certain phrases might seem repetitive, but then something subtle surprises us. It is only through the regular practice of *davening* with *nusah* that we have the opportunity to make these discoveries. Over time, that regular practice further develops our *nusah* as well. As we develop insights into the text, the emphasis we place on a word might change. We might add a musical element to a phrase that we wish to emphasize. These musical improvisations aren't just for aesthetic purposes. They are an embellishment of the meaning of the text; they have the power to transform it.

• **It is intentional** - The rabbis of the Talmud knew that it was not enough to just read the words of our *tefilot*.<sup>6</sup> One only fulfills the obligation by having כוונה (intention) at the proper times. *Nusah* is a pathway for developing one's כוונה. For the beginner, it lays out a framework for כוונה, providing a set of phrases and melodic fragments intended to spiritually lift the *davener*, to point out what is important. For the experienced *davener*, *nusah* is a reference point, a way of centering and being grounded in tradition, and then allowing one to springboard from that state into realms of discovery. This is the lifelong process of developing כוונה.

• **It establishes, develops and nourishes a personal relationship with the Divine** - I believe the real purpose of *nusah* is to be a vehicle for the *hazzan* to bring the congregation closer to God. The Talmud describes prayer as replacing sacrifice,<sup>7</sup> and in its essence, the text of our prayers contains so much richness and depth that if we were all so learned and always had intense כוונה when davening, that might be enough. But given that we don't always arrive at *shul* ready to enter into that כוונה, we need a vehicle for getting there. The job of the *hazzan* is to get us there, and *nusah* is the toolset for doing this. The בשר (meat) of the sacrifice might be nutritious by itself, but *nusah* is the ריח ניחח (soothing aroma) that draws God close to us.

• **One engages in spiritual practices in order to be transformed** - Whether you are a service leader or a congregant, *davening* with *nusah* is a lifelong process of learning to listen, learning to hear what our tradition is telling us, and learning to be open to being changed by that tradition. For example, as I daven the ברכות (blessings) of the weekday *Amidah*, there are times that I see myself or some part of my life in one of the בקשות (petitions). When that happens, it leads me to ask questions about myself and my relationship with God. *Nusah* is a lubricant that allows the spiritual movement necessary for transformation to happen.

The spiritual practice of *nusah* asks us to be a listener first. So often we rush to sing. So many of us want to sing as individuals and in groups, and singing can be fun and enjoyable. But I believe *nusah* is begging us to listen, to use our ears and our imaginations to probe the depths of Jewish liturgical tradition; to search for meaning and connection with our people, and with God.

### The Three Primary Modes for Shabbat

The traditional Ashkenazi liturgical chants used on Shabbat are classified using three primary modes: *Adonai Malakh*, *Magen Avot*, and *Ahavah Rabbah*. There are many features of these modes, including their technical construction, the motifs that are characteristic of each service on Shabbat, and the manner in which a cantor navigates through the inner cadences that each contains. A deep understanding of each of these elements is critical for a cantor or any practitioner of *nusah*, and even more so for someone to be able to find spiritual meaning within these modes. However, the feature of each mode that I am particularly interested in for this purpose is the connotation or meaning that the mode imparts onto a liturgical text when a text is chanted using that mode. As Boaz Tarsi writes, *nusah*...

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<sup>6</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 13a

<sup>7</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 26a

“...may even affect our perception of the meaning of the words, or give them additional depth by creating cross-references, connotative links, additional layers of meaning, and what will be explained later on as ‘ethos.’ In this sense, as well as in the shaping and articulating power it possesses, music renders the liturgical experience a complex, multidimensional occurrence and provides additional levels of perception, understanding, and coherence.”<sup>8</sup>

### *Adonai Malakh*

The *Adonai Malakh* mode is said to connote God’s majesty and the grandeur of God’s Creation. Charles Davidson, in his introduction to *Adonai Malakh* in his workbook on the cantorial modes, writes that *Adonai Malakh* “generally conveys an ethos of grandeur and majesty.”<sup>9</sup> Macy Nulman further describes *Adonai Malakh* as majestic, signifying “praise and glorification.”<sup>10</sup>

All of this makes *Adonai Malakh* the perfect mode for davening *Kabbalat Shabbat*, a Kabbalistic re-enactment of Creation.<sup>11</sup> It begins with six Psalms (Psalm 95 through 99, plus Psalm 29) representing the six days of Creation. It is then followed by *Lekhah Dodi*, the Kabbalistic transition to Shabbat. It concludes with two additional psalms (Psalm 92 and 93), representing the double portion of Manna for Shabbat. The first five psalms are chanted in *Adonai Malakh*, musically connoting the glory of God’s creation. The sixth and last two psalms are chanted in *Magen Avot*, which as we will discuss in the next section, connotes the tranquility of Shabbat. Macy Nulman explains this musical structure:

Musical tradition has assigned the majestic mode *Adonai Malakh*, which signifies praise and glorification, to the *Kabbalat Shabbat*. The first six psalms, according to rabbinic tradition, symbolize the six working days of the week, the six days of creation, or the six shofar blasts that were sounded on Friday afternoon to announce the ushering in of the Sabbath. They proclaim that God is King and call upon all nature and all nations to join in adoration of the holy and righteous ruler of the universe. If the six psalms are regarded as one unit having the same intention, why then does the *Sh’liah Tzibbur* chant the first five psalms in the *Adonai Malakh* mode and the sixth psalm (29) in the *Magen Avot* mode? A possible explanation is that the first five psalms are a culmination of creation: “But the Lord made the heavens” (Ps. 96), “the world also is fixed that it be not moved” (Ps. 96), and “It is Thou who hast established equity (Ps. 99).” To indicate this, Ḥasidim

<sup>8</sup> Tarsi, Boaz, “How Music Articulates Liturgical Structure, Meaning and Perception: The *Kaddish*.” Published in *The Experience of Jewish Liturgy: Studies Dedicated to Menahem Schmelzer*, Edited by Debra Reed Blank, De Gruyter Brill, 2011, p. 311.

<sup>9</sup> Davidson, Charles. *Immunim Benusach Hatefilah I*. Ashbourne Music Pub. 1996. p.7. Davidson also quotes comments by Hanoch Avenary that “the majesty ethos is not always associated with *Adonai Malakh*.” It is important to remember that these interpretations are not fixed prescriptions; they are descriptions of what the listener has experienced.

<sup>10</sup> Nulman, Macy, *Concepts of Jewish Music and Prayer*, Yeshiva University, 1985, p. 12.

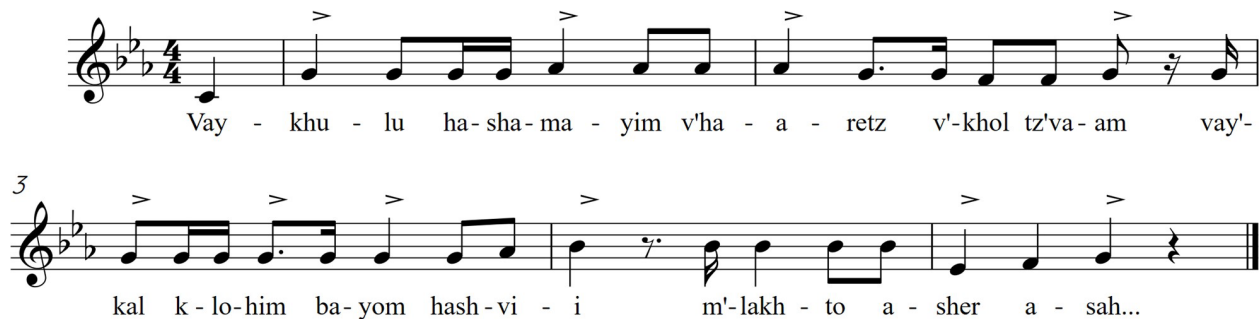
<sup>11</sup> Zion, Noam, Shalom Hartman Institute, <https://www.hartman.org.il/lcha-dodi-and-the-kabbalist-background-to-kabbalat-shabbat/>

often join each of the five psalms by ending on the third and not on the tonic. The *Magen Avot* mode whose style of singing is in a relaxed and peaceful manner, expressing faith, hope, and thanksgiving is a fitting introduction to the Sabbath since the climax of Psalm 29 is “The Lord will bless His people with peace.” Furthermore, Psalm 29 is closely associated with the Sabbath, especially Friday evening.<sup>12</sup>

Looked at in this way, the *nusah* for *Kabbalat Shabbat* tells a story. Once we are aware of this story, entire new worlds of theological exploration become possible as we dig into the Psalms and explore their meaning as they relate to each day of Creation, and to Shabbat. The first five psalms are chanted in *Adonai Malakh*, with its non-resolving feeling propelling us from psalm to psalm, from day to day of Creation. *Lekhah Dodi* exists in a liminal space between *Hol* and Shabbat, surrounded by the final three psalms, sung in *Magen Avot* (minor), which introduce the feeling of the tranquility of Shabbat and prepare our ears to be ready for מעריב. But these chants are not a strict formula. The cantor has tremendous latitude to divert and come back and take the congregation on a mystical journey. When the cantor sings a blue note—the lowered 7th, or even more exciting, the lowered 10th or even the 13th if he can—it is a moment that we should ask ourselves: What is the Cantor trying to tell us? What does s/he know about this text that s/he wants to share with us?

*Magen Avot*

The *Magen Avot* mode is named for the *מעין שבע* prayer of the Friday evening service. *Magen Avot* is sung in the Aeolian (Natural) Minor scale. It is said to open to the 5th, meaning that it is characteristic for the cantor to begin a *Magen Avot* פתיחה with a 1-5 motif. The 5th (the dominant) is used as a reciting tone, and the melody will explore the upper part of the octave as it ascends toward the 7th. From there, the 7th becomes a new dominant, as the melody modulates to the relative major on the 3rd of the scale, redefining the tonic on the 3rd, and establishing a new modality. For example, here is Louis Lewandowski's ויכלו: <sup>13</sup>



**Figure 4: *Vay'khulu***

<sup>12</sup> Nulman, Op. Cit. P. 12-13

<sup>13</sup> Lewandowski, Louis, *Kol Rinnah U' T'fillah* (Berlin: Bote & Beck, 1882), "Wajchulu," No. 26, pp. 19-20. Reprinted as Volume 9 in the *Out-of-Print Classics* series (New York: Sacred Music Press), 1954.

This is a perfect example of *Magen Avot* chanting, where the cantor opens to the 5th immediately on the first word, ויכלו. It modulates to the major on השביעי as if to say that on the seventh day everything changed: Creation was finished, and we are musically in a new world.

Just as with the *Adonai Malakh* mode, we need to ask ourselves—what does this mean? When we hear a text chanted in *Magen Avot*, what meaning is imparted onto that text?

A.W. Binder suggests that a text chanted in *Magen Avot* takes on a connotation of “sweet peace and rest.” He imagines the Jew of hundreds of years ago living in a world surrounded by conflict throughout the work week and yearning for all that Shabbat represented for him. He writes,

Was not the synagogue on the Sabbath the only haven of refuge where the Jew could come and feel that he was among his own? That feeling of relaxation certainly could not have been attained by chanting these prayers in a stiff and commanding tone, but rather from ... a mode which gives the sacred feeling of the Sabbath day—the mode of ‘sweet peace and rest.’<sup>14</sup>

Let’s look at another *Magen Avot* example - a congregational melody for ושמרו by Max Wohlberg:

V' shom - ru v' - nei Yis-ro-el es ha-sha - bos la-a - sos es ha-sha -

6 bos \_\_\_\_\_ l' - do-ro-som b'-ris\_ o - lom be - ni u-vein b' - nei Yis-ro-el

11 os hi l' - o - lom ki she-shes yo-mim o-soh A-do - noy es ha-sho-ma-yim v'-

16 es\_ ho - o-retz u - va - yom hash - vi - i sho- vas\_ va - yi - no - fash.

**Figure 5: Wohlberg *V'shamru***

In this melody, we see the same structure found in the earlier ויכלו example. The melody, written in F minor, opens to the 5th (C) through an arpeggio on the word ושמרו. At measure 8, Wohlberg modulates to the relative major on the 3rd by dropping down one step at בני ובין.

<sup>14</sup> *Collected Writings of A. W. Binder*, edited by Irene Heskes, Bloch Publishing Company, 2001, p. 53.

establishing the new dominant and leaping up a fourth to the new tonic on Ab major. Wohlberg makes it especially clear that we are now in Ab major by writing two-part harmonies that emphasize the new tonic and dominant.

A series of modulations occur to bring the piece back to conclude in F minor. The most interesting of those happens at measure 18, where we hear a distinct modal change. Something magical happens in this measure, but to understand it, we first need to introduce the *Ahavah Rabbah* mode.

### ***Ahavah Rabbah***

The *Ahavah Rabbah* mode is the quintessential Ashkenazi musical sound. Western music is primarily based on the major and minor (diatonic) scales, and the cantorial modes of *Adonai Malakh* and *Magen Avot* provide equivalents for *nusah*. But if a Western composer wants to make a piece of music sound “Jewish,” from *Fiddler On The Roof* to Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, *Ahavah Rabbah* will be the mode they use. Perhaps the most well-known example of *Ahavah Rabbah* in popular music is *Havah Nagilah*.



**Figure 6: *Havah Nagilah***

The technical name for *Ahavah Rabbah* is dominant Phrygian. (Phrygian being a minor scale with a lowered 2nd, and “dominant” referring to raising the 3rd degree). The most notable features of *Ahavah Rabbah* are the minor 2nd between the 1st and 2nd scale degrees, and the augmented 2nd between the 2nd and 3rd scale degrees. The mode contains the major 3rd of the Major scale, but the lowered 6th and 7th of Natural Minor. We see all of these features in the *Havah Nagilah* example above, with a tonic of E.

As its name implies, it is said that liturgical texts chanted in *Ahavah Rabbah* take on the connotation of God’s great love for His people. This makes *Ahavah Rabbah* the perfect mode for the ברכות surrounding the שמע —a text about loving God. And, in fact, those ברכות will be chanted using *Ahavah Rabbah* on every day of the liturgical year, even though the specific *Ahavah Rabbah* motifs that will be used on weekdays, Shabbat, and *Yamim Nora'im* will be very different.

For example, on weekdays, the חתימה of the ברכה immediately preceding the שמע for which the mode is named is:

Va-ha-vi-ei - nu l' - sha-lom mei-ar - ba kan-fot ha - a - retz v'-to - li - khei - nu

6  
ko - m'-mi-yut l' - ar-tzei - nu ki el po - el y'-shu - ot a - ta u -

11  
va - nu va-har-ta mi - kol am v'-la- shon. V' - kei-rav-ta-nu l'-shim-kha ha - ga - dol se-lah be-e-

16  
met l' - ho - dot l' - kha ul - ya - hed-kha b' - a - ha-vah Ba -

19  
ruk h a - tah a - do - nai ha - bo - her b' - a - mo yis - ra - el b' - a - ha-vah.

**Figure 7 -Vahavienu Weekdays**

The weekday example above<sup>15</sup> focuses mostly on the lower part of the octave. However, on Shabbat, the same חתומה is chanted using *Ahavah Rabbah*, focusing on the upper part of the octave, signifying the higher spiritual place we are in on Shabbat.<sup>16</sup>

Va-ha-vi-ei - nu l'-sha-lom mei-ar - ba kan-fot ha - a - retz v'-to-li-

4  
khei - nu ko - m'-mi - yut l'-ar-tzei - nu. Ki El po-el y'-shu-ot a-tah u -

8  
va-nu va-har - ta mi kol am v'-la-shon V' - ke-rav-ta - nu l'-shim-kha ha-ga - dol

<sup>15</sup> Wohlberg, Max, *Shahar Avakeshka: A Weekday Morning Service*, Transcontinental Music Co. 1974, p. 29-30.

<sup>16</sup> Zim, Sol, *Musical Siddur Shabbat*. Cantors Assembly, 2002, p.148.



**Figure 8: Vahavieinu Shabbat**

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, there is an altogether different manner in which these prayers are chanted. However, an *Ahavah Rabbah* motif used throughout the *Yamim Nora'im* appears on the words ובנו בחרת מכל-עם ולשון (You have chosen us from among all peoples and tongues), signifying God's great love in making this choice.



**Figure 9: Vanu Vaharta**

Perhaps it is not too surprising that we would chant the שמע ברכות surrounding שמע, and especially the ברכה named אהבה רבה using *Ahavah Rabbah* mode! But what may be surprising is the other, unexpected places that *Ahavah Rabbah* appears. One of my favorite examples is the אל מלא רחמים (God, filled with compassion)—the memorial prayer. If one were to compose a melody for this text using Western sensibilities, you might do so in minor, which Western music uses to signify sadness. But our *nusah* has a completely different idea. At the moment of our greatest sadness, we recall and acknowledge God's great love for us:



**Figure 10: Wohlberg Malei**

u - va - yom ha - sh' - vi - i sho - vas\_ va - yi - no - fash

At measure 18, Wohlberg briefly teases us with the *Ahavah Rabbah* sound on a temporary tonic of Bb. This isn't just a musical flourish. Wohlberg is a master at turning a phrase using *nusah*. By switching into the mode that connotes God's great love of his people on the words "and on the seventh day God ceased work and rested," Wohlberg is adding a new idea to וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ: "And on the seventh day, *out of great love*, God ceased work and rested."

My goal is to reframe *Nusah Hatefillah* as a Spiritual Path. So far, I've described many technical aspects of the modes, which are vitally important to understand for this purpose, as well as the connotations that are understood to be imparted onto a text chanted in each mode. Now, I want to go much deeper and demonstrate how, using our creativity combined with opening our hearts to the divine inspiration contained in our liturgy, we can discover new meaning and depth. This is the process at the heart of seeing *nusah* as a spiritual path.

## Expanding Our Understanding of the Three Primary Modes

| Cantorial Mode                           | Connotation                                        |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Adonai Malakh</i> (major)             | God's majesty and the glory of God's creation      |
| <i>Ahavah Rabbah</i> (dominant Phrygian) | God's great love for His people                    |
| <i>Magen Avot</i> (minor)                | The tranquility of Shabbat, "sweet peace and rest" |

One can develop beautiful insights into our liturgy just from these three connotations, as I've discussed. But as I applied the same connotation to text after text in a section of the service, I felt a monotony. For example, *Ahavah Rabbah* imparts the connotation of God's great love. It is very beautiful to look at an individual text in this way, but as I would *daven* the ברכות surrounding the שמע or the חזרת הש"ץ (reader's repetition of the *Amidah*) on Shabbat, I would wind up with the same interpretation over and over again, and I began searching for deeper connotations.

I started wondering if I could find a pattern that would unify these three connotations into a single framework, and which would allow me to unlock new meanings. I found one such interpretation by focusing on the fact that there are three primary modes, and looking for other "triplets" that they could correspond to. As we have seen, the first mode, *Adonai Malakh*, connotes themes of Creation; *Ahavah Rabbah* imparts the idea of God's great love onto a text;<sup>17</sup> *Magen Avot* is about us experiencing the tranquility of Shabbat. It connotes the peace and freedom that God has delivered for us, now that we are no longer slaves in Egypt. Shabbat becomes an expression of God's redemption, since we are only able to observe the *mitzvot* of Shabbat because we have been redeemed. Put these three themes together with the corresponding modes that I've identified, and we have re-discovered the three primary themes of the ברכות surrounding the שמע :

| Cantorial Mode       | Connotation                 | Theme      |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| <i>Adonai Malakh</i> | The glory of God's creation | Creation   |
| <i>Ahavah Rabbah</i> | God's great love            | Revelation |
| <i>Magen Avot</i>    | The tranquility of Shabbat  | Redemption |

Reuven Kimelman points out that each of these themes is an aspect of Divine Sovereignty. He writes, "As the unifying theme of the *Shema* and its blessings, the realization of divine sovereignty is refracted through the motifs of creation, revelation, and redemption." He further points out the first and third ברכות (creation and redemption) contain musical ideas, referencing "the testimony of celestial and terrestrial choirs. Through the orchestration of these heavenly and earthly realms, divine sovereignty is attested to throughout the universe. By including references to past as well as present, to heaven as well as earth, the liturgy presents the whole from the perspective of an omniscient narrator."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> I'm extending this idea to infer that showing us love is the way that God reveals God-self to us.

<sup>18</sup> Kimelman, Reuven. "The *Shema* Liturgy: From Covenant Ceremony to Coronation" published in *Kenishta: Studies of the Synagogue World*. Bar-Ilan University Press. 2001. p. 25.

In the first ברכה we find the link between the theme of Creation and a musical heavenly choir that Kimelman is referencing: בשירה ובזמרה, וכלם פותחים את-פיהם בקדושה ובטהרה, ([the angels] all open their mouths in holiness and purity, with song and music). Similarly in the third, we find the link of Redemption to an earthly choir in רבה בשמחה רבה (Moses and the Children of Israel sang a song to You with great joy) and also שירה חדשה שבחו גאולים לשמך על-שפת הים (With a new song the redeemed people praised Your Name at the seashore).

Our interpretive palette of connotations has been expanded. We started with a linear three connotations: Creation, Great Love, and Tranquility. We added an additional dimension of Creation, Revelation, and Redemption. Kimelman further shows that all three are aspects of Divine Sovereignty. And he points out the temporal nature of these themes (past and present), and the parallels between heaven and earth. We can now further expand our chart of connotations:

| Mode                 | Connotation                 | Theme      | Divine<br>Sovereignty | Time    | Space  |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-----------------------|---------|--------|
| <i>Adonai Malakh</i> | The glory of God's creation | Creation   |                       | Past    | Heaven |
| <i>Ahavah Rabbah</i> | God's great love            | Revelation |                       |         |        |
| <i>Magen Avot</i>    | The tranquility of Shabbat  | Redemption |                       | Present | Earth  |

There are two empty boxes in our chart. Perhaps we can deduce that Revelation and God's love represent a link in time and space. God's love is the link between our past and our present, and also the link between heaven and earth.

I also observed that these same three themes are found in the 4<sup>th</sup> ברכה (the קדשת היום of Sanctifying the Day) of the first three out of four *Amidot* of Shabbat. The מעריב קדשת היום of מוצאי שבת recalls Creation. In שחרית, it describes the giving of the ten commandments, i.e. revelation. And in מוסף, it describes our relationship with God (through קרבנות, coming close to God).

But what about the fourth *Amidah* for Shabbat—מנחה? The theme of קדשת היום of מנחה is the One-ness of God. It looks forward to a future where all people will know the tranquility of Shabbat and will sanctify God's name. We can add a theme of God's One-ness, leaving us with the question of what cantorial mode would correspond to the idea of a future-looking theme.

| Mode                 | Connotation                 | Theme                | Divine Sovereignty | Time          | Space                    |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Adonai Malakh</i> | The glory of God's creation | Creation             |                    | Past          | Heaven                   |
| <i>Ahavah Rabbah</i> | God's great love            | Revelation           |                    | <i>link</i> ↓ | <i>link</i> ↓            |
| <i>Magen Avot</i>    | The tranquility of Shabbat  | Redemption           |                    | Present       | Earth                    |
| ??                   |                             | <b>God's Oneness</b> |                    | <b>Future</b> | <b>The World to Come</b> |

The next most-frequently used mode is Ukrainian Dorian, also known in different contexts as *Mi Shebeirakh* mode or *Seliah* mode. The themes in our chart line up well with the intention of those modes. A *Mi Shebeirakh* is asking God to bless us in the future, as God blessed our ancestors. *Seliah* mode is about discovering תשובה within our liturgy and returning to God. It points to a future where we rediscover sanctity and holiness in ourselves and in our relationship with God.

The addition of this fourth mode gives us a complete theory of interpreting the modes:

| Mode                                                             | Connotation                 | Theme          | Divine Sovereignty | Time          | Space             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| <i>Adonai Malakh</i>                                             | The glory of God's creation | Creation       |                    | Past          | Heaven            |
| <i>Ahavah Rabbah</i>                                             | God's great love            | Revelation     |                    | <i>link</i> ↓ | <i>link</i> ↓     |
| <i>Magen Avot</i>                                                | The tranquility of Shabbat  | Redemption     |                    | Present       | Earth             |
| <i>Seliah</i><br><i>Mi Shebeirakh</i><br><i>Ukrainian Dorian</i> | <i>Teshuvah</i>             | God's One-ness |                    | Future        | The World to Come |

Having constructed this theory, we can now use the theory to do new analysis. Let's consider Israel Alter's recitative for וְלֹא נִתְּנוּ from קדושת היום of שבת שחרית. Here is the text, with my own translation:

ולא נתתו ה' אלוהינו לגוי הארצות.

ולא הנחלתו מלכנו לעובדי פסילים.

וגם במנוחתו לא ישכנו ערלים.

כי לישראל עמך נתתו באהבה.

לזרע יעקב אשר במ בחרת:

עם מקדשי שביעי.

כלם ישבעו ויתענגו מטובך.

ובשביעי רצית בו וקדשתו.

חמדת ימים אותו קראת.

זכר למעשה בראשית:

And You did not give it, Lord, our God, to the nations of the lands

And You did not bequeath it, our King, to the worshipers of idols.

And in its rest the uncircumcised will not dwell.

For Israel, Your people, You gave it in love

To the seed of Jacob, that You have chosen:

The people who sanctify the seventh day.

All will be satiated and will enjoy from Your goodness.

And in the seventh day You found favor in it and sanctified it.

Coveted of days, You called it,

In remembrance of creation.

This text describes the gift of Shabbat, given to the Chosen People. On Shabbat morning, the *Amidah* is chanted in the *Ahavah Rabbah* mode, connoting God's great love of His people. And as we would expect, Alter composes his recitative in *Ahavah Rabbah* in D:

V' - lo n'-sa-to a-do-nai e-lo-hei-nu l' go-yei ho-a-ro-tzos v' - lo hin-hal-to mal-

- kei-nu l' o-v'-dei f'-si - lim v' - gam bi-m'-nu-ho-so lo yish-k'-nu a-rei-lim

ki l'-yis-ro-eil a-m'-kho n'-sa-to b'-a-ha-

voh l'-ze-ra ya-a-kov a-sheer bom bo-hor - to

am m'-ka-d'-shei sh'-vi-i ku-lom yis-b'-u v'-yis-a-n'-gu mi-tu-ve-kho u-va-sh'-vi-



**Figure 12: Alter *V'lo N'sato***

As an interpretation, *Ahavaḥ Rabbah* is the obvious mode for this text - the text literally says “For Israel, Your people, You gave it in love.” But on the first word כִּי of that most important line Alter diverts from *Ahavaḥ Rabbah* into Ukrainian Dorian in G and then relaxes into *Magen Avot* (G minor) for the rest of the phrase. This isn’t a mere flourish. Alter has something really important to tell us, and my proposed theory contains the answer: that line is really about the World to Come. When chanted in this manner, the text is saying, “(As a taste of the World to Come) for Israel, Your people, You will give us eternal tranquility in love.” You can hear in the extended melismatic phrase the intense emotion of what it might be like to experience that world. On the words נִתְּנוּ בְּאַהֲבָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עִמָּךְ we briefly get to experience the tranquility of that World to Come, the Shabbat that will never end.

A second diversion from *Ahavaḥ Rabbah* is found on the words עַם מְקֻדְּשֵׁי שְׁבִיעִי (The people of sanctification of the seventh), where Alter briefly pivots to major on the 4th (as we’ve discussed one frequently does in *Ahavaḥ Rabbah*). This pivot to major (*Adonai Malakh*) is an obvious reference to Creation.

### How Would One Make *Nusah* Their Spiritual Practice?

I am happy to share these musical insights and gleanings about *nusah* and hope others will find them useful in their own spiritual work. My real point, however, is to talk about a process: *Nusah* is more than simply “This is how we sing it;” it is a framework and a process by which we interpret it. I want to offer a new way to think about *nusah*, such that cantors and congregants alike can find new meaning in it and a new purpose for it.

Without question, being able to discover one’s own insights requires a deep knowledge of the *nusah* itself. Being able to listen to how a cantor modulates from mode to mode within a text, and to learn to hear the connotations prescribed by each mode applied to the text, is what gives the listener the ability to understand what the cantor is actually saying. Here are some ideas for how a listener or practitioner can turn *nusah* into a personal spiritual practice:

- **Develop a deep knowledge of *nusah*.** As with any practice, having a deep understanding of the source material opens doors.

● **Slow things down.** Instead of looking at a composition as a whole, pick a phrase that interests you. What modes can you identify? What are the important intervals? Can you identify patterns or relationships with other parts of the text?

● **Develop a personal toolbox.** I've offered many of my own patterns—the “penitence motive,” movement through the primary modes reflecting the core themes of creation, revelation and redemption, musical text painting. Over time, you will develop your own—and once you have these in your toolbox, you can look for new places to apply them and discover new liturgical and theological insights from them.

● **Develop your ear.** With practice, you can learn to identify modal changes, important intervals, modulation, the use of motifs in their place and also in unexpected places. With each of these, ask yourself what the cantor or composer is trying to tell you. What secret do they know that they are trying to share with you?

● **Study multiple compositions** for the same liturgical text. What is different? What is similar? What insights can you glean from those patterns?

● **Learn to Listen.** So many of us want to sing. But the revelations come from listening. Like any spiritual practice, it requires repetition and consistency. For people who *daven* regularly, this is already built into their lives. If this is not already your practice, set aside a small amount of time on a regular basis to begin *davening*. Listen to the *nusah* over and over, each time you *daven*. Focus on a single text—it's too easy to become overwhelmed by the sheer length of the *davening*. By focusing on a single text, you will give yourself time to see patterns and make discoveries.

I encourage cantors, teachers and synagogue leaders to develop classes that teach the mechanical details of *nusah*, the performance practices associated with them, and most important, encourage students to begin thinking about how the *nusah* helps us understand not only the liturgical text, but also the interpretive layers that a cantor can impart onto the text.

Several years ago I created a semester-long adult education class titled “How to Listen to the Cantorial Modes.” The focus wasn't on singing, though we did plenty of that. The focus was on listening. I taught students to listen to a recitative and notice the modal changes that would occur from phrase to phrase

Perhaps the most important point of all of this is to transform קבע (rote) into כוונה (intention). In some settings each time we attend a service we hear the same text sung the exact same way. The music that had been composed with the intention of creating כוונה became a new source of קבע. The *nusah* became fixed and stale.

Looking at *nusah* as a spiritual practice opens worlds of exploration and depth. It doesn't require changing the *nusah* or adding new music. The *nusah* we have sung for hundreds of years contains much spiritual depth, though most congregants (and even cantors) are unaware it is there.

Thousands of years ago, our ancestors stood at Mount Sinai and received revelation - but that was not the end of revelation. Every time a rabbi or scholar gleaned a gem of Torah, revelation continued. Every time the *Amoraim* made a connection to Torah, every time a *midrash* was explained, every time a *halakhah* was derived, revelation continued. And today, every time someone delivers a *d'var Torah*, every time a rabbi writes a *teshuvah*, and every time a cantor or composer gives us new music to interpret our liturgy, revelation is continuing. When cantorial masters composed and wrote down the *nusah*, revelation was happening. When we use that foundation as a source of new interpretation, we are conduits through which revelation continues.

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## ***Kaddish: The Liturgy of Sanctification***

*by Scott M. Sokol and Brian J. Mayer*

### **Introduction**

Few texts occupy a place in Jewish religious life comparable to that of the *Kaddish*. It is among the most frequently repeated passages in the traditional liturgy, appearing at multiple points in each of the three daily services and in a variety of forms on Sabbath, festivals, fast days, and the High Holidays. It is recited after prayer, after the public reading and study of sacred texts, at funerals and burials, during the period of mourning, on a *yahrzeit*, and upon the completion of a tractate of Mishnah or Talmud. Its opening words, “*yitgadal v’yitkadash sh’mey rabbah*,” are immediately recognizable, even to many Jews whose familiarity with the remainder of the liturgy is limited.

The frequency of the *Kaddish* alone would justify close attention to its text and performance. Its importance, however, extends beyond the number of times it is recited. The *Kaddish* is a public proclamation of Divine sovereignty, a congregational act of sanctification, a structural marker within the synagogue service, a conclusion to sacred study, and, in its best-known contemporary use, an expression of religious fidelity in the aftermath of death. Remarkably, this text most closely associated with mourning contains no explicit reference to death, bereavement, or the soul of the deceased. Its subject is not human mortality but the magnification of God’s name and the hope that redemption, peace, and God’s sovereignty will become manifest in the world. Moreover, what we ordinarily call “the *Kaddish*” is not a single prayer but a family of related texts whose differing expansions correspond to differing liturgical functions.

For the *hazzan*, the *Kaddish* has traditionally carried additional importance. Because the various forms of *Kaddish* occur at decisive liturgical transitions, their musical realization tests whether the prayer leader understands the larger architecture of the service. A competent rendition requires more than the ability to reproduce a familiar tune. The *hazzan* must know which *Kaddish* is appropriate – that is, which text belongs to which ritual or occasion—which musical mode has governed the preceding section, and whether the *Kaddish* should conclude that musical unit, bridge it to the next one, or introduce a change in liturgical atmosphere. Therefore, a proper chanting of the *Kaddish* demonstrates sensitivity to diction, accentuation, phrasing, traditional *nusah* (i.e., mode, motif and metrical response), and the emotional character of a particular service.

Unfortunately, as many of us have certainly noted, *Kaddish* is frequently chanted without adequate attention to these considerations. Familiar melodies may be imposed on inappropriate occasions; words may be distorted to accommodate musical phrases; textual accents may be displaced; congregational responses may be obscured; and melodies associated with one season, service, or ritual may be transferred indiscriminately to another.

This problem is ironically exacerbated by the general familiarity of the *Kaddish*. A prayer known to nearly everyone can easily be treated as though its meaning and performance were self-evident. In reality, it possesses a complex textual history, and as just mentioned, several distinct liturgical forms, meaningful variations among rites, and a highly developed musical tradition. A study of the *Kaddish* must therefore consider not merely what the prayer “means,” but how its words, functions, and musical settings developed within Jewish communal worship.

## Purpose and Scope

This paper will attempt to address a subset of these considerations, namely those involving the historical, textual, and liturgical analysis of the *Kaddish*. A subsequent manuscript planned by these authors will turn to the *Kaddish*’s musical realization, that is the traditional modes and melodies associated with its several forms, their placement within the architecture of the service, and the musical responsibilities of the *hazzan*.

## Origin

To begin, we ask a deceptively simple question: Where did *Kaddish* come from? The answer is less straightforward than one might assume. The *Kaddish* was not composed at a single identifiable moment, nor did it originally enter Jewish life as a mourner’s prayer. Rather, the evidence points to a process of liturgical development. An early form of the *Kaddish* response, associated with public Torah teaching, is already referenced in the Rabbinic period. Expanded forms subsequently entered the organized synagogue liturgy, certainly by the Geonic period. Different forms of *Kaddish* then acquired distinctive liturgical functions. Finally, in medieval Ashkenaz, one particular use of *Kaddish* became intimately associated with mourning. The history of the prayer is therefore a history of liturgical expansion and reinterpretation.

## The Earliest Piece: *Yehei Sh’mei Rabba*

There is no single historical author of *Kaddish*. Although elements of the prayer have sometimes been assigned a very early date, even to the Second Temple period, the evidence does not establish the existence of the complete text at so early a stage. What rabbinic literature does clearly preserve is the central congregational response, together with related phrases, that would later form the core of the *Kaddish*.

יְהִי שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעֵלָם וּלְעֵלָמִי עֲלָמֵיָא

*May His great name be blessed forever and for all eternity.*

The Talmud treats this response as an act of religious importance. The relevant passage is found towards the end of *Berakhot* 3a, in the story of R. Yose entering one of the ruins of Jerusalem to pray. Elijah asks him what he heard there, and R. Yose reports hearing a heavenly voice lamenting the destruction of the Temple and the exile. Elijah then adds that this is not an isolated lament; it occurs whenever Israel responds with the central *Kaddish* response.

ולא זו בלבד, אלא בְּשִׁעָה שִׁישָׁרְאֵל נִכְנָסִין לְבֵיתִי וּלְבֵיתֵי מִדְרָשׁוֹת וְעוֹנִין "יְהִי שְׁמִיהּ הַגָּדוֹל מְבוֹרָךְ",  
הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְנַעֲנֵעַ רִאשׁוֹ, וְאוֹמֵר: אֲשֶׁר־יְהִי הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁמִקְלָסִין אוֹתוֹ בְּבֵיתוֹ כָּךְ.

*"And not only this, but whenever Israel enters synagogues and houses of study and responds, 'May His great name be blessed,' the Holy One, blessed be He, nods His head and says: 'Fortunate is the king who is praised in his house in this way.'"*

The passage therefore links praise of God with Divine grief over the destruction of the Temple and the exile of Israel. The great fourteenth-century Spanish liturgical scholar David Abudarham (whom we will be referencing liberally throughout this article) will later make this passage central to his own interpretation of *Kaddish*.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, in *Shabbat* 119b, R. Yehoshua ben Levi teaches the following:

כָּל הָעוֹנֶה "אָמֵן יְהִי שְׁמִיהּ רַבָּא מְבֹרָךְ" בְּכָל כַּחוֹ, קוֹרְעִין לוֹ גִּזְרֵי דִּינוֹ, שְׁנֹאֲמַר:  
"בְּפָרוּעַ פְּרֻעוֹת בִּישָׁרְאֵל בְּהִתְנַדֵּב עִם בְּרַכּוֹ ה'."

*Anyone who answers, "Amen, may His great name be blessed," with all his might is as if he has torn his adverse decree, as it says, "When punishments are annulled in Israel when the people offer the praise Blessed in God."*

Even more significant for reconstructing the prayer's history is *Sotah* 49a. In a bleak description of the post-Temple destruction, the Talmud asks how the world continues to stand, and answers in part that it rests upon the *Yehei sh'mei rabba* that follows *Aggadah*—public rabbinic teaching.

עָלְמָא אֲמַאי קָא מְקַיִם? אַקְדוּשָׁה דְּסִידְרָא, וְאַ"יְהִי שְׁמִיהּ רַבָּא" דְּאַגְדָּתָא  
*On what account does the world continue to exist? Because of the Kedushah de-Sidra and the "Yehei sh'mei rabba" recited after the Aggadic teaching.*

The expression is explicit: the *Yehei sh'mei rabba* associated with Aggadic exposition.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to reiterate that these texts do not in any way suggest that the complete *Kaddish* in our *siddur* existed in fully standardized form at the time of the Talmud. They demonstrate, though, that its central congregational response was already well established and that it had a particularly strong association with communal Torah teaching. That distinction is important.

<sup>1</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 3a. See also David Abudarham, *Rabbenu David Abudarham: Perushei ha-Berakhot ve-ha-Tefillot*, ed. Aryeh Menaḥem Grintsai, Yosef Ḥayim Werner, and Eliyahu Grintsai (Jerusalem: Keren Re'em, 2016), section "*Seder Tefillot ha-Hol, Kaddish u-Barekhu*."

<sup>2</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Sotah* 49a. On the relationship between *Kaddish* and the liturgy of the *beit midrash*, see Joseph Heinemann, "Prayers of Beth Midrash Origin," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 5, no. 3 (1960): 264–280; and Michael Weitzman, "The Origin of the *Qaddish*," in *Hebrew Scholarship and the Medieval World*, ed. Nicholas de Lange (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 131–137.

## From the *Beit Midrash* to the Synagogue

As just implied, a widely accepted line of scholarship places one important early use of *Kaddish* at the conclusion of public teaching. A teacher would complete an exposition, particularly an aggadic discourse, and praise God or offer a brief eschatological prayer. The listeners responded with an acclamation blessing God's great name.<sup>3</sup>

This placement helps explain several otherwise unusual characteristics of *Kaddish*. First, the prayer is responsorial. The reciter does not simply address God while the congregation listens. The text repeatedly requires communal participation: the frequent “*v'imru amen*” insertions.<sup>4</sup> As also just demonstrated, the central theme belongs to the congregational response of “*y'hei sh'mei rabba*.”

Second, the association with public teaching helps explain the later *Kaddish d'Rabbanan*, which adds prayers for:

עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל רַבָּנָן וְעַל תַּלְמֵי דִּיהוֹן וְעַל כָּל תַּלְמֵי דִּי תַּלְמֵי דִּיהוֹן  
*Upon Israel, upon the rabbis, upon their students,  
and upon all the students of their students.*

Abudarham explicitly distinguishes this *Kaddish* from the one following formal prayer. Following prayer, the reciter adds *Titkabal tzlot'hon u-va'ut'hon*: “May the prayers and supplications of all Israel be accepted.” Following Talmud or Midrash, the corresponding addition is instead the petition for Israel, the rabbis, their students, and those engaged in Torah.<sup>5</sup>

The differing expansions are therefore not arbitrary. They preserve the purpose of the *Kaddish* in its immediate setting. This background also provides the most persuasive historical explanation of its Aramaic language, a subject to which we shall return below.

## Kaddish as Liturgical Architecture

By the Geonic period the development of *Kaddish* had advanced considerably. *Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, associated with the ninth century and among our earliest comprehensive guides to the order of the synagogue service, preserves *Kaddish* in an expanded liturgical unit. By then, *Kaddish* was not simply the response to a lesson; it had become attached to divisions within communal worship. The prayer book attributed to Rav Amram contains *Kaddish* passages placed after a variety of liturgical and midrashic units.<sup>6</sup> In other words, a public affirmation that was associated primarily with study came to be a device through which the

<sup>3</sup> Heinemann, “Prayers of *Beth Midrash* Origin,” 264–280; Weitzman, “Origin of the *Qaddish*,” 131–137; Andreas Lehnardt, *Qaddish: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Rezeption eines rabbinischen Gebetes* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> As a matter of practical recitation, it is clear from the syntax here that one should chant (or speak) “*v'imru amen*” as a unit, with the expected congregational response “*Amen*.”

<sup>5</sup> Abudarham, *Perushei ha-Berakhot ve-ha-Tefillot*, “*Kaddish u-Barekhu*,” where he distinguishes *Titkabal* after prayer from the petition for the rabbis and their students after Talmud or Midrash.

<sup>6</sup> Amram Gaon, *Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, ed. Daniel Goldschmidt (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1971). On the Geonic-period shaping and canonization of the synagogue service, see Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Canonization of the Synagogue Service* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

synagogue service demarcated sacred time, separating major units of prayer and signaling transitions from one prayer activity to the next.

A *Ḥatzi Kaddish*, or Half *Kaddish*, generally marks an internal transition. At *Shaharit*, the *Kaddish* after *Pesukei d'Zimra* separates that introductory unit from the blessings surrounding the *Shema*. At *Minḥah*, *Kaddish* following *Ashrei* prepares for the *Amidah*. Similar transitions occur at *Ma'ariv* and elsewhere.

The *Kaddish Shalem*, or Full *Kaddish*, serves another function. It contains:

תְּתַקַּבַּל צְלוֹתָהוֹן וּבְעוֹתָהוֹן דְּכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

*May the prayers and supplications of all the House of Israel be accepted.*

It therefore properly belongs after the completion of the central statutory prayer, the *Amidah*. Abudarham notices precisely this logic: when *Kaddish* follows the regular prayer service, *Titkabal* is added because it asks for the acceptance of the prayers and supplications just offered.<sup>7</sup>

*Kaddish* after study, as we have seen, receives a different expansion. The Mourner's *Kaddish* omits *Titkabal*, since it is not functioning as the conclusion to the statutory *Amidah*. Moreover, as we often explain in houses of mourning, omitting the *Titkabal* sentence underscores the fact that after a recent passing of a loved one, the mourner does not typically feel as if prayers have been accepted. The extended *Kaddish d'Ithad'ta* associated with burial and, in some traditions, a *siyyum*, contains still other language related to these functions.

As a result of this demarcating function of the *Kaddish*, it is often described simply as a “divider” in Jewish worship services. However, to do so belies its higher function and understates its significance. By analogy, as any good musician knows, a rest is not an empty interval. It is an opportunity to breathe and anticipate. In a similar vein, by means of the *Kaddish*, the community places what it has just recited or studied within the larger context of God's sanctification. The prayer transforms a structural boundary into an act of praise. It gathers the spiritual force of the preceding unit, invites the congregation to respond, and directs worship toward the hoped-for revelation of divine sovereignty.

### What Does *Kaddish* Actually Say?

**K***addish* is, in its essence, a doxology, a term that is most often defined as a prayer of praise. A doxology is more than that, however. It is a formal liturgical expression that ascribes glory, greatness, holiness, or sovereignty to God. It is not simply devotional, but an affirmation of Divine attributes or status. This is precisely what is stated in the first two words of the *Kaddish*: *Yitgadal v'yitkadash*, “May [His name] be magnified and sanctified.”

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<sup>7</sup> Abudarham, *Perushei ha-Berakhot ve-ha-Tefillot*, “*Kaddish u-Barekhu*,” on *Titkabal tzlotehon u-va'utehon* as the addition to *Kaddish* following the completion of prayer.

As many readers no doubt know, the textual source for this beginning of *Kaddish* comes from Ezekiel 38:23:

וְהַתְגַּדַּלְתִּי וְהַתְקַדְּשֹׁתִי וְנִדְעָתִי לְעֵינֵי גוֹיִם רַבִּים וְיָדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי ה'   
 *And so I will show My greatness and My holiness,*  
*and I will make Myself known in the sight of many nations.*  
*Then they will know that I am the Lord.*

As such, *Kaddish* is fundamentally a public proclamation and petition concerning the magnification of God's name and the manifestation of God's sovereignty. But there is considerably more embedded within its language. In analyzing the text, Aburdaham's commentary is particularly valuable. His *Hibbur Perush ha-Berakhot ve-ha-Tefillot*, completed in Seville around 1340, is one of the most extensive medieval commentaries on the synagogue liturgy. Abudarham drew upon the Talmuds (*Bavli* and *Yerushalmi*), the *Geonim*, earlier prayer books, halakhic authorities, grammatical traditions, and local customs, with a particular concern that worshippers understand both the meaning of the prayers and their proper liturgical use.

His treatment of *Kaddish* is especially rich because he proceeds almost word by word, repeatedly asking what biblical or rabbinic language lies behind the text. In discussing the verse from Ezekiel just cited, for example, Abudarham makes explicit the eschatological character of the prayer: *Kaddish* looks toward a future in which God's sovereignty will be fully revealed. We are not asking that an insufficiently holy God somehow become holy. Rather, we pray that God's holiness and greatness become manifest and universally acknowledged. Abudarham accordingly connects the opening of *Kaddish* with Zechariah's vision:

בְּיוֹם הַהוּא יְהִי ה' אֶחָד וְשִׁמּוֹ אֶחָד   
 *On that day the Lord shall be One and His name One* (Zechariah 14:9).

The phrases that follow continue this movement from creation toward the hoped-for revelation of Divine sovereignty. *B'al'ma di-v'ra khirutei*, "in the world that God created according to God's will" locates the prayer within the world of God's creation, while *v'yamlikh malkhutei*, "may God establish God's kingdom," expresses the hope that God's sovereignty become apparent within that world. For Abudarham, therefore, the opening of *Kaddish* moves from the magnification of God's name to the establishment and recognition of God's kingship.

That hope is made strikingly immediate in the familiar words:

בְּחַיֵּינוּ וּבְיוֹמֵינוּ וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל   
 *In your lifetime and in your days, and in the lifetime of all the House of Israel.*

The prayer does not place redemption in some remote or indeterminate future. It asks that the manifestation of God's sovereignty occur within the lives of those who are themselves reciting and hearing the prayer. The eschatological hope is therefore brought into the present: may the world toward which *Kaddish* looks begin to take shape *in our lifetime and in our days*.

At this point something important happens liturgically: the speaker changes. The congregation responds:

אָמֵן. יְהִי שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעֵלָם וּלְעֵלְמֵי עֲלְמַיָּא  
*Amen. May His great name be blessed forever and for all eternity.*

This response is not merely an affirmation appended to the “real” prayer. As we have already seen, it preserves the oldest recoverable core of the *Kaddish* tradition. Rabbinic literature assigns extraordinary importance to the communal recitation of *Yehei sh'mei rabba*, and Abudarham likewise treats its wording with great seriousness. He records the tradition that the congregational response should continue through *l'alam ul'almei almaya*, and notes the symbolic significance attached to its seven words and twenty-eight letters.

More important than the numerology is what it tells us about the nature of *Kaddish*. The prayer is not complete as the speech of an individual reciter. Its structure depends upon an interchange between leader and congregation. The reciter proclaims the magnification and sanctification of God's name; the community responds by blessing that name. The sanctification is therefore a genuinely communal act. This characteristic will become particularly significant when *Kaddish* later develops into an obligation of the mourner: even then, its efficacy and meaning depend upon the response of the surrounding community.

Following *Yehei sh'mei rabba* comes a veritable cascade of praise, praises that in fact are a thematic continuation of the very beginning of the *Kaddish* (i.e., *Yitgadal v'yitkadash*):

יְתִבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל  
*May He be blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, raised up, honored, elevated, and extolled.*

Here Abudarham's method of exegesis is especially significant. He understands virtually every verb as echoing biblical or rabbinic language: *yitpa'ar* recalls “Israel, in whom I shall be glorified;” *yitromam v'yitnasei* evokes prophetic descriptions of Divine exaltation; *yithadar* reflects praise of the heavenly King. It is unnecessary to trace every individual allusion in order to appreciate his larger point. The sequence deliberately piles one expression of praise upon another until language itself seems inadequate to the task.

The *Kaddish* then says precisely that:

לְעֵלָּא מִן כָּל בְּרָכָתָא וְשִׁירָתָא תְּשַׁבְּחָתָא וְנִחְמָתָא  
*Above all blessings, songs, praises, and consolations...*

In other words, however many forms of praise human beings can articulate, God remains beyond them.

Abudarham gives particular attention to what might be considered a *non sequitur*, namely the word *v'nehemata*, “and consolations.” He connects this word with the passage in *Berakhot* 3a in which God responds to Israel's recitation of *Yehei sh'mei rabba* by grieving over the destruction of the Temple and the exile of His children. In Abudarham's cogent interpretation, *Kaddish* expresses not only Israel's longing for consolation but a hope for the consolation of God Himself, that is, that the exile and estrangement between God and Israel will come to an end.

This aspect of consolation is also a thread that runs through the Mourner's *Kaddish* and may be the only actual reference to a time of grieving.

Seen through Abudarham's commentary, the *Kaddish* is thus considerably more than a sequence of laudatory phrases. Its language traces a coherent movement: from the magnification of God's name, to the hoped-for manifestation of Divine sovereignty within human history, to the congregation's own participation in sanctifying that name, and finally to an acknowledgement that even the accumulated language of human praise remains inadequate to express divine greatness.

### Why Is *Kaddish* in Aramaic?

**T**he predominance of Aramaic has generated questions and explanations for centuries to the present time. Many contemporary congregants are often heard complaining about having to "cut their teeth" on the strange sounding words that are "not quite" Hebrew.

Abudarham offers two major rationales. The first is supernatural. *Kaddish* was stated in Aramaic so that the ministering angels would not understand or would perhaps refuse to attend to it. Because Israel's *Yehei sh'mei rabba* is so magnificent a praise, the angels might become jealous.<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, understanding that Israel's praise causes God to remember the destruction of the Temple and exile might lead the angels to prosecute Israel before the heavenly court.

Abudarham notes the obvious objection raised by the Tosafists (in *Shabbat* 12b): if angels know even human thoughts, can they really be defeated by Aramaic? The answer offered is not literally that they are linguistically ignorant of Aramaic, but that it is considered beneath their dignity and therefore receives no attention from them.

The second explanation is historically far more plausible. Abudarham attributes it to an explanation of the Ri (Rabbi Isaac ben Samuel of Dampierre): *Kaddish* was regularly recited after the public discourse, precisely the setting suggested by *Sotah* 49a. Ordinary people attended these teachings and spoke Aramaic. The prayer was consequently recited in the language they understood. Interestingly, a very similar opinion is actually brought in the *Tosafot* itself (*Berakhot* 3a).

Abudarham elsewhere applies essentially the same explanation to the Aramaic translation within *U-va l'Tzion*: it was provided so that ordinary worshippers who did not understand Hebrew could understand what they were saying.

At the same time, describing *Kaddish* simply as "vernacular Aramaic" would be an oversimplification. Its language is liturgical and literary rather than a transcript of everyday conversation, and the received prayer contains Hebrew or Hebrew-like elements alongside

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<sup>8</sup> This is similar in a way to the argument as to why traditional Jews do not recite the sentence *Barukh shem kevod malkhuto l'olam va'ed* after the first sentence of the *Shema* (except on Yom Kippur). Namely, so that the angels don't get angry that we stole their unique praise of God.

Aramaic ones. What matters historically is that its linguistic form placed the prayer within the Aramaic-speaking culture of late antique rabbinic Judaism and enabled broad communal participation.

Abudarham himself is so committed to the linguistic unity of the prayer that he objects to a Spanish custom of reciting the section beginning *l'eila min kol birkhata* in Hebrew. Rav Amram, Rav Saadiah, and Maimonides, he observes, all transmit the passage in Aramaic.<sup>9</sup>

### Why Does *Kaddish* Require a *Minyan*?

The communal character of *Kaddish* is also expressed halakhically. *Kaddish* belongs to the prayer category known as a *davar she'bikdushah*, a public act of sanctification. The foundational rabbinic discussion appears in *Megillah* 23b. The Mishnah lists several liturgical acts that may not be conducted with fewer than ten, including *pores al Shema*,<sup>10</sup> repetition of the *Amidah*, the priestly blessing, Torah reading, and *haftarah*.

The Gemara explains:

וְנִקְדָּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

*I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel* (Leviticus 22:32).

The word *b'tokh* is linked (through application of a *g'zerah shavah*) to the term *edah* in Numbers 16:21 concerning Korah:

הַכָּדְלוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַזֹּאת

*Separate yourselves from among this congregation.*

And then finally to Numbers 14:27 concerning the spies:

עַד מָתַי לְעֵדָה הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת

*How long shall I tolerate this evil congregation?*

In other words, the rabbis establish ten as the minimum number for a public act of sanctification, ironically from the notion of the “evil congregation” of spies (i.e., once Joshua and Caleb are removed from the group of twelve).

The Mishnah itself does not name *Kaddish* in this list, and one should therefore avoid saying that *Megillah* 23b explicitly legislates the *Kaddish*. Later halakhic tradition applies the category to *Kaddish* and *Barekhu*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Abudarham, *Perushei ha-Berakhot ve-ha-Tefillot*, “*Kaddish u-Barekhu*.” For the two explanations of Aramaic, compare Babylonian Talmud, *Sotah* 33a, on angels and Aramaic, with *Sotah* 49a, on the *Yehei sh'mei rabba* following Aggadic teaching.

<sup>10</sup> *Pores al Shema* refers to leading a shortened public recitation of *Kaddish*, *Barekhu*, and the blessing before the *Shema* for people who missed the regular service.

<sup>11</sup> Mishnah *Megillah* 4:3; Babylonian Talmud, *Megillah* 23b. Abudarham explicitly includes *Kaddish* among the *devarim she-bikedushah* requiring ten; see Abudarham, *Perushei ha-Berakhot ve-ha-Tefillot*, “*Kaddish u-Barekhu*.”

Abudarham, however, states the rule without ambiguity:

“It may not be recited with fewer than ten people, because any *davar she-bikdushah*, such as *Kaddish*, *Barekhu*, *Kedushah*, or *pores al Shema*, requires no fewer than ten.”

He then gives essentially the same scriptural derivation from Leviticus and the ten spies.

But Abudarham goes considerably further. He discusses what happens when a quorum begins a unit of prayer and members subsequently leave. Citing the Jerusalem Talmud and a responsum of Maimonides, he distinguishes between completing a sacred unit that began with ten and introducing a new *Kaddish*. A *Kedushah* belonging to a unit already begun may under certain circumstances be completed; *Kaddish* cannot simply be added afterward without the quorum, because it is a new liturgical act rather than part of what was already begun.

He also records a medieval dispute over how many of the ten must actually need to hear *Kaddish* or *Barekhu*. Rabbeinu Tam appears to require six who have not yet heard them; traditions associated with Rashi allow the prayer to be recited even for the benefit of one individual when nine others join in responding. Abudarham finds the latter position logically persuasive: the single individual is nevertheless sanctifying God’s name in the presence of ten.<sup>12</sup>

The conceptual point is more important than the technical disagreement. A *minyan* is not merely an audience assembled to watch a person say *Kaddish*. The congregation is part of the prayer itself.<sup>13</sup> The reciter proclaims; the community answers.

### The Several *Kaddishes*

As we have described, that which we now call “*Kaddish*” is best understood as a common doxological core upon which several functionally distinct forms are built. Although these have already been mentioned and are also likely well-known to this audience, they are briefly reviewed here.

***Hatzi Kaddish*** contains the fundamental opening through *da’amiran be-alma ve-imru amen*. It serves especially at internal transitions in the service.

***Kaddish Shalem***, or *Kaddish Titkabal*, adds the plea for the acceptance of Israel’s prayers and therefore normally follows the completed statutory prayer (*Amidah*).

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<sup>12</sup> Abudarham, *Perushei ha-Berakhot ve-ha-Tefillot*, “*Kaddish u-Barekhu*,” citing Rabbeinu Tam, Maimonides, traditions reported in Rashi’s name, and *Masekhet Soferim* (10:7)

<sup>13</sup> In this regard, Scott Sokol has often taught that a *davar she-bikdushah* must be recited in a group because the nature of holiness is itself an emergent property of community. The Torah teaches that “*Kedoshim tihyu...* you (plural) shall be holy because I the Lord your God am holy.” Though each of us is created in the image of God, none of us reflects God perfectly, and therefore the best chance we have to approach God’s holiness is through a plurality of images.

*Kaddish d'Rabbanan* adds petitions for the rabbis, students, students of students, and those who engage in Torah. In this form, the prayer's ancient connection with Torah study remains especially transparent.

*Kaddish Yatom*, the form conventionally associated with mourners, includes the later peace petitions but not *Titkabal*. Its meaning as a mourner's prayer comes from who says it and when, not from explicit references to death.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, an expanded *Kaddish* known as *Kaddish d'Ithadta* (the unification *Kaddish*), associated particularly with burial and with the completion of study, contains explicit eschatological language not found in the ordinary Mourner's *Kaddish*. Abudarham records a version of this *Kaddish* used "after burying the dead, and likewise on Tisha B'Av" beginning:

יְהִי שֵׁם רַבָּא דְּהוּא עֲתִיד לְחַדְתָּא עֲלָמָא

*May His great name be magnified and sanctified, for He is destined to renew the world.*

It proceeds to speak explicitly of rebuilding the Temple, redeeming the living, reviving the dead, and rebuilding Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup> This extended *Kaddish* is worth emphasizing precisely because it complicates the familiar observation that "*Kaddish* says nothing about death." Ordinary Mourner's *Kaddish* does not. But another historical form of *Kaddish* used in direct proximity to burial certainly does speak of resurrection and cosmic renewal. The distinction underscores once again that there has never been only one *Kaddish*.

### How Did *Kaddish* Become the Mourner's Prayer?

This development is among the most remarkable in Jewish liturgical history. As we know, neither the central words of *Kaddish* nor our earliest rabbinic references to *Yehei sh'mei rabba* identify the prayer with mourning. Its earliest recoverable associations are instead with sanctification, Torah teaching, and public worship.<sup>16</sup>

The familiar *Kaddish Yatom* belongs to a later chapter. The background includes stories in which the religious acts of a child affect the fate of a deceased parent. The most influential version tells of a rabbi, identified in different textual traditions as R. Akiva or R. Yohanan ben Zakkai, encountering a dead sinner undergoing punishment. The dead man explains that his suffering can be relieved if his son can be taught to stand before the congregation, summon it to bless God, and cause the congregation to respond. The child is found, educated, and eventually performs the required public sanctification; the father is thereby released from punishment.

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<sup>14</sup> For the differentiated functions of the several forms of *Kaddish*, see Abudarham, *Perushei ha-Berakhot ve-ha-Tefillot*, "*Kaddish u-Barekhu*"; Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Abudarham, *Perushei ha-Berakhot ve-ha-Tefillot*, "*Kaddish u-Barekhu*," on the special *Kaddish* recited after burial and on Tisha B'Av.

<sup>16</sup> For the distinction between the early history of *Kaddish* and the later institution of Mourner's *Kaddish*, see David I. Shyovitz, "'You Have Saved Me from the Judgment of Gehenna': The Origins of the Mourner's *Kaddish* in Medieval Ashkenaz," *AJS Review* 39, no. 1 (2015): 49–73; see also Heinemann, "Prayers of *Beth Midrash* Origin," and Weitzman, "Origin of the *Qaddish*."

The narrative appears in several medieval forms and becomes closely associated with *Kaddish*. The important theological mechanism is not magic in the words of *Kaddish* themselves. The son publicly causes others to sanctify God's name.<sup>17</sup>

The historical custom crystallized in medieval Ashkenaz. David Shyovitz, a modern liturgical scholar, carried out a detailed study of Mourner's *Kaddish*. He places its first attestations in late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Ashkenazic halakhic texts and argues that its rapid spread should be understood within a broader medieval transformation in Jewish thinking about the afterlife, merit, recompense, and intercession.

The *Or Zaru'a* of R. Isaac ben Moses of Vienna in the thirteenth century supplies one of the classic early witnesses. Significantly, the evidence indicates that the custom was geographically specific before becoming universal: practices that came to seem ancient and self-evident could in fact be innovations spreading from one Jewish community to another.<sup>18</sup>

Over succeeding centuries, the regulations became increasingly elaborate: which mourner had precedence, how long a child should say *Kaddish* for a parent, which *Kaddishes* belonged to mourners, what happened when several mourners were present, and how *Kaddish* related to the anniversary of death. Only retrospectively did *Kaddish* become so thoroughly identified with mourning that many Jews now assume that mourning was its original purpose.

Historical lateness does not imply theological superficiality, though. Quite the contrary: the older text proved remarkably suited to its newer function.

A mourner does not say, "My parent has died." The mourner says:

יְהַמְדֵּל וְיִקְדֹּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא

*May His great name be magnified and sanctified.*

The prayer does not explain death. It does not tell the mourner that grief is unreal. It does not directly describe the virtues of the deceased. It directs attention instead toward a world still awaiting redemption and toward a Divine sovereignty not yet fully apparent, namely the eschatological message we have previously described. For that reason, the *Kaddish* can express faith without pretending that suffering has become intelligible or diminished.

Its *minyan* requirement gives the practice an equally important social dimension. The mourner cannot fulfill the obligation in isolation. To say *Kaddish* is necessarily to enter a community, stand among others, and invite them to respond. And the community must respond. The mourner's act is therefore not a private incantation performed in public. It is an exchange:

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<sup>17</sup> Isaac ben Moses of Vienna, *Sefer Or Zaru'a*, pt. 2, *Hilkhot Shabbat* §50 (Zhytomyr, 1862); Shyovitz, "'You Have Saved Me from the Judgment of Gehenna,'" 49–73.

<sup>18</sup> *Or Zaru'a*, pt. 2, *Hilkhot Shabbat* §50. Isaac reports the orphan's recitation of *Kaddish* as a custom in Bohemia and the Rhineland while noting a different practice in France; see also Shyovitz, "'You Have Saved Me from the Judgment of Gehenna,'" 49–73.

The mourner: *May His great name be magnified and sanctified.*

The congregation: *Amen.*

The mourner: *May God's sovereignty become manifest.*

The congregation:

אָמֵן יְהִי שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ

*Amen. May His great name be blessed.*

In this way, bereavement is drawn into and supported by communal worship.

### **Kaddish and Peace**

One final feature of *Kaddish* deserves more attention than it sometimes receives. The expanded forms of *Kaddish* move from sanctification and redemption toward peace:

יְהִי שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שָׁמַיָּא

*May there be abundant peace from heaven.*

And finally:

עֲשֵׂה שְׁלֹום בְּמִרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלֹום עָלֵינוּ

*He who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace upon us.*

Abudarham asks why peace is placed at the conclusion, and answers that peace is *shekulah keneged hakol*, equivalent to everything. Human existence is meaningless and empty in the absence of peace. As we remind ourselves in the *Etz Hayim* passage, Torah's ways are "ways of pleasantness" and "all her paths are peace." Even the celestial beings require the God who "makes peace in His heights." Just as our *Amidah* prayers only end with *birkat shalom*, so too we end our liturgical coda with a yearning for peace.

In some rites the paragraph is expanded to request life, abundance, salvation, consolation, healing, redemption, forgiveness, atonement, relief, and deliverance. Abudarham enumerates and sources these petitions and remarks that twelve are requested, corresponding symbolically to the twelve tribes.

The movement of the complete prayer is therefore striking. It begins with God's name and cosmic sanctification. It looks toward Divine kingship and redemption. It summons the congregation to bless God's name eternally. It declares that God exceeds every human form of praise. And it ultimately returns to the human community with a plea for life and peace.

### **Conclusion: A Prayer of Accumulated History**

**K***addish* is not the product of a single historical moment. Its earliest recoverable core lies in a communal affirmation: *Yehei sh'mei rabba*. Rabbinic texts preserve that response in synagogues and houses of study and associate it especially with the conclusion of *Aggadic* teaching. By the Geonic period, expanded forms of *Kaddish* had entered the developing architecture of the synagogue service. Different expansions came to mark different activities:

statutory prayer, Torah study, liturgical transition, burial, and completion. Only later, in medieval Ashkenaz, did one form become the distinctive obligation of mourners.<sup>19</sup>

Yet these historical layers have not simply accumulated accidentally. They remain visible in the texts themselves. The *Kaddish d'Rabbanan* remembers the world of Torah study. The Half *Kaddish* reveals the prayer as a liturgical transition. *Kaddish Titkabal* identifies the Full *Kaddish* as the conclusion of communal prayer. The extended burial *Kaddish* makes explicit the eschatological expectations of renewal and resurrection. The Mourner's *Kaddish* transforms an older communal sanctification into an act performed in the presence of death.

Through all of these “*kaddishes*” runs the same theological conviction: the world as we presently experience it is not yet complete. God's sovereignty is not yet universally recognized; exile has not yet ended; peace has not yet been established. *Kaddish* therefore looks forward.

The history, text, and liturgical function of *Kaddish* are therefore inseparable. Understanding them also establishes the foundation for the subject to which we hope to turn in the second part of this two-part series, namely how these differing meanings and functions are made audible through *nusah*, mode, melody, phrasing, and congregational response.

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<sup>19</sup> For the historical sequence summarized here, see Heinemann, “Prayers of *Beth Midrash* Origin,” 264–280; Weitzman, “Origin of the *Qaddish*,” 131–137; Lehnardt, *Qaddish*; and Shyovitz, ““You Have Saved Me from the Judgment of *Gehenna*,”” 49–73.

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*At the time this manuscript was being prepared, Brian Mayer's father passed away unexpectedly, just as Brian was approaching the conclusion of the eleven-month period of reciting Kaddish for his mother. Not long before, Scott Sokol's mother also passed away. Thus, both authors currently find themselves engaged in the personal practice of honoring their parents' memories, in part through the daily recitation of Kaddish. We pray that our remembrance of them will continue to inspire us to learning and to acts of lovingkindness.*

## Digest of Recent Research — Including New Discoveries from the Secret Archives

by Daniel S. Katz

I learned the name “Kashtan” (the nickname of Salomon Weintraub [1781-1829], one of the most famous cantors of his era) early in my studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Although I do not remember hearing any of his music in class, it was clear that contemporary cantors still held him in esteem nearly two centuries after his death. Of course, I had no inkling then that Kashtan would play a major role in my career as a musicologist, yet he has been with me for over thirty years. His music was part of my very first published article, a systematic introductory examination of the musical function of the cantorial assistants called *m’shor’rim* in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>20</sup> Since 2020, he has been the main focus of my research, a large part of which has been supported by a grant from the German Research Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, the German equivalent of the National Endowment for the Humanities).

How do we know about a singer who has been silent for 200 years? How do we begin to access the unremembered music of the past? And how do we try to recover the history of Ashkenazi liturgical song, which, due to the dearth of musical sources, for all practical purposes does not begin until the middle of the eighteenth century? If we are lucky, we can investigate old music in different ways: from texts that contemporaries wrote about it; from paintings and other artistic depictions of music-making; from surviving musical instruments; from music notation (i.e., music that was written down on parchment or paper); and from sound recordings.

Unfortunately, the last of these possibilities did not exist until about 150 years ago, and the quality of the earliest recordings is not the best (though we do have cantorial recordings from the beginning of the twentieth century). Music notation also did not exist forever. Although the ancient Greeks had a form of music notation, the Christians in medieval Europe were not able to write down music until about 800. Because they give only a vague indication of the melodic contour, the earliest examples are not sufficient to transmit an unknown melody. Subsequent developments, such as staff lines and clefs, enabled the notation of pitches, but not of rhythm. It was only in the fourteenth century that musicians first developed a reliable system of rhythmical notation; this was the subject of my doctoral dissertation.<sup>21</sup>

### Why is all this important?

Does it really matter if we know what secular songs sounded like 650 years ago or what happened to a synagogue cantor who died in 1829? Yes, I think it does. First of all, a new repertory of songs, whether secular songs of the fourteenth century or liturgical settings of the nineteenth, is worthwhile for its own sake — and the composers of the fourteenth

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel S. Katz, “A Prolegomenon to the Study of the Performance Practice of Synagogue Music Involving *M’shor’rim*,” *Journal of Synagogue Music*, vol. 24, no. 2 (December 1995), pp. 35–79.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel S. Katz, “The Earliest Sources for the *Libellus cantus mensurabilis secundum Johannem de Muris*” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1989).

century wrote some wonderful music (look up “Guillaume de Machaut,” “Francesco Landini,” and “*Ars subtilior*” on YouTube!).

This music has an intrinsic value of its own. Adding a cultural element such as music enhances the study of the history of any period or people. History also links us to our roots. Transcending time – connecting the present, in which we live, with the past eras of biblical, medieval, and premodern times, as well as with the future that we will never know — is a major theme in Jewish prayer and thought. Moreover, the Jewish religion requires lifelong study. Study and the acquisition of knowledge — even about music! — is worthwhile *lishma* (for its own sake) and may even be considered holy. As we say three times each day in the weekday liturgy: אַתָּה חוֹנֵן לְאָדָם דַּעַת (“You show us Your grace by granting knowledge”).

In particular, if modern cantors want to preserve, sing, and teach traditional Jewish liturgical melodies, then it is essential to recognize what they are and how they are documented. It is crucial to be able to distinguish between popular or nostalgic romanticism and scholarly assessments of historical sources. For example, my current project on *Kol nidre* (not yet complete) will dispel some beloved, almost folkloristic, but historically untenable beliefs about the *Kol nidre* melody.<sup>22</sup> Comparisons of synagogue chant (*Aleinu l’shabei’ah*<sup>23</sup> and *Akdamut*<sup>24</sup>) with Gregorian chant show that melodic similarity does not imply structural similarity or historical relationships.

Similarly, my research confirms that what cantors learn about *Akdamut* in modern cantorial schools is indeed authentic, but also reveals that what the schools teach represents only a portion of the historical musical tradition for *Akdamut*, for which we have documentation beginning in 1744, nearly 300 years ago.<sup>25</sup> If we know about this, we will gain a greater appreciation for *Akdamut* while rehearsing and singing it; additional musical materials to use for services, concerts, and classes; and also the ability to play an active role in the chain of transmission, restoring elements of the older liturgical practice to the living cantorial tradition of today. Furthermore, the *Akdamut* settings, which typically embed traditional motives within a framework of free composition, demonstrate the close stylistic connection between cantorial

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<sup>22</sup> My earlier research on *Kol nidre* was about a different *Kol nidre* melody — not the famous one! — from a Danish congregational songbook from 1825; see Daniel S. Katz, “When *Kol nidrei* is not *Kol nidrei*: Synagogue Reform in Århus, Denmark (1825),” in *Liber amicorum Isabelle Cazeaux: Symbols, Parallels and Discoveries in Her Honor*, ed. Paul-André Bempéchat (Hillsdale, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 2005), Festschrift Series No. 19, pp. 395–442, here pp. 434–442. The lilting setting of *L’khah dodi* is the only one of these melodies that is suitable for a modern congregation; for a transcription, see p. 416, ex. 1, no. 1 (the text underlay reflects the contemporary pronunciation of the Hebrew).

<sup>23</sup> Daniel S. Katz, “A Gregorian Chant, a Melodic Revelation from Mount Sinai, and the Burning of Martyrs at the Stake: The Legends and Presumed Relationship of *Sanctus* and *Aleinu*,” unpublished paper read at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society (Denver, 2023) and at the Cantus Planus 40th Anniversary Conference (Gödöllő, Hungary, 2024).

<sup>24</sup> Daniel S. Katz, “From Mount Sinai to the Year 6000: A Study of the Interaction of Oral Tradition and Written Sources in the Transmission of an Ashkenazi Liturgical Chant (*Akdamut*),” *Rivista Internazionale di Musica Sacra*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1999), pp. 175–206 (corrected version as supplement to vol. 20, no. 2 [2000]), here pp. 197–204.

<sup>25</sup> Katz, “From Mount Sinai,” pp. 179–197, especially pp. 192–197.

singing and the contemporary classical music of that period. The greatest example of this is the elaborate and complete setting by Isaac Offenbach.<sup>26</sup>

On a larger scale, research into Jewish music of earlier eras connects the synagogue with broader historical events, personalities, and culture. Kashtan lived during the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic periods, a time of great turmoil in Europe, during which the legal status of Jews was often in flux while armies and politicians frequently altered international borders. Understanding this history, and especially the ramifications of the partitions of Poland and the Congress of Vienna (which redrew the political map of Europe following Napoleon's defeat) gives us immeasurably enhanced insights not only into Kashtan's life, but into Jewish life in general at that time.

My research shows how Kashtan came face to face with the xenophobia of the Prussian Empire,<sup>27</sup> with czarist officials who (perhaps counter-intuitively) offered to promote his career,<sup>28</sup> and with Austrian authorities who seized a rabbi's son on the first evening of a major festival in order to force him to serve in the army.<sup>29</sup> It shows interactions between Jews and non-Jews, including between Kashtan and government officials, and sometimes gives us an insider's look at synagogue services from 200 years ago. We see how Kashtan relates to the public, to jealous competitors, to admiring and hostile rabbis, and to his own intimate circle of friends, family, and apprentices (*m'shor'rim*).

Studying the lives and music of Kashtan and his son, Cantor Hirsch Weintraub (ca. 1812–1881), brings us closer to the tremendous musical revolution that took place in the synagogue during the first half of the nineteenth century as Salomon Sulzer and others reshaped the Ashkenazi musical repertory, creating a style that is still familiar to us today (Kashtan's style is not!). Hirsch Weintraub is important as a transitional figure — a disciple of both his father and of Sulzer — and for coming out of one milieu and making his career in another.<sup>30</sup> Kashtan is

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<sup>26</sup> This setting is in eight movements and is the only known *Akdmut* composition that provides notated music for every couplet that the cantor typically sings (traditionally the cantor and the congregation sing the forty-five couplets responsively; Offenbach does not give music for the congregation's couplets). For an analysis and transcription of Offenbach's *Akdmut*, see Daniel S. Katz, "Music That Escaped: Transcriptions of Two Songs of Praise From a Surviving, but Still Hidden, Synagogue Repertory," in *Fiori Musicali: Liber amicorum Alexander Silbiger*, ed. Claire Fontijn with Susan Parisi (Sterling Heights, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 2010), Detroit Monographs in Musicology / Studies in Music, No. 55, pp. 525–573, here pp. 532–538 and 556–563; cf. Katz, "Prolegomenon," pp. 55–56, 58, and 73 and "From Mount Sinai," pp. 195–196 (Ex. 13).

<sup>27</sup> Daniel S. Katz, "The Jews of Kempen (Kępno) vs. the Kingdom of Prussia: Campaigning for Permission to Hire the Renowned Cantor Salomon ("Kashtan") After the Congress of Vienna," unpublished paper read at meetings of the Association for Jewish Studies (San Francisco, 2023) and the European Academy of Religion (Rome, 2026).

<sup>28</sup> Daniel S. Katz, "A Chestnut, a Grape, and a Pack of Lions: A Shabbos in Płock with a Popular Synagogue Singer in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 32 (2020), pp. 15–29, here p. 17, n. 9.

<sup>29</sup> "Die Suche nach einer Lebenschronologie des Kantors Salomon Weintraub, genannt Kashtan (ca. 1781–1829)" ("Seeking a Timeline for the Life of Cantor Salomon Weintraub, known as Kashtan [ca. 1781–1829]"), forthcoming in *Trumah* (the journal of the Institute for Jewish Studies in Heidelberg).

<sup>30</sup> Hanoah Avenary stresses this transition in the title of the article in which he presents his Hebrew translation of Hirsch Weintraub's autobiography: "דרכו של חזן מערבה: האוטוביוגרפיה של הרש ויינטראוב" ("A Cantor's Journey Westward: The Autobiography of Hirsch Weintraub") in *תצליל*, vol. 9 (1969), pp. 124–127. The word "westward" refers to the cultural differences between eastern and western Europe, including the differences in musical styles, as well as to the geography. Hirsch was born in Dubno (today in Ukraine) and spent forty years as cantor in Königsberg, Prussia (today Kaliningrad in Russia's noncontiguous enclave on the Baltic Sea).

important as a representative of the older style. My research helps ensure that we do not view Sulzer, Kashtan, and Hirsch merely as individuals in isolation, but within the wider historical and cultural context of the ongoing development of the synagogue and its music during the Enlightenment and Emancipation.

## Focusing on Kashtan

Having already completed my Ph.D. before studying cantorial music, I was aware of the standard musicological reference works and source catalogues. I knew that Israel Adler, the founder of the Jewish Music Research Centre at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, had published two groundbreaking catalogues: *Hebrew Notated Manuscript Sources*, which lists and itemizes the contents of over 200 music manuscripts from the twelfth century through 1840,<sup>31</sup> and *Hebrew Writings Concerning Music*, which not only lists, but gives the text of the relevant passages about Jewish music.<sup>32</sup>

Adler, who invited me to write a review of *Hebrew Notated Manuscript Sources*,<sup>33</sup> was an influence not only on me, but also on our colleagues. Much of the music that I have transcribed and analyzed throughout my career is listed in his manuscript catalogue and its indices, and I have published a translation of and commentary on one of the texts in *Hebrew Writings*.<sup>34</sup> Adler was Geoffrey Goldberg's second doctoral advisor at the Hebrew University (his main advisor was Eliyahu Schleifer).<sup>35</sup> Matthew Austerklein's recent dissertation<sup>36</sup> develops historical ideas and analyzes Hebrew texts that Adler had first presented in his own dissertation sixty years ago.<sup>37</sup>

I have been able to study Kashtan's life and works through two types of materials: his own music and what others have written about him. So far, my earliest contemporary source is from 1819. Kashtan's music first became generally available in 1859, when his son, Cantor

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<sup>31</sup> Israel Adler, ed. *Hebrew Notated Manuscript Sources up to circa 1840: A Descriptive and Thematic Catalogue with a Checklist of Printed Sources* (Munich: G. Henle, 1989), *Répertoire International des Sources Musicales*, B IX<sup>1</sup>, 2 vols.

<sup>32</sup> Israel Adler, ed., *Hebrew Writings Concerning Music in Manuscripts and Printed Books from Geonic Times up to 1800* (Munich: G. Henle, 1975), *Répertoire International des Sources Musicales*, B IX<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel S. Katz, review of Israel Adler, *Hebrew Notated Manuscript Sources*, in *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore*, vol. 18 (1993), pp. 66-69.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel S. Katz, "The 'Eighth Way' in the *Ma'aseh Efod* of Profiat Duran (1403): A Catalanian Grammarian's Remarks on Biblical Cantillation," in *The Past in the Present: Papers Read at the IMS Intercongressional Symposium and the 10th Meeting of the CANTUS PLANUS, Budapest & Visegrád, 2000*, 2 vols. (Budapest: Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, 2003), vol. 1, pp. 61-85.

<sup>35</sup> See Geoffrey Goldberg, "Maier Levi of Esslingen, Germany: A Small-Town *Hazzan* in the Time of the Emancipation and his Cantorial Compendium" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The Hebrew University, 2000) and *Between Tradition and Modernity: The High Holy Day Melodies of Minhag Ashkenaz According to Hazzan Maier Levi of Esslingen* (Jerusalem: Jewish Music Research Centre, The Hebrew University, 2019), Yuval Music Series, no. 12.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew Austerklein, "The Professionalization of the Ashkenazic Cantor in East-Central Europe, 1500-1750" (Ph.D. dissertation, Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle-Wittenberg, Germany, 2026).

<sup>37</sup> Israel Adler, *La Pratique musicale savante dans quelques communautés juives en Europe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles (The Learned Musical Practice in Several Jewish Communities in Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries)*, 2 vols. (Paris and The Hague: Mouton, 1966), *Etudes Juives* 8.

Hirsch Weintraub, devoted an entire volume of his three-part publication to it.<sup>38</sup> Three additional pieces are listed in Adler’s catalogue *Hebrew Notated Manuscript Sources*. Strangely, all three are settings of the same text (*Mimkomkha* from the Shabbat morning liturgy). I have transcribed them and have so far published two of the three.<sup>39</sup>

The most important work written about Kashtan is a biography that Hirsch Weintraub published in Hebrew in 1875.<sup>40</sup> This has been the starting point for much of my historical research, supplemented by archival documents that I have been fortunate to discover, principally in the Secret Archives of Prussian Cultural Heritage (*Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz*) in Berlin.

Perhaps surprisingly, the most basic things that I learned about Kashtan are his name and the dates when he lived. His *name*? Is that not obvious? No! Modern writers sometimes call him “Salomon Kashtan”<sup>41</sup> and sometimes “Salomon Weintraub”<sup>42</sup> or even “Salomon Weintraub-Kashtan.”<sup>43</sup> Some authors seem to treat these names as interchangeable.<sup>44</sup> However, it turns out that at the time when Kashtan was born (1781), most Jews in the Russian Empire did not have family names. Kashtan’s name at birth was simply שלמה בן שמשון — Shloyme ben Shimshon or Salomon, son of Samson.

<sup>38</sup> Hirsch Weintraub, ed., שירי שלמה [Shirei Shlomoh]: Grösstentheils componirt von meinem seeligen Vater Salomon Weintraub genannt Kaschtan. Dritter Theil des שירי בית ה' Schire Beth Adonai (*The Songs of Salomon: mostly composed by my late father Salomon Weintraub, called Kashtan. Third Part of Songs of the Lord’s House*) [1859] (reprint, New York: Sacred Music Press, [1955], Out of Print Classics Series of Synagogue Music, vol. 21).

<sup>39</sup> See Daniel S. Katz, “Ein erster Blick auf ein geschmackvolles altes Kastanienstück: Transkription einer vergessenen Komposition von Kantor Salomon (1781–1829), genannt Kaschtan (d. h. ‘Kastanie’)” (“A First Look at a Tasteful Old Chestnut: A Transcription of a Forgotten Composition by Cantor Salomon [1781–1829], Known as Kashtan [i.e., ‘Chestnut’]”), in ‘Ein Gebet ohne Gesang ist wie ein Körper ohne Seele’: Aspekte der synagogalen Musik = PaRDeS (Zeitschrift der Vereinigung für Jüdische Studien e.V.) (*A Prayer Without Song is Like a Body Without a Soul’: Aspects of Synagogue Music = PaRDeS [Journal of the Organization for Jewish Studies]*), vol. 20 (2014), pp. 61-74 and “Another *Mimkomkha* by Cantor Salomon (‘Kashtan’): A Transcription and Analysis,” *Musica Judaica*, vol. 23 (2021-2022), pp. 1–40.

<sup>40</sup> Hirsch Weintraub, ז"ל הגדוע קאשטאן (The Life of the Famous Cantor Kashtan of Blessed Memory,” *המגיד* (*Hamagid*), vol. 19 (1875): no. 14 (Apr. 7), p. 122; no. 15 (Apr. 14), p. 130; no. 16 (Apr. 28), p. 140; no. 17 (May 5), p. 148; no. 18 (May 12), p. 160; no. 19 (May 19), p. 168; no. 20 (May 26), p. 176; no. 21 (June 2), pp. 186–187; no. 23 (June 16), pp. 202–203; and no. 24 (June 23), p. 210.

<sup>41</sup> E.g., Abraham Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development* (New York: Henry Holt, 1929), pp. 266, 271.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Israel Adler, *Hebrew Notated Manuscript Sources*, vol. 1: “Solomon [sic] Weintraub” (pp. 193, 196); “Solomon Weintraub, called Kasztan (‘Rotkopf’)” [sic] (pp. 330, 332). For the meaning of the name “Kashtan” (literally not “Rotkopf” [“redheaded”], but “chestnut”), see Katz, “Music That Escaped,” pp. 546–555 (appendix: “What Was Salomon Weintraub’s Name and What Color Was His ‘Red’ Hair?”) and Daniel S. Katz, “The Death of Kashtan, or When Did Cantor Hirsch and his Father Salomon (Kashtan) Become Weintraubs?” in the *Journal of Synagogue Music*, vol. 49, no. 1 (October 2024), pp. 65–81, here pp. 66–71.

<sup>43</sup> Abraham Idelsohn, “Salomon Weintraub-Kaschtan: *Mim’kom’cho*,” *Der jüdische Kantor*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1931), *Musikbeilage* (music supplement).

<sup>44</sup> For example, Eric Werner treats “Kashtan” as both a first and last name, calling him “Kashtan (redheaded) Weintraub” [sic] and “Solomon [sic] Kashtan”; see *A Voice Still Heard: The Sacred Songs of the Ashkenazic Jews* (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), p. 229 (for “redheaded,” see above, n. 23).

In his biography of his father, Hirsch reveals that “Kashtan” was a nickname, bestowed lovingly by his mentor, the “Lame Cantor,” with whom the young Kashtan stayed for six years, starting after the death of his mother when he was nine.<sup>45</sup> As for the name “Weintraub,” I found a brief item in a newspaper from Lemberg that referred to Hirsch by this name in 1833.<sup>46</sup> Since Kashtan had died in 1829, I had no evidence linking him to the name “Weintraub.” Therefore, I stopped calling him “Weintraub” and began to say that he had no family name.<sup>47</sup>

Then I discovered Kashtan’s death certificate — more accurately, his entry in the Jewish death registry in Brody, which calls him “Salomon Weintraub.” I still do not know if Kashtan was called “Weintraub” during his lifetime, or if local regulations in Brody required a last name for burial, but at least we now have evidence that connects the name “Weintraub” directly to Salomon. Kashtan’s death certificate is also important because it verifies the date when he died (Dec. 2, 1829) and supports Hirsch’s account of his father’s two-year-long illness and death. It even confirms the name of the doctor whose misdiagnosis led to his death six weeks later.<sup>48</sup>

Archival documents show that Kashtan cannot have acquired the family name “Weintraub” before December 1819. One of the most memorable events in his life was an extended trip to the Grand Duchy of Posen in 1819. This territory, today part of Poland, was under Prussian rule after the Congress of Vienna (1815). Hirsch Weintraub describes his father’s adventures there, including his being falsely accused of using a forged passport. Although Kashtan was cleared of any wrongdoing, the government ordered him and his *m’shor’rim* to leave the country anyway and sent gendarmes to escort them to the border. The Jewish community of Kempen (Kępno) rescued them, brought them back to the city, and wrote to the government in an unsuccessful attempt to procure a residence permit for Kashtan so that he could become the permanent cantor there.

I discovered the letter from the Jewish community of Kempen to the Prussian government, as well as two internal bureaucratic memos, in the Secret Archives in Berlin. These documents support Hirsch’s telling of the story. They use an almost comical form of Kashtan’s name, a Polish patronymic so unwieldy that neither the Prussian government nor even the Jewish community could keep it straight. This proves that Kashtan did not yet have the surname “Weintraub” when he visited Kempen in 1819.<sup>49</sup>

These documents are useful for establishing a chronology of Kashtan’s life, since they give us a date for his visit to Kempen. Unfortunately, unambiguous dates are few and far between. Even the dates of Hirsch Weintraub’s birth and death have been disputed. Not only do modern scholars give contradictory information — Hirsch himself is inconsistent about his birth! Two of my next articles will be devoted to clearing up the chronology. In one I establish a

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<sup>45</sup> Katz, “Music That Escaped,” p. 552, n. 73 and p. 554; see also “*Die Suche nach einer Lebenschronologie.*”

<sup>46</sup> Katz, “The Death of Kashtan,” p. 79.

<sup>47</sup> E.g., Katz, “Another *Mimkomkha*,” p. 1 (including n. 1).

<sup>48</sup> Katz, “The Death of Kashtan,” pp. 75–77.

<sup>49</sup> Katz, “The Jews of Kempen.”

timeline for the documented events in Kashtan's life.<sup>50</sup> In the other I evaluate the evidence about when Hirsch Weintraub was born and died.<sup>51</sup>

One of the aspects of my research has been to seek out genealogical sources about Kashtan and Hirsch's family. I have found records of the births of about half a dozen of Hirsch's children as well as some information about his marriages. Not all of these documents are original. Some, such as the notice of Hirsch Weintraub's first marriage, are Prussian records of events that had occurred earlier, when Hirsch was still living in the Russian Empire. Nevertheless, one can see that Hirsch had many children and that at a certain point the name of their mother changed in their birth records.

It was not unusual for a man to have two wives in the nineteenth century (not simultaneously, of course), since life expectancy was low by our standards and women often died in childbirth. However, I found the death certificates of both of Hirsch's wives. Neither died young (one was 87 and the other 92). Both died over a quarter-century after Hirsch himself. From these facts it became clear that Hirsch Weintraub had gotten divorced in the 1850s. His first wife was his cousin; Kashtan had arranged the marriage. The second wife was about twenty years younger than the first.<sup>52</sup>

I also discovered that Hirsch adopted a younger cousin as his own son. The adoptee later became cantor in Frankfurt am Main. He wrote to Eduard Birnbaum<sup>53</sup> after Hirsch's death and sought to arrange for a pension for one of Hirsch's daughters, who was living in poverty in Königsberg (where Hirsch had spent most of his life, and where Birnbaum had succeeded him as cantor).<sup>54</sup>

Two of the lengthiest and most interesting episodes in Hirsch Weintraub's biography of Kashtan were a guest appearance on Shabbat in the Polish city of Płock (pronounced "Pwutsk"; the vowel is like the *u* in *tusk* or the *o* in *love*) and his visit to Alt-Ofen (Old Buda, today part of Budapest). I wrote about the visit to Płock in an article called "A Chestnut, a Grape, and a Pack of Lions." The nickname "Kashtan" means "Chestnut," the name "Weintraub" means "grape," and "a pack of lions" refers to Hirsch's humorous description of the awful singing of the local cantor in Płock. On Friday evening he invited about two dozen visiting cantors and *m'shor'rim*, who had come there to hear Kashtan the next morning, to join him singing the service as an impromptu choir. Hirsch Weintraub wrote:

Every one of them roared like a lion over its prey to show his strength and power, and the more roaring the better! The cantor roared like a lion more than all of them. As far as music was concerned, they knew nothing.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Katz, "*Die Suche nach einer Lebenschronologie*."

<sup>51</sup> Daniel S. Katz, "Reassessing the Years of Hirsch Weintraub's Birth and Death (ca. 1812–1881)," forthcoming.

<sup>52</sup> See Katz, "*Die Suche nach einer Lebenschronologie*."

<sup>53</sup> Birnbaum (1855–1920) was a cantor, composer, and scholar.

<sup>54</sup> I have not yet published the correspondence.

<sup>55</sup> Katz, "A Chestnut," p. 19.

The other episode, the visit to Alt-Ofen, led me to expand my work in an unanticipated direction. When Cantors Assembly member Jalda Rebling heard that I was working on Kashtan, she told me about a Yiddish play in which she had performed in Berlin in 1999. The name of the play was “The False Kashtan!”! She wondered if there was a connection between this name and the subject of my cantorial research.

It turned out that there was. Kashtan’s visit to Alt-Ofen (Budapest), together with some shenanigans in the local Jewish community there, led a rebellious young man, despite his recently having obtained a rabbinical *smikhah* (ordination), to satirize the local synagogue in a theatrical farce in which a cunning character pretends to be the renowned cantor and makes a fool of the president of the congregation. “The False Kashtan” is hardly known to Yiddish scholars outside of Hungary. This is unfortunate, because the existence of a Hungarian Yiddish play from ca. 1820 is significant for the history of Yiddish theater. Unfortunately, the play was not published until 1900 and then it was expurgated due to its crudeness and vulgarity.<sup>56</sup>

Some scholars indicated that the same author, Moritz (originally Moses) Gottlieb Saphir (1795–1857), who later became famous for his German satirical writings, produced a second, but similar play at about the same time, in which the title character was an Italian soprano. This claim was complicated, but I managed to untangle the issue, not only showing what had really happened, but also uncovering the initial source of the confusion. I presented my findings at a conference on Yiddish studies and hope to publish them soon as an article.<sup>57</sup>

When I began to plan scholarly research trips again after Corona, I spent more time than I initially had expected at the Secret Archives in Berlin. I never found the main item I was looking for (a clean copy of Hirsch Weintraub’s brief autobiography), but instead I found materials that will keep me busy for many years, including letters and reports of musicians, and also some synagogue cantors, whom the King of Prussia honored with the title *königlicher Musikdirektor* (Royal Music Director). I even discovered the minutes of a meeting to discuss the criteria for awarding this title.

The Secret Archives preserves a lengthy correspondence between Hirsch Weintraub and the Prussian authorities, in which he sought to explain why he was worthy of receiving this honor. The bureaucrats evaluated, refuted, and eventually accepted his application. The documents reveal an extensive debate over whether or not Hirsch met the musical requirements. Initially the king’s advisors had rejected Hirsch’s request. They awarded him instead the “little gold medal” (routinely given to artists!).

Hirsch, who really did not want the “little gold medal,” never gave up his dream of being named Royal Music Director. He suspected that the unification of Germany would be an auspicious time to renew his application. When King Wilhelm I of Prussia became the kaiser in 1871, Hirsch submitted his setting of Psalm 72 for cantor, soloists, and orchestra. He pointed out that this would be an ideal piece to perform at a coronation. I have seen no hint that the kaiser

<sup>56</sup> See Katz, “The Death of Kashtan,” pp. 67–69.

<sup>57</sup> Daniel S. Katz, “*Was ist an ‘Dem falschen Kashtan’ und ‘Der falschen Catalani’ wahr?*” (“What is True About ‘The False Kashtan’ and ‘The False Catalani’?”), unpublished paper read at the Yiddish Studies Symposium (Dusseldorf, 2024).

ever took him up on this suggestion. Nevertheless, Hirsch finally succeeded in getting his title in 1873. The prestigiousness of this title is made clear from two additional documents: the death certificate of Hirsch's second wife calls her "*die Musikdirektorwitwe*" ("the music-director-widow") and the title appears also in the death certificate of one of Hirsch's daughters.

There are many sketches for Psalm 72 in the Birnbaum Collection in Cincinnati, together with a *Lekha dodi* set to the same music. I found a sumptuous manuscript copy of the psalm in Berlin. The elaborate calligraphy strongly suggests that this was the copy that Hirsch had sent to the kaiser. Unfortunately, there is no documentation to prove this conjecture. I had hoped that the library might also have the copy of Hirsch's autobiography that he sent to the kaiser but could find no trace of it. So far, we know of this short text — essentially a curriculum vitae written out in prose and comprising just two and a half pages — solely from the heavily edited draft in the Birnbaum Collection. I am preparing to publish the German text with an English translation.

In 1906 Eduard Birnbaum commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of Hirsch Weintraub's death by giving a lecture and organizing an exhibition of 34 objects pertaining to Hirsch's life. Among the items that he displayed, and to which he obviously had access, were both the "little gold medal" and the official certificate that finally bestowed on Hirsch the elusive title of "Royal Music Director."<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately, we do not know what happened to Weintraub's medal and certificate, whether they still exist, and if so, where they are.

Birnbaum's exhibit included the score of Psalm 72, together with a report by the 88-year-old Moses Montefiore about his mission to St. Petersburg in 1872. After meeting with Czar Alexander II, Montefiore stopped off in Königsberg over Shabbat during his return trip to England and experienced "a pleasing incident" involving Hirsch Weintraub: together with a small group of accomplices, Hirsch concealed himself in a hotel room adjacent to Montefiore's, and suddenly they started singing! This story is one of three vignettes in my recent article "The Cantor Next Door."<sup>59</sup>

Kashtan's biography tells of other humorous or "pleasing incident[s]," some of which I included in my paper on "The Services and Antics of the Singing Assistants (*m'shor'rim*)."<sup>60</sup> Another paper, called "Curses, Blessings, and 'Too Bad We Don't Have More Sins,'"<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>. See *Verzeichnis der Ausstellungs-Objecte zum Vortrag "H. Weintraub als Synagogencomponist" gehalten von Ed. Birnbaum am 12. Dezember 1906 im Verein für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur zu Königsberg i. Pr.* (Catalogue of Items on Exhibit in Connection With the Lecture "H[irsch] Weintraub as Synagogue Composer," held by Ed[uard] Birnbaum on December 12, 1906 at the Association for Jewish History and Literature in Königsberg i[n] Pr[ussia]) (Cincinnati, Klau Library, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Birnbaum Collection).

<sup>59</sup>. Daniel S. Katz, "The Cantor Next Door: Cantor Salomon (Known as Kashtan), His Son Hirsch Weintraub, and the Motif of Hiding in the Next Room," *Journal of Synagogue Music*, vol. 48, no. 1 (September 2023), pp. 54–60, here pp. 56–59.

<sup>60</sup>. Daniel S. Katz, "The Services and Antics of the Singing Assistants (*m'shor'rim*) of a Nomadic Synagogue Cantor in the Russian Empire (Principally Ukraine and Poland) ca. 1820," unpublished paper read at the 21st Quinquennial Congress of the International Musicological Society (Athens, Greece, 2022).

<sup>61</sup>. Daniel S. Katz, "Curses, Blessings, and 'Too Bad We Don't Have More Sins': The Role of Rabbis in a Hebrew Biography from 1875 of the Famous Cantor Salomon, known as Kashtan (1781-1829), in the Russian Empire (mostly Poland and Ukraine)," unpublished paper read at the conference of the European Association of Jewish Studies (Frankfurt, Germany, 2023).

discusses Kashtan's relationship with rabbis over the course of his career. Some rabbis admired and encouraged Kashtan; others were hostile or even threatened him.

The long-term goal of this research is to publish Hirsch Weintraub's biography of Kashtan in the original Hebrew, together with an English translation and commentary, enhanced with as much additional information as I can find in archival documents. Meanwhile, I have already included several excerpts from the biography in some of my articles and conference papers.<sup>62</sup>

As a conclusion, I would like to mention one final paper and project that are not centered around Kashtan. At a conference on Italian Jewish music, I presented an experimental methodology for using the cantillation signs (*t'amei hamikra*) as a tool for analyzing Salomone Rossi's settings of biblical texts. The idea was not to suggest that Rossi used cantillation melodies in his Hebrew songs, but rather that taking account of the cantillation signs can give us a better understanding of his music. Our colleague Matthew Austerklein also spoke about Rossi at this conference.<sup>63</sup>

And finally, an international project that brings together the research of approximately twenty authorities on Jewish Studies or Jewish music to celebrate the life and work of one of the senior scholars in the field: I am pleased to announce a *Festschrift* in honor of the musicologist Eliyahu Schleifer, the former director of the cantorial school at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem. It will appear as a special issue of *Musica Judaica*, and I am grateful that the regular editors of the journal have invited me to be the guest editor.

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<sup>62</sup> Katz, "The Cantor Next Door," p. 59; "A Chestnut," pp. 18–20; "The Death of Kashtan," pp. 72–75; see also "The Jews of Kempen," "The Services and Antics," and "*Die Suche nach einer Lebenschronologie*."

<sup>63</sup> Daniel S. Katz, "The Hidden Influence of Biblical Cantillation Signs in Late Renaissance Polyphony? An Analysis of Salamone Rossi's Hebrew Setting of Psalm 146," forthcoming in the proceedings of the conference "*Suoni di una memoria frammentata: Repertori musicali ebraici in Italia*" ("Sounds of a Fragmented Memory: Jewish Musical Repertories in Italy") (Venice, 2024), and see Matthew Austerklein, "The Ashkenazic Afterlives of Salamone Rossi's *HaShirim Asher Lishlomo*," forthcoming in the same volume.

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# IYYUN BIT'FILAH

## Melekh

*A teaching by Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig<sup>64</sup>*

At a Conservative synagogue on Rosh Hashanah  
one of the rabbis  
apologized for the *mahzor*'s repeated reference  
to God as *Melekh*.

I understand.

A) "*Melekh*" is unquestionably masculine. B) "*Melekh*" suggests power-over rather than empowerment. C) "*Melekh*" has already been replaced by "*Ruah*" in some congregations. D) And "*Melekh*" makes some congregants think of the "No Kings" rallies and marches in which they have participated and makes them object even more vehemently to referring to God as "King" or at least to pose the question: **Why do we use *Melekh* as a name for God?**

The behavior of *biblical* kings  
might provoke the same question:

The word *melekh* first appears

when four kings launch a war against four other kings,  
among them *Melekh S'dom*.

Avimelekh comes next,

the king who wishes to take Sarah to bed with him.

And then there's *Melekh Mitzraim*

who orders midwives to murder babies.

Generations later, the nation of Israel is given *her* first king  
*as a punishment*.

And Israel's prophets

never cease to castigate those kings.

There's *David Melekh Yisrael*

who carouses, neglects his wife,

and murders the husband of the woman after whom he lusts.

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<sup>64</sup> Inspired by a practicum by Shirel Richman, "*Malkhuyot*," September 14, 2022 / 18 Elul 5782  
at the School of Sacred Music of Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, NY. Revised  
October 28, 2024 / 26 Tishrei 5785; Revised again November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024 / 6 Heshvan 5785 Revised again, December  
14, 2025 / 14 Kislev 5786

And King Ahashverosh  
who is nearly duped by Haman  
into killing all the Jews in his realm.

**And we call God, *Melekh*?**

France, the first European country to emancipate its Jews,  
*beheaded* its royalty.

King George  
*was wrong*  
when he insisted: “You’ll be back.”

America,  
where Jews enjoy unparalleled religious freedom,  
*rejected* royalty  
from its very outset.

Curious then  
that liturgical innovators  
as bold as  
Isaac Mayer Wise, David Einhorn,  
Mordecai Kaplan, Ira Eisenstein,  
John Rainer and Chaim Stern,  
*did not eliminate Melekh as a metaphor for God*  
in the prayer books they edited.

And while, in *Mishkan Hanelesh*,<sup>65</sup>  
the English word King  
is replaced by the gender neutral “Ruler” or “Sovereign,”  
the editors of that *mahzor*,  
like those who came before them,  
did not depose *HaMelekh*.  
We still recite:  
“*HaMelekh haKadosh*,” “*Melekh el hai v’kayam*,” “*Melekh Elyon*,”  
“*Malkhuyot*,” “*M’lokh*,” *Melekh al kol ha’aretz*,” and “*Avinu Malkeinu*.”

**If we were editors of a *mahzor* what would we do?**

**Is *Melekh* a fitting image or metaphor for God?**

Of course,  
God is ultimately unknowable,  
the Hidden One,  
ineffable, unmeasurable, unfathomable, indescribable.  
And yet our liturgy offers us many images or metaphors for God:  
a shield, a rock, eagle’s wings, a strong arm, an outstretched hand,  
a shepherd, a beloved...

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<sup>65</sup> A High Holy Day *Mahzor* published for the Reform movement by CCAR Press.

How can we use *any* images for an unimaginable God?  
The *piyyut Anim Z'mirot* provides this explanation:

“I tell of Your glory, even though I have not seen You.  
I describe You, even though I have not known You.  
Your prophets imagined You not as You really are.  
They described You by Your works alone.  
They multiplied *m'shalim* for You...  
They saw You both in old age and in youth,  
With Your hair now grey, now black  
As a wise old judge, as a handsome young warrior...  
Head drenched with the dew of light  
Locks filled with the drops of night...  
Dazzling and ruddy...wearing [royal] robes of red...”<sup>66</sup>

Gerard Manley Hopkins put it this way:  
“We guess, we clothe Thee, unseen King  
With attributes we deem are meet  
Each in his own imagining  
Sets up a shadow in Thy seat...”<sup>67</sup>

So, *Melekh* is a *mashal*, a metaphor.  
**Yet,**  
**in a tradition rich with images and metaphors and names for God,**  
**why *Melekh*?**

Context might help us.  
The very first time Torah speaks of *God* as king  
is in the Song of the Sea  
when the Israelites are being pursued by *Melekh Mitzraim*.  
Proclaiming *Adonai yimlokh*,  
in that context,  
expresses a belief that there *is* One  
whose power and laws  
*transcend* those of any mortal king.  
*Melekh Mitzraim* drowned in the Sea.  
While *Adonai yimlokh l'olam va'ed*.

The reign of a *melekh basar vadam*, an emperor, a prime minister, a president  
will come and go.

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<sup>66</sup> Birnbaum, *Daily, Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*, pp. 417-8. In many Ashkenazi *siddurim Shir Hakavod/Anim Z'mirot* is sung at or near the end of *Musaf*.

<sup>67</sup> From his poem, “Nordum.”

Rulers die, terms end, elections are lost.  
A human ruler may be impeached, assassinated or beheaded.  
Policies promulgated by one  
may be reversed by a *melekh hadash*.  
And when a human being rules or governs,  
they rule but one empire or nation. (Though it may be vast.)

Not so *HaMelekh*, *Melekh Malkhei Hamlakhim*  
who reigns not over one nation or empire  
but  
*al kol ha'olam kulo*.

**If, however, the nature of *HaMelekh*  
is utterly different than that of every mortal sovereign,  
then what does our liturgy mean  
when it calls God “*Melekh*”?**

*Melekh* in the *mahzor* means two things:  
**First: *Shehu noteh shamayim v'yoseid aretz*<sup>68</sup>, the Source of immutable laws of nature.**  
The earth revolves around the sun, the moon 'round the earth.  
Day follows night and, season follows season,  
Every breath we take, every move we make, everything we see and hear,  
every note you sound  
is governed by immutable, intricate, wondrous, grand and glorious laws of nature.  
“The [whole] world is charged with the grandeur of God,”  
proclaims Hopkins  
and that grandeur, glory, power or majesty of *Melekh HaOlam*  
is most certainly evoked through words and music on Rosh Hashannah.  
**Secondly, calling God “*Melekh*” evokes the majesty of immutable moral laws.**

**“At present [however],” lamented Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik,  
“the kingdom of God is to be found solely in the natural law.  
As far as the moral law is concerned,  
God’s sovereignty is not yet universally accepted.”<sup>69</sup>**

For God provided us with free will and  
-we do not always choose good. We do not always choose life.

The news provides daily evidence of leaders who inspire or order followers to murder  
and who sacrifice others’ lives for some “greater” goal.

On a more personal level:  
-Sometimes we allow not God but our *yetzer* to rule over us:

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<sup>68</sup> From the “Great” *Aleinu*, the Introduction to *Malkhuyot*.

<sup>69</sup> Rosh Hashannah *Mahzor*, with commentary according to the teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, p. 535

-Sometimes people capitulate to the will of the state, or to charismatic authority figures,  
-sometimes to pressure from peers.

-We may succumb to advertising, making us want things we do not need  
even though *malkhut shamayim* prohibits us from coveting what others have.

-We may succumb to demands to work a seven-day week  
even though *malkhut shamayim* commands a full day of rest.

-Even some deeply religious people surrender to the allure of adultery,  
knowing full well that *malkhut shamayim* prohibits it.

Disparities such as these lead us to pray that,  
just as laws of nature currently reign *al kol ha'olam kulo*,  
what universal moral laws there be  
may one day reign *bakol*  
in the hearts of  
*kol asher n'shamah b'apo* -- including our own,  
as is so subtly and yet clearly articulated  
in the text of *M'lokh*  
which employs, in the end, not the preposition “*al*” that we expect to hear,  
but rather the preposition “*ba*,” “*bakol*.”

אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ,  
מְלוֹךְ עַל כָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוּ בִּכְבוֹדָךְ,  
וְהַנְּשֹׂא עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ בִּיקָרָךְ,  
וְהוֹפֵעַ בַּהֲדָר גָּאוֹן עֲנֵךְ,  
עַל כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֵל אֲרֻצֶּיךָ,  
וַיַּדַּע כָּל פֶּעוּל כִּי אַתָּה פֹּעֵלָתוֹ,  
וַיִּבֶן כָּל יִצּוֹר כִּי אַתָּה יִצְרָתוֹ,  
וַיֹּאמֶר כָּל אִשָּׁר נִשְׁמָה בְּאָפוֹ,  
ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מְלֶכֶךְ, וּמַלְכוּתוֹ  
בְּכָל מְשָׁלָה

Portraits of God as *Melekh*,  
prayers for the fulfillment of God's *malkhut*;  
are central to the liturgy for Rosh Hashannah.  
In *Unetane tokef* we pray: *uvo t'nashe malkhutekha, vihon b'hesed kisekha*.  
In another High Holiday *piyyut* we sing: *v'yitnu lekha keter melukha*.  
On Rosh Hashannah, *M'lokh* is at the center of every *Kedushat Hayom*.

Yes, God as *Melekh* is central to the liturgy of the New Year,  
and yet  
**daily** we acknowledge God as *Melekh*  
in every *brakhah* of *Nisim b'khol yom*,  
every time we sing *Mi khamokha*,  
in every *Kaddish* and every *Aleinu*.  
We mention *Melekh* in every psalm of *Kabbalat Shabbat*, save one.

In fact, every *brakhah* must mention *malkhut shamayim*, insists Rav Yochanan in the Gemarah.<sup>70</sup>  
And, in the *Mishneh Torah*, the Rambam affirms that position.<sup>71</sup>  
Thus we recite: *Barukh atah Hashem, Eloheinu, Melekh HaOlam borei p'ri hagafen*.

I don't know about you,  
but, I, for one, confess, that  
there are times  
I recite these *brakhot* or others  
*Barukh atah Hashem, Eloheinu, Melekh HaOlam hamotzi lehem min ha'aretz.*  
*Barukh atah Hashem, Eloheinu, Melekh HaOlam shehakol n'hiyeh bidvaro.*  
unmindful of the words *Melekh HaOlam*.  
I confess there are days  
I go through life  
so busy or distracted  
that I am unmindful  
of the glory that fills the world.

And there are days when humans  
feel great pressure to follow urges  
that contravene commitments we accepted with 'Ol Malkhut Shamayim.

Because there are days like those,  
**expressions of grandeur,  
of majesty  
that serve a necessary role in our liturgy  
not only on Rosh Hashannah  
but every day of the year.  
We call God "Melekh"  
throughout our daily prayers  
to help us be mindful of HaMelekh  
throughout our daily  
lives.**

As an editor of a *mahzor*, would I call God "Melekh?"  
Yes.  
How 'bout you?

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<sup>70</sup> Brachot 60a

<sup>71</sup> "V'khol brakhah she'ein bah hazkarat haShem uMalkhut, enah brakhah, ela im kein haytah s'mu<sub>h</sub> lahaverta. Every *brakhah* which does not contain [mention of] God's name and God's Sovereignty is not a *brakhah* unless it follows a *brakhah* that does." Blessings 1:5

*Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig has been teaching at HUC-JIR since 1985. Though not a musician herself, she has audited a dozen courses taught by Cantors Faith Steinsnyder, Jacob Mendelson, Israel Goldstein z"l, Azi Schwartz and Dr. Gordon Dale, among others. Along with Hazzan Henry Rosenblum, Wenig leads cantorial students in an exploration of the ways in which diverse musical settings interpret High Holiday prayers. One of her favorite tasks is helping fourth-year students prepare the liturgy and iyyunim for their High Holiday practica.*



זָמְרוּ אֱלֹהִים זָמְרוּ זָמְרוּ לְמֶלְכֵנוּ זָמְרוּ:

כִּי מֶלֶךְ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ אֱלֹהִים זָמְרוּ מִשְׁכִּיל:

*Sing, O sing to God; sing, O sing to our Sovereign;*

*For God is Ruler over all the earth; sing a hymn.*

Psalm 47:7-8



## NEGINAH L'MA'ASEH

In the years since the Society for Jewish Folk Music (flourishing between 1908 – 1918) first put Jewish art music on the map, many modern composers have borrowed motives from *nusah* and/or biblical cantillation (as well as folk melodies) to inform their music. Because Jewish composers are the most likely to be familiar enough with these materials to incorporate them into their music, Maurice Ravel's (1875-1937) setting of "*Deux melodies Hebraiques*" (two Hebrew melodies), as well as several Yiddish folk songs, raised suspicion that he might have some Jewish background (he was listed as such in a Nazi compilation) but, much like Israeli composer, Yehezkel Braun (1922-2014), who also set songs from a variety of cultures, Ravel was simply interested in the world of music. In this instance, he was also responding to a commission from French soprano Alvina Alvi.

It is unknown whether Alvi suggested the melodies Ravel chose, or whether Ravel found them on his own. The second of the pair, "*L'Enigma Eternelle*" (the Eternal Question) sets a Yiddish folk song which combines elements of the *Ahavah Rabbah* mode and the *Lernsteiger* (learning mode). The opening song, "*Kaddisch*" sets a variation of the *Kaddish* preceding *Musaf* on the High Holidays, in the traditional Aramaic. (Their 1915 publication in Paris also included alternate texts in French). We offer Ravel's setting, not to suggest that it should be used in the synagogue, but as an addition to the repertoire of Jewish concert music that colleagues might choose to include in any number of programs – with pride that our *nusah* has provided the world with such a beautiful piece of music.

We are grateful to our colleagues, Azi Schwartz, for his moving performance, and to Joseph Ness, for the delicate orchestration, commissioned by Azi's Park Avenue Synagogue in New York. You can watch the video here: [https://youtu.be/Ufnyu\\_KvTRI?si=4dASkTeh5A5jCljg](https://youtu.be/Ufnyu_KvTRI?si=4dASkTeh5A5jCljg)

# I. Kaddisch

MAURICE RAVEL

**CHANT** *Lent* *p*

Yithgad - dal - - - - - wey - ith - kad -  
 Que ta gloi - - - - - re, ô Roi - des

**PIANO** *Lent* *p*

- dash - - - - - sche - mēh - - - - - rab - ba - - - - - be -  
 rois, - - - - - soit e - - - - - xal - tée, - - - - - ô

- 'ol - - - - - mâ - - - - - di - ve - râ - 'khi - re' ou - thé -  
 toi - - - - - qui dois - re - nou - ve - ler le Mon - - - - - de

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D. & F. 9268

Paris, 4, Place de la Madeleine.

vey - am li'kh mal' - khou - té be -  
 et res - su - ci - ter les tré - pas - sés Ton

- hay yé'khôn, ou - ve - zo - me'khôu ou - ve'hay -  
 rè gne, A - do - na - ï, soit procla -

- yé de'khol beth yis - ra - èl ba - 'a -  
 - mé par nous, fils d'Is - ra - èl, au - jour -

ga - lâ - ou - viz - man - qa riw - we - im -  
 d'hui, - de - main, - à ja - mais. - Di - sons

rou. A men. yith ba -  
 tous: A men. Qu'il soit ai -

ra'kh. Wey - isch - ta ba'h wey -  
 mé, qu'il soit che - ri, qu'il

ith pa.êr weyithro - mam wey.ith - nas - sé wey.ith - had -  
soit lou.é glo.ri-fi - é ton nom ra - di - eux. Qu'il soit bé -

dar wey.ith - 'al - lé - wey - ith - hal -  
ni, sanc-ti - fi - é; qu'il soit a - do -

lal sche - méh de.qoud - schâ be - ri'kh  
ré, ton nom qui pla - - - ne sur les

hou, le-'è - là u - le-'è - là min kol bir-'kha-tha we-schi - ra -  
 cieux, sur nos lou - an - ges, sur nos hym-nes, sur tou - tes nos bé - né - dic - ti -

- tha toudche ha - tha we-ne-'ha-ma - thâ - da - a -  
 - ons Que le ciel - - - - - clément nous ac - cor - de la vie

- mi rân - ah! - - - - - be - 'ol - ma  
 cal - - me, la paix, - - - - - le bon - - - - - heur.

ah! ah! ah! ah!

ah! ah! ah! ah!

*p cresc.*

ah! we im rou

ah! Di sonstous:

*ff dim.*

A - - - men.

A - - - men.

*pp*

## REVIEWS

### ***A Life in Music: Ben Zion Shenker and Hasidic Song in America*** **by Gordon Dale**

*Reviewed by Marsha Bryan Edelman*

**B**en Zion Shenker (1925-2016) was the acknowledged “musical secretary” to the Modzitzer Rebbe (Rabbi Shaul Yedidya Elazar Taub), leader of his adopted home in the Hasidic community. In addition to notating the traditional melodies of the sect, he expanded its repertoire with his own compositions, including settings of *Eishet Hayil* and *Mizmor L'David* (Ps. 23) that have traveled well beyond the Hasidic world. Shenker’s pivotal role in bridging the European heritage and contributing his own music helped to shape Hasidic music culture in the United States. It is this work, and the biographical elements that made it possible, that are the subject of Gordon Dale’s fascinating monograph, published by the Jewish Music Research Centre of The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and available via download at <https://jewish-music.huji.ac.il/en/node/24900>

Divided into ten chapters of approximately equal length, Dale describes Shenker’s family background and the early years in which he developed his abundant musical skills; his appointment as “Musical Secretary” to the Modzitzer Rebbe; his activity as a composer of *nigunim*; his emerging adulthood and the building of his family; his forays into the recording studio (a transformative moment in the introduction of Hasidic music to the broader world); the style and structure of his compositions (with a preface briefly describing his “secular” employment in the diamond industry); Shenker’s activity leading paraliturgical events within the Hasidic community; his return to the recording studio after a hiatus of many years; the medical challenges that plagued him in his final years as his musical legacy was reaching its peak; and final reflections on Shenker’s musical life.

This, however, is no mere biography of an interesting figure. In several informative introductory sections, Dale explains the scope and nature of the ethnomusicological perspective he has adopted for his subject, focusing on Shenker’s key role in shaping Hasidic music in America. In this context, his section on “The *Nigun*” is especially valuable. In it, Dale explains both the musical parameters of the genre and its metaphysical role in Hasidic philosophy.

Dale’s section on “Approach and Methods” is also revealing. He notes the interplay of musical and religious elements with Shenker’s life and music, and emphasizes the importance of contextualizing “the shifting contours of the Jewish community” (p.21) in which Shenker lived and contributed.

In addition to recounting the “facts and personalities” that impacted Shenker’s life, Dale offers his own “Reflections” following each chapter. These sections summarize the foregoing

material, but also overtly emphasize their significance in Shenker's life and work. Especially valuable are his musings on the intertwining of tradition and modernity, as Shenker's religious upbringing confronts the challenges of the modern era with its technological advances and evolving standards of performance and practice.

In some respects, it is difficult to identify the target audience for this book. There are passages that simply recount the history of Ben Zion Shenker. Given the importance of his musical activity, though, in addition to the musical illustrations included throughout the book (especially in chapters 3, 4, 6 and 8) there are also lengthy sections that go into detail about the structure and technical aspects of Shenker's tunes. Readers with an interest in Shenker's life and his contributions to the Hasidic soundscape will get a great deal out of this biography, but those without musical backgrounds will be confounded by these passages.

Some of the other details of Dale's publication are also frustrating. He is inconsistent in identifying some of the important figures he mentions, assuming, perhaps, that some of them (Yossele Rosenblatt, Shlomo Carlebach and the Ba'al Shem Tov) need no introductions; at the same time, other figures (including such well-known individuals as Moshe Koussevitsky, Andy Statman, Richard Tucker and Menachem Mendel Schneerson) are not only introduced in the text, but included in an Appendix of Biographical Information. Even when sufficiently identified in the text, some individuals merit birth and death dates, while others do not.

Even more egregiously, Dale is wildly inconsistent about translating foreign terms and titles. He goes to great lengths to explain a word like "*Sukkah*" (which gets a four-line footnote, including the complete text of the biblical injunction that enjoins Jews to build and dwell in them) or a location (a lengthy note describing conflicting dates for the Modzitzer Rebbe's sojourns in a variety of Eastern European towns) but does not bother to identify or translate many others. There are even several instances of phrases that appear in the text in Hebrew letters without even transliteration.

Notwithstanding these idiosyncrasies, Dale has produced a valuable text. Shenker's work in the Hasidic community played a unique and significant role in documenting and transmitting the musical legacy of the past, while his own contributions – as a composer and recording artist – facilitated the evolution of the form. Shenker was also an important conduit for transmitting the art of Hasidic song beyond the confines of his community. Dale's monograph (which was designed to accompany the publication of a complete collection of Shenker's original melodies) serves well to place Shenker at the intersection of history, religious philosophy and music.

## Scrutonizing the Synagogue: A Review of *The Death and Life of Nusah* by Charles Heller<sup>1</sup>

By Matt Austerklein

The author Hussein Aboubakr Mansour recently penned a contemporary sequel to the *Divine Comedy* in which he depicts Dante confronting the lord of nihilism, Friedrich Nietzsche. After witnessing a ghoulish parade of postmodern thinkers, the devastated Dante spies a pitiful man, weeping. Nietzsche sneers:

“That one? They call him Scruton. He is the final man, the last advocate of chains—the tender of embers. He warms himself by corpses. He is nostalgia’s priest, like you, living in tombs—too weak to dance, too weak to build. Pity him not; his flame is rot.” Nietzsche leans closer. “His flame offers neither heat nor thaw, for it is kindled by memory and regret alone—not by will, nor by the living flame of creation. His is the delicate glow of decay, the fading twilight of nostalgia. Do not pity him, poet. His soul is the most sterile of all, unable to create anew. He remains on this frozen lake because he still believes in a lie—the oldest lie of all: that the butterfly alone can build a bridge beyond this abyss to his lost somewhere.”

Mansour’s antagonist here scorns the figure of the late British philosopher, Sir Roger Scruton (1944-2020), a revered public conservative and advocate for Western culture. While Mansour is presumably sympathetic to the subject of his caricature, he uses Nietzsche’s demonic accusations to point out the weaknesses he perceives in Scruton’s writing: a worship of frozen cultural forms and, perhaps, an impotent program of action to realize his great dreams in the face of a lost culture.

To begin this review of Charles Heller’s *The Death and Life of Nusah* with a modern critique of Roger Scruton is to furnish the former with great praise. Heller, like Scruton, is a leading defender of tradition — both of Western culture and of the Ashkenazic synagogue. He has fought on the front lines of the Jewish worship wars for five decades, serving as a cantor, music director, accompanist, composer, and educator, advocating for tasteful Jewish music and traditional cantorial style.

Heller has also sharply wielded the pen upon the battlefield of ideas, contributing frequently to the *Journal of Synagogue Music* and authoring two previous books: *What to Listen for in Jewish Music* (2006) and *Shul Going: 2500 Years of Impressions and Reflections on Visits to the Synagogue* (2019). These early volumes reflect Heller’s keen understanding of the structure of Ashkenazic synagogue music, as well as his broad knowledge of historical sources which give texture to those received traditions. His latest book, *The Death and Life of Nusah*:

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<sup>1</sup> This review originally appeared as the October 20, 2025 entry in Matt’s Substack post, “Beyond the Music.” We are grateful for his permission to reprint it here.

*Conservation and Innovation in the Transmission of Synagogue Chant* (European Cantors Association, 2025), displays both aspects of his erudition, dynamically exploring the beautiful inner workings of *nusah* while describing the factors leading to its healthy transmission and, in our own era, to its decline.

The book opens with a short introduction describing its overall strategy: (1) to chart the modern challenges to the millenium-old edifice of traditional Ashkenazic chant (*nusah*); (2) to describe the form and function of *nusah* and how it evolves, both properly and improperly; and (3) to advocate for traditional *nusah* and the benefits of the synagogue service. Heller makes this case from a Scrutonian vantage point, paralleling the decay of Ashkenazic music and Western classical music due to secularization, decolonization, and musical “dumbing down.”

Heller defines *nusah* as “the traditional application of synagogue melodies to the liturgy.” Composed of an amalgam of Ashkenazic prayer modes, motifs, and melodies, the purpose of *nusah* is “to unite the community through a shared awareness of time and place.” This goal is shared, the author posits, with musical systems from other cultures, including ancient Greek modes, Indian *ragas*, Arabic *maqam*, and Catholic plainchant. The creation of such repertoires allows a population to achieve unity of song and purpose across a wide geography.

Heller and Scruton are both distinctive by their use of broad disciplines to explicate the beautiful and the good. Thus, the most ingenious conceit of Heller’s lies in its use of Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection.<sup>2</sup> “Selection is the key to our understanding of how *nusah* is transmitted,” writes Heller, taking the reader through evolutionary theory and its application to the realm of synagogue music. Dispensing with nineteenth-century theories of folk music as expressing the mystical qualities of a national soul, Heller instead embraces a scientific approach, using concepts like preadaptation, the founder effect, and mimetics to explain musical change. His argument thereby transcends overused abstractions like “heritage” and “tradition,” opting instead to view *nusah* as a living organism gradually evolving over time.

*If nusah is a living organism then change is inevitable. The art is to manage that change in a controlled, acceptable way.* —Charles Heller

Heller first attributes the endangering of the *nusah* species to lay prayer leaders who, in an increasingly secularized society, have less exposure to the richness and complexity of the Ashkenazic musical tradition. In the Orthodox world, Heller indicts the custom of appointing mourners or untrained laypeople to lead the service, many of whom introduce “inappropriate, non-traditional material” with little connection to the *nusah*. “As the old witticism goes: *Losing a parent makes you a mourner, not a hazzan.*” Outside of Orthodoxy, Heller points the typical finger at Jewish summer camps, where the compositions of folk artists like Shlomo Carlebach and Debbie Friedman have supplanted the traditional cultural and musical hierarchies atop which the educated cantor once stood. What remains of this endangered *nusah* is its most basic, lay-

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<sup>2</sup> Read more about Darwin’s theory here:

[https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Darwin?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Darwin?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email)

accessible form, stripped of the precious depth and dynamism it acquired over a thousand years of evolution.

Yet Heller also passes judgement on the supposed caretakers of this living tradition — the cantors. He firstly conceives of the natural evolution of *nusah* as comprising a perennial tension between masses and elites — i.e. between congregants and cantors. The latter serve as *nusah*'s fundamental conservators and gatekeepers, charged with integrating acceptable innovations and rejecting unacceptable ones. Still, Heller indicts the contemporary cantorate for largely abdicating this role, exchanging conservatism for innovation and “weaken[ing] the impact of a tradition that is the product of generations of selection.” While acknowledging and exploring the human need for novelty, Heller advocates for its actualization through *nusah* artistry and tasteful adaptation — not through pandering to the lowest common musical denominator.

Among the strongest aspects of Heller's writing are his descriptions of the techniques utilized by faithful cantors who fulfill their dual roles as watchful preservationists and mindful innovators. Both the second chapter (“*Nusah*”) and third chapter (“Case Study: Shabbat *Musaf*”) notate and explicate such forms of *hazzanut* and successful congregational repertoire, as well as contrast effective and ineffective melodic choices. The third chapter is particularly focused on this endeavor, walking the reader through cantorial tactics for segments of the *Musaf* service (more of Heller's comprehensive knowledge would have been most welcome here to give a complete portrait of that service). These sections, in the aggregate, should be read by cantors and prayer leaders with much profit for their sacred craft.

Heller's polemical tone rears its head when evaluating “acceptable tunes” for the synagogue. His criteria for such tunes are twofold: (1) they should match or complement the *nusah*; and (2) they should not have cheap or inappropriate associations. Thus, the Lubavitcher use of “*La Marseillaise*” for *Ne'ilah* and Leonard Cohen's “Who By Fire” for *B'rosh hashanah yikatevun* are deemed acceptable for the High Holy Days due to their rich subtexts, whereas the romantic ballad “Greensleeves” is firmly rejected. Heller's ambiguous cases are particularly telling: *Mimkom'kha* to the Neapolitan song “*Torna a Surriento*” and the *Kedushah* set to melodies from *Carmen* are both assessed as “maybe” appropriate, yet the latter is invalidated if one knows the story behind the opera. Football team fight songs for *Adon Olam* are also approved due to their longstanding use among passionate sports fans on Sabbath gamedays.

These and other curious in-between cases reveal the deeper loyalties of the author. Fealty to local sports and classical music are often the marks of the cultured Jew in the West. Solomon Schechter, the legendary Anglo-Jewish scholar who inspired the Conservative/Masorti movement, famously advocated sports knowledge to future American rabbis, advising the young Louis Finkelstein:<sup>3</sup> “Unless you can play baseball, you'll never get to be a rabbi in America.” Such loyalties display a sense of Western-Jewish *doikayt* — a civic patriotism for one's place, be it in the concert hall or the stadium. This has been the case wherever Jews have

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<sup>3</sup> Ed. note: Rabbi Dr. Louis Finkelstein (1895-1991) was a Talmud scholar, an expert in Jewish Law, and a leader at The Jewish Theological Seminary, serving as its Chancellor from 1940-1972.

prospered, whether in sixteenth-century Poland, seventeenth-century Amsterdam, nineteenth-century Germany, or twentieth-century America and Britain.

Yet it is hard to avoid the fact that both of these arenas — the opera house and the football pitch — represent lifestyles which often live in tension with Jewish observance. The use of operatic and sports tunes thus derives not from religious sentiment, but from an attempt to resolve this perennial tension through remissive admixture. Such an act of cultural peacemaking keeps these contrafacts in the author's good graces, whereas others listed in the book are damned among a litany of other "*nusah* crimes."

Though easy, popular melodies are often described in our era as the key to "participation" in the synagogue, Heller rejects this familiar trope outright. He instead points to *nusah* itself as the truly unifying aspect of the service, as it facilitates common responses, feelings, and a sense of shared time and place. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's own remarks from his famous lecture, "The Vocation of the Cantor"<sup>4</sup> (quoted by Heller), echo this cantorial ideal: "To pray without *nusah* is to forfeit the active participation of the community. People may not be able to pray; they are all able to chant. And chant leads to prayer."

A short fourth chapter, "Oral versus Written Transmission," provides an informative portrait of how orality created the building blocks of the musical language of *nusah* long before it was systematized or written down. Heller's observations are well-supported, as elsewhere, by appeals to other theorists, especially the writings of English folk song collector Cecil Sharp (1859-1924). This section furthers the book's success in illuminating the often-opaque structure and evolution of *nusah* by putting it in dialogue with studies of world music cultures, past and present.

The book's final substantial chapter, "The Role of the Synagogue in Community Cohesion," attempts to set the *raison d'être* of *nusah* on firm ground. Heller here touts the social and psychological benefits of the synagogue service, in addition to its spiritual goods like expressing wonder and gratitude and achieving a sense of well-being. The community building aspect, however, stands out as the primary purpose of the whole exercise. Heller writes:

"Communal prayer has a social function that is made more vivid through ritual. The use of standardized words and tunes creates a ritualized performance. And the purpose of ritual is to create cohesion in the community, leading to trust and cooperation between its members."

Yet newer generations of worshipers "remain believers but not belongers," retaining their own personal belief system without the need for traditional community. Surveying what appears to be a wasteland of modern experiments, Heller bemoans new enterprises such as BASE Hillel, Jewish farming with Earth-based spirituality, and contemporary *havurot*, all of which "offer communal ritual without the trappings of the synagogue service." Such innovations are

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<sup>4</sup> Available at: <https://www.hebrewcollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Heschel-The-Vocation-of-the-Cantor.pdf>

characterized as departing entirely from the shared cultural covenant which created and sustained Ashkenazic *nusah* for centuries. This abandonment is accelerated, Heller adds, by the strategies of synagogue leaders who “have interpreted the loss of members as indicating a need to change the service and abandon traditional forms of worship.” Tragically, “people attending services have not been exposed to these traditions and are encouraged to reject them without actually knowing what they are.”

While appearing to have answered his final rhetorical question and chapter title, “The Death of *Nusah*?,” Heller attempts to leave the door open to the future. After all, “the feeling of wanting to be with others in a synagogue has not gone away.” Spurred on by tragedies like the Tree of Life Synagogue, COVID-19, and October 7th, the author has witnessed many return to the synagogue, longing for that sense of belonging which anchors Heller’s idealized community of *nusah*. As he concludes:

“When all is said and done, the basic human need for people to come together remains, and the synagogue waits for them. For those who come to the synagogue, the rich heritage of traditional *nusah* will be there to enrich the experience.”

Reflecting on the book’s conclusion, I cannot help but return to Mansour’s Dante-inspired vision of Roger Scruton. For in reflecting on Scruton’s conservatism, Mansour reveals that which it lacked: the loving and commanding presence of God. Scruton was a sort of Christian, but he based his arguments in broader, humanistic values that he hoped could be appreciated by the atheist and the agnostic alike. His appeals were to natural conservative impulses, but not inherently to religious ones.

This is an admirable, if twentieth-century solution to the problem of meaning. For when free people could no longer be united around shared *ethics*, the hope became that they could become united through shared *aesthetics*. These would allow us to surpass our differences and sing together, ultimately pointing towards reconciliation and brotherhood. It is this faith in the peace-making ability of national aesthetics that has driven the modern West for the last century, and which is constantly implicit in its cultural sector. From the synagogue to the nation-state, we dared to hope that resurrecting a beautiful musical past created by the honored dead could unite our communities —and countries— in an uncertain future.

Yet the story told by Heller’s book demonstrates the ever-chilling embers of this promised fire. While secularization and the modern attack on high culture are partly to blame for the musical atrophy of the service, the simple fact is that twenty-first century Jews can acquire a sense of belonging in other ways, for good and for ill. *Nusah*-based music can ennoble and enrich one’s life, but without an existential grounding in religious commitment, the whole edifice becomes its own stadium and concert hall, even when enhanced by choral harmony, cantorial artistry, or communal singing. To invite someone into the *nusah* tradition in the twenty-first century requires an appeal to something higher.

Judaism does have language for the religious impulse behind Heller’s Scrutonian conservatism. It is called *minhag* — a series of accepted religious customs organized around a

Jewish ethnic subgroup, be it Italian, Yemenite, Romaniote, or any variety of Sephardic or Ashkenazic Jewry. Though Heller attempts to use the term “*nusah*” to encompass these religiously-mediated and culturally canonized folkways, *minhag* is the correct word. It is the cantorial term “*nusah*,” in fact, which is a borrowing from the language of *minhag*, originally referring to the version of the prayers which is statutory for each Jewish ethnic group. Because of its long continuity and conservative medieval rulings, Ashkenazic *minhag* has always been given great weight, sometimes even over that of law itself. The classic call to heritage among Ashkenazic Jews has thus always been a religious one, proclaiming *minhag avoteinu b’yadeinu*: the custom of our ancestors is in our hands.

Counter to Heller’s heroic ideal, cantors have not always been loyal protectors of Ashkenazic *minhag*. Between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, cantors were just as likely to profane old customs and innovate new ones as they were to preserve traditional melodies. Although a canonical body of Ashkenazic melodies is evident as early as the fifteenth century and again by the late-sixteenth century, the increasing independence of the Ashkenazic cantorate from its rabbinate in early modernity caused a wellspring of innovation and the expansion of Ashkenazic custom.<sup>5</sup> This occurred much to the chagrin of rabbis, who were the original preservers of traditional melody. The ideal of cantorial *nusah* conservatorship came during the nineteenth century, during which modern cantors like Salomon Sulzer emerged to “purify” the *nusah* tradition from years of ornamental accretions and to preserve its “authentic” Jewish national spirit. It is when cantors assumed the mantle of professionalism that they “switched sides,” leaving populism behind for the elite musical stewardship familiar from Heller’s book.

Whether or not Charles Heller’s anatomy of premodern change in the Ashkenazic *nusah* tradition is correct, his diagnoses of the form, function, and problems of the tradition today are spot on. The question remains — is there more to this millenium-old inheritance than aesthetic beauty and social cohesion?

While on an academic fellowship at Oxford several years ago, I saw an advertisement for one of the children’s choirs attached to a prominent college chapel. This ensemble sang angelic Anglican hymns each week with immeasurable beauty. Describing their experience, the young choral scholars and their directors lauded the choir as a great social outlet which gave the children a good music education. But incredibly, the advert did not once mention the person to Whom the beautiful music was all ultimately addressed. Like Heller’s own estimation of the synagogue service, the ancillary benefits of the synagogue service were far more natural to advertise than the child’s introduction to faith, prayer, and Scripture by being part of a beautiful, musical religious service.

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<sup>5</sup> See Matthew Austerklein, “Rossi in Moravia: The Rise of Cantorial Professionalism in Bohemian Lands and Poland-Lithuania in the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of Synagogue Music*, September 2023 (5784) 48/1: 26-53.

This is the tragedy shared by both *hazzanut* and much of Western music: forgetting its intended recipient, and the worship of frozen aesthetics rather than using their stirring warmth to point us to the existential fires of faith.

I deeply share Charles Heller's love of *nusah* and belief in its inherent goodness. We share affinity for the same high cultures — traditional *hazzanut* and classical music — particularly as exemplified by the United Kingdom and its downstream cultural daughters in the Commonwealth. And although I spent many years as a young gadfly championing neo-Hasidic synagogue repertoire (which I still use regularly), now in early-middle age I find myself ever more drawn to the old cantorial ways. *Hazzanut* holds the promise of discovering God within musical complexity, expressing the soul of the liturgical words through its Ashkenazic liturgical jazz. In our internet age, it is not difficult to find the prophets and repertoires of Jewish music's new geist. But the depths of *nusah* and *hazzanut* now represent an *or ganuz* — a hidden light requiring time and effort to master, challenging both one's voice and one's spirit to go deeper into the words of prayer.

The invitation of *nusah* is not only to community, but to a radical attention to liturgy and to one's relationship with God. As Yosef Lindell concluded in his recent article<sup>6</sup> on the evolution of the cantor's role:

"We are commanded to glorify and beautify G-d through the performance of *mitzvot* (see Rashi, *Sukkah* 29b). This ideal should apply to *tefillah* no less than to a gleaming Torah crown or a flawless *etrog*."

*The Death and Life of Nusah* is a wonderful and provocative guide to this rich tradition. But for this tradition to survive in any respectable form, we must return to the existential and religious sentiments which first animated its creation and which course vividly through its prayerful words.

*Nusah*, like a nation, cannot endure simply as a covenant of aesthetics. Even the most beautiful of such bonds eventually grows brittle and cold, unable to defend against the hot passions of a new, unbridled age.

Instead of pondering its death, advocates of *nusah* must choose life, grounding the practice of *nusah* in the Eternal. Rejecting death, we must boldly proclaim: *Lo amut, ki ehyeh va'asaper ma'asei yah* — "I shall not die, but I shall live and tell of the deeds of the Lord."

*The Death and Life of Nusah* by Charles Heller is available for purchase from the European Cantors Association.

- To purchase a download please email [nusah.book@cantors.eu](mailto:nusah.book@cantors.eu)
- To purchase a printed copy email [geraldine@cantors.eu](mailto:geraldine@cantors.eu).

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<sup>6</sup> See "Between Nusach and Niggun: The Chazzan's Evolving Role" in *Jewish Action Magazine*, Fall 2025 at [https://jewishaction.com/synagogue-prayer/between-nusach-and-niggun-the-chazzans-evolving-role/?utm\\_source=substack&utm\\_medium=email](https://jewishaction.com/synagogue-prayer/between-nusach-and-niggun-the-chazzans-evolving-role/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email)

## MAIL BOX

### *Minhag sh'tut -- Skipping B'rikh Sh'mei on Yom Tov*

**A**mong the pleasures of retirement are the opportunities to compare and contrast the way things are done in different congregations in the context of the decades of my prior experience. My library of *siddurim* has always allowed me to indulge in such comparisons, but now I tend to reflect on them more often. Spending my younger years and early cantorial positions in Orthodox *shuls* had already primed me with a sensitivity to liturgical variation; spending some of my *Shabbatot* now in such *shuls* again has sharpened that sensitivity.

The service for taking out the Torah on a Shabbat or major holiday has four core sections:

- 1) *Ein kamokha + Vayehi binso'a*
- 2) *B'rikh sh'mei*
- 3) *Hashem Hashem* + meditations
- 4) *Sh'ma + Gadlu.*

The placement of the first and fourth have been fixed historically and are uniform in basically all *siddurim*. But the sequencing of *B'rikh sh'mei* and *Hashem Hashem* has always been arbitrary and variable. The Kabbalistic prayer *B'rikh sh'mei* was not adopted in all communities at the same time, or even at all. (Some European synagogues had large wall posters of this excerpt from the *Zohar* to aid those whose *siddur* did not have it.) What was not variable, however, was the fact of reciting both prayers on a *Yom Tov* that fell on a weekday. A *Yom Tov* that fell on a Shabbat was marked by the omission of *Hashem Hashem*. *Minhagim* varied in the case of a High Holiday that fell on a Shabbat.

But something strange happened in Conservative congregations with the publication in 1939 of the *High Holiday Prayer Book* edited by Morris Silverman. That *mahzor* simply omitted *B'rikh sh'mei* altogether. When Silverman published his *Sabbath & Festival Prayer Book* in 1946 he re-instituted *B'rikh sh'mei* in a smaller typeface with the misleading heading, "On Sabbath." *Hashem Hashem* followed this prayer, with the instruction "When a Festival occurs on a weekday, add:" That sequence of instructions created the implication that the "On Sabbath" of *B'rikh sh'mei* meant "On a Sabbath that is not a Festival." The straightforward way of handling this situation -- as found in most *siddurim* -- would have been to leave *B'rikh sh'mei* without a heading and to state that *Hashem Hashem* is omitted on a Sabbath. This would not have created any false implications about a prayer that is recited on every weekday as well as every Shabbat and on all High Holidays.

The 1985 edition of *Siddur Sim Shalom* tried to rectify the situation by printing *Hashem Hashem* right after *Vayehi binso'a* with the instruction "On Shabbat omit the following and continue with *B'rikh sh'mei*." When *B'rikh sh'mei* follows on the next page with the heading "On

Shabbat" the intent is clearly "On Shabbat continue:" rather than "On Shabbat only." But instead of leaving well enough alone, the 1998 edition of *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals* chose to revert to Silverman's sequence of *B'rikh sh'mei* first (with the misleading heading "On Shabbat") followed by *Hashem Hashem* with the heading "On *Yom Tov* (excluding Shabbat)," again inviting the misconception that *B'rikh sh'mei* is for Shabbat only.

Extra credit is due to the *Koren Siddur*, which seems to be cognizant of this entire mess. Right after *Vayehi binso'a* it states "On Shabbat continue on page 503," i.e. with *B'rikh sh'mei*. Then comes the instruction for *Hashem Hashem*: "On *Yom Tov* (except when it falls on Shabbat) and on *Hoshana Rabbah*, say the following verses three times." Finally we have the unambiguous heading for *B'rikh sh'mei*: "On Shabbat, *Yom Tov*, and on *Hoshana Rabbah*."

Sometimes it becomes necessary to restate the obvious.

**Sam Weiss**

Paramus, NJ

## Festival *Nusah* on *Pesah* in Modern *Davening* Communities

by David F. Tilman

I retired in 2011 after more than four decades as a full-time *hazzan*. Since then, my family and I have been “on the road” for the complete eight-day Passover festival, participating with enthusiastic Orthodox and Conservative *daveners* in passionate and intense *minyanim*. From the start of our “world tour,” I have been both surprised and thrilled at how authentic and traditional the services were. In virtually every experience in both Modern Orthodox and Conservative *minyanim*, the prayer leaders followed the traditional musical patterns that my colleagues and I had been taught at JTS, and the congregants joined in enthusiastic *davening* and communal singing based on learned lifetime experiences.

I was a student at the Cantors Institute from September 1968 to June 1972. The most practical and consequential area of study in the curriculum was *Nusah hat’filah*, the musical materials for chanting the prayers of the complete Jewish year. I was blessed to have learned this material from Cantor Max Wohlberg, *z”l*, one of the founding faculty members of the Cantors Institute. He is regarded by all as a great scholar of Jewish Ashkenazic musical traditions. He was also a great educator, presenting this vast area of study in a highly organized and systematic fashion. He was humorous, charming, and very demanding of all of us.

The first-year curriculum covered music for Shabbat. The second year was devoted to the High Holiday liturgy, beginning with *Selihot*, and concluding with *Ne’ilah* at the end of Yom Kippur. In year three, we studied *nusah* for *Shalosh Regalim*, the Three Festivals. In the fourth year, we learned the *nusha’ot* for life cycle events: *britim*, weddings, funerals, unveilings; and other less frequent occasions in the Jewish calendar year, including *Yom Kippur Katan*, *Tisha B’Av*, minor fast days, and contemporary Jewish celebrations, such as Israel Independence Day, *Yom HaShoah* and *Yom HaZikaron*.

We Cantors Institute students were, for the most part, familiar with Shabbat and High Holiday modes and melodies. However, the material for year three, *Nusah* for the Three Festivals, contained motifs and compositions that were totally new to us.

I spent six years as *Hazzan-in-residence* at the *Pesah* retreat at Camp Ramah Darom in Clayton, Georgia. I was privileged to lead *davening* for the assembled guests, most of whom came from Conservative congregations. I found the participants to be extremely knowledgeable and comfortable with traditional *Pesah davening* melodies. The community *minhag* included *Duhanan*. I was expected to lead the full priestly benediction, including an ad hoc ensemble of *Kohanim* and, once, a *Bat Kohen*.

For three seasons, my family attended *Pesah* retreats run by Vered Holidays, an Israeli tour operator. Yehuda Vered and his family chartered five-star resorts in central Europe along the Mediterranean coast, *kashered* the kitchens, and brought in the kitchen staff from Israel. Over 700 guests from Israel, London, Paris, Brussels, Montreal, Toronto, and the USA attended, virtually all of whom were Modern Orthodox. From the first *Ma’ariv* service, it was clear that these Jews knew how to *daven*, and were totally at home with the traditional Festival musical

phrases in the service, including the Festival mode for the Evening Service, the signature “*Ha’Eil B’ta’atzumot Uzehkha*” in *Shaharit*, and the Festival mode for the repetition of both the *Shaharit* and *Musaf Amidot*. Everyone knew how to sing *Kah Eili* before *Musaf*, and the responses to the special *Hatzi Kaddish* introducing *Tefilat Tal* (Dew) before *Musaf* of the first day.

In *Hallel*, the prayer leaders inserted rhythmic and melodic tunes that were well known to the congregants, regardless of where they lived. I remember hearing a tune for *Mah Ashiv* by Mordechai Ben David, an American Orthodox songwriter, that everyone sang with familiarity and abundant energy. The congregants and the leaders were very careful not to repeat any words in their singing, according to Orthodox standards.

I was asked to lead the *davening* for the eighth day of *Pesah*. The experience was very fulfilling, even though I was reprimanded because I omitted the “long *Av Harahamim*” after the *Haftarah*!

We spent seven *Pesah* holidays at retreats offered by *Adamah*, formerly called *Hazon*, the national agency that teaches Jewish values about environmental concerns, three at Isabella Freedman Center in northern Connecticut, and four at Pearlstone Retreat Center in Reistertown, Maryland. At both locations, a professional *hazzan* was included as a staff member to lead the traditional *davening* for the Modern Orthodox guests.

At Pearlstone, the *hazzan* was especially skilled at adapting contemporary *Hasidic* and Israeli melodies to verses in the *Kedushah* of *Shaharit* and *Musaf*, and to the *Hallel* prayers. His only criterion for selecting the melodies was the rhythmic fit, with no regard to the original musical source and meaning of the original text of the melody. As soon as the very knowledgeable congregants heard the beginnings of the melodic material, they embraced the new liturgical text and sang it “*forte*.”

I learned during this decade of *Pesah* holiday observances that the traditional Ashkenazic *nuscha’ot* for *Shalosh Regalim* are alive and well in contemporary Modern Orthodox and Conservative practice! Our obligation as *hazzanim* in the Conservative Movement is to make all our Shabbat, High Holiday and Festival services rich in traditional musical content, lively, and passionate, utilizing both traditional *nusah* and contemporary Jewish musical sources derived from relevant and meaningful sources.

**David F. Tilman**

Scotch Plains, NJ

## IN MEMORIAM

### Baruch Blum (1937-2026)

*Remembered by the Temple Beth Israel community of Port Washington, NY*

Temple Beth Israel was profoundly saddened to mark the passing of Cantor Emeritus Baruch Blum on February 2, 2026. Cantor Blum served the Temple Beth Israel community with distinction for 41 years, where he touched the lives of countless families throughout Port Washington and beyond.

Cantor Blum was born in Israel and discovered his love of music while studying with Israel's renowned music teacher and composer, Daniel Sambursky. After serving in the Israel Defense Forces Army, Navy, and Merchant Marines, he emigrated with his family to Vancouver, Canada, where he continued his studies in voice, music, and dance.

In 1967, Cantor Blum arrived in New York on a scholarship from the American Ballet Theatre. Within a year, he was performing on Broadway and in national theater companies, including productions of *George M*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *Hello, Dolly!* He also became the leading young man of the Yiddish theater, working alongside such legends as Jacob Jacobs, Ben Bonus, Mina Bern, Leo Fuchs, and Pesach Burstein.

During this time, Cantor Blum met his beloved wife, Gerri, through their common passions for music, dance, and acting. Sadly, Gerri Blum passed away in 2022.

Through a singing engagement with famed choir director Oscar Julius, Cantor Blum was introduced to the world of *hazzanut*. He auditioned for Cantor Zvee Aroni and was accepted to the Manhattan School for Cantors, from which he graduated in 1975.

Cantor Blum served two congregations during his distinguished career: Congregation B'nai Israel of Staten Island for two years, and Temple Beth Israel of Port Washington beginning in 1977, where he remained until his retirement in June 2018.

During his more than four decades at Temple Beth Israel, Cantor Blum prepared over 600 students for their *b'nai mitzvah*, led High Holiday services, and provided music for the synagogue's religious school and preschool. In the spirit of "from generation to generation,"



Cantor Blum officiated at baby naming ceremonies, *b'nai mitzvah* and weddings; years later, he officiated the same sacred rituals for their children.

Reflecting on his long tenure at Temple Beth Israel, Cantor Blum once said, "I enjoy working with the kids. It is very meaningful for me to work with each and every *bar* or *bat mitzvah*, teaching them how to chant from the Torah and how to lead services."

His family observed that "he came to life when he was in *shul* and when he was tutoring," a testament to the deep joy and fulfillment he found in serving his community and teaching the next generation.

"It's hard to put into words what Cantor Blum's presence here has meant," said Temple Beth Israel's Senior Rabbi Michael Mishkin. "He was so humble and kind, cared deeply about people, and touched people with his great loving-kindness. For forty plus years, Cantor Blum had a huge impact on the Temple Beth Israel community and the larger Port Washington community."

In 2010, after 33 years of inspired service, Temple Beth Israel honored Cantor and Gerri Blum, by dedicating a restored Holocaust Torah in their honor. The Torah, originally handwritten in Hungary, was hidden during the Holocaust and saved from the Nazis. The TBI community's generous participation in this holy project made a powerful statement: they treasured the opportunity to restore a Holocaust Torah and delighted in honoring their beloved Cantor Baruch and Gerri.

In 2018, Cantor Blum was among 20 cantors awarded an honorary doctorate by the Jewish Theological Seminary for having served the Jewish community with distinction. The ceremony recognized his myriad contributions to Jewish life and celebrated his role as a spiritual leader.

Upon his retirement, in June 2018, Cantor Blum was honored with the title of Cantor Emeritus and continued to serve as a beloved teacher, preparing religious school students for their *b'nai mitzvah*, and working with adults.

On the Shabbat of Thanksgiving weekend, 2020, at the age of 83, Cantor Blum celebrated his own *Bar Mitzvah Sheni* when he chanted from the Torah and Haftarah.

Cantor Blum is survived by children Benni (Eric Hyer), Hyam, Selli (Eddie Grupper), and Avi (Amy Seiler), and his grandchildren Julian, Philip, and Gali.

Cantor Blum once reflected, "Often, a cantor only spends a few years in a place, and then they think the grass is greener elsewhere and leave. I never considered that because I knew I was in a great place with wonderful people. They welcomed me and gave me great support through the years, and I loved them."

*Yehi zikhro barukh* – may his memory be an eternal blessing.

## Cantor Nathan Chaitovsky (1926-2026)

*Remembered by Marsha Bryan Edelman with Yaakov Chaitovsky*

Some of my earliest memories are of attending services at Philadelphia's Temple Sinai. While Rabbi Sidney Greenberg was renowned for the power of his sermons (he was likely among the only rabbis ever criticized for an occasional *d'var torah* that was perceived to be too short!) it is the voice of Cantor Nathan Chaitovsky that resonates for me. That voice, and the melodies he chanted, defined the sound of the synagogue, and to a large extent, remain the standard by which I have judged all of my subsequent exposures to Jewish liturgical music.



Nathan Chaitovsky started his sacred musical career at the age of five in the choir of the famed Kovno *Chorshul*; later he became its alto soloist and was selected to accompany the great Moshe Koussevitsky on a concert tour of Lithuania. He was hailed as a child prodigy and performed both sacred and secular music. Music was an integral part of his family's life. His father was a *hazzan* and *badkhen* as well as a renowned Torah scholar and rabbi known for his fiery oratory. Cantor Chaitovsky's siblings - three brothers and a sister - were all gifted vocalists and highly musical. One brother, Binyamin, was a well-known singer in Eastern Europe, and another brother, Kalman, served as a *hazzan* in Springfield, Massachusetts for many years.

Cantor Chaitovsky came to America with his mother and three of his four siblings in 1940, arriving in Springfield, MA several years after his father, who was serving there as a rabbi and *shohefet*. He soon became a student at the renown Chaim Berlin Yeshivah in Brooklyn, NY. He would often sing at *yeshivah* events and was regarded as the "personal *hazzan*" of the *Rosh Yeshivah*, Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner.

In addition to officiating as a guest *hazzan* at various synagogues known for hosting stellar *hazzanim*, Cantor Chaitovsky was the *hazzan* at the Young Israel of Newark, NJ from 1944-46 and then at Beth Sholom Congregation in Washington, DC from 1947-50. He was hired (by my grandfather!) for the pulpit of Temple Sinai in Philadelphia in 1951 and remained its *hazzan* for 50 years.

Cantor Chaitovsky was blessed with an unusually beautiful tenor voice that was ideally suited to classical *hazzanut*. His range, his perfectly executed coloratura and his remarkable falsetto, combined with his expertise in *nusah* and *peirush hamilot*, total grasp of the meaning of the words of prayer, made every Friday night, every Shabbat and *Yom Tov* morning and every High Holy Day service a memorable and spiritually uplifting experience.

Cantor Chaitovsky had an all-encompassing knowledge of the classic Eastern and Western European cantorial tradition and repertoire. Standing at the *amud*, he would thrill worshippers with “warhorse” recitatives as well as masterful improvisations that would beautifully interpret and transmit the meaning of the words being chanted. He composed many cantorial works as well as engaging congregational melodies that were the staple of every Temple Sinai service. His Children’s Choir, which accompanied Shabbat and *Yom Tov* services, was the primary vehicle through which those memorable melodies were introduced. The Choir, as it was known, played a significant role in educating generations of Temple Sinai children to become knowledgeable Jews. As a young teen, I was among the first members of that ensemble, and many of my fellow singers grew up to become Jewish educators, Jewish music professionals, and members of the clergy.

Cantor Chaitovsky and his beloved wife and life partner, Beverly, were together for nearly 76 years. Together, they raised two sons – Myron (Esther) (who continued the “family business” in his youth as a member of *Ruach*, one of the first Jewish American “rock bands”) and Rabbi Yaakov; the family later expanded to include two grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Nathan Chaitovsky’s memory lives on as a blessing to his family, and to the generations of congregants who were inspired by his devotion to the music and traditions of our people.



רָנְנוּ צְדִיקִים בַּה'

לִישָׁרִים נְאֻהָ תְהִלָּה:

*Sing forth, O you righteous, to GOD;  
it is fitting that the upright offer praise*

Psalm 33:1



## Irving Grossman (1947-2026)

*Remembered by Stephen Texon*

If there ever was a modern sweet singer of Israel it was Cantor Irving Grossman. He was a cherished colleague with whom I performed multiple times in cantorial concerts and in secular concerts, most notably in “Two Cantors and a Diva” with alternatively Joni Shira and Elise Rachel. His rendition of *Phantom of the Opera* was outstanding, wearing his mask and cape as the Phantom.

Irv was a gentle soul with a very powerful tenor voice, and our Yiddish Medley arrangement was always a knockout at every show.

Irv persevered after the passing of his first wife and found great love and comfort in his dear wife Myrle and his spiritual home of Beth Tikvah, where I joined him in several Cantors Assembly concerts.



Sing now with the angels, dear Irv. You will be sorely missed by your children, your grandchildren and all those whose lives you touched at Beth Tikvah and beyond, but you are now in God's care. May your memory be a blessing for all of us. Rest in peace, my dear friend.



שִׁירוּ לֵאלֹהִים זַמְרוּ שְׁמוֹ

סֵלוּ לְרֹכֵב בְּעָרְבוֹת

בִּיהַ שְׁמוֹ וְעִלְזוּ לְפָנָיו:

*Sing to God, chant hymns to the Divine name;*

*Extol the One who rides the clouds,*

*The One whose name is Yah. Exult in God's presence*

Psalm 68:5



## Mitchell Kowitz (1957-2025)

### *Remembered by Lonny Goldsmith*

Cantor Joshua Diamond had learned from an early age what it meant to be a member of the clergy from his father, longtime Temple of Aaron (St. Paul, MN) Cantor Mitchell Kowitz. And even though Cantor Kowitz didn't want his son to follow in his footsteps, it seemed inevitable.

"I felt something inside of me [on the *bimah*] that I didn't feel when I was doing opera or musical theater or [plays] in college. And I saw the profound impact that I could make on people's lives," Diamond said.

"Mitchell Kowitz transformed and changed lives," Diamond said. "With every single person that he met, and it didn't matter who you were, whatever your situation was, you spoke to him, and you thought you were the most important person in the world."



Cantor Kowitz left Temple of Aaron in 2012 after spending 23 years at the St. Paul congregation. He had worked in an adjunct capacity at Sharei Chesed in Minnetonka and was contracted to lead High Holiday services at Temple El Emeth in Youngstown, Ohio, for the last several years.

One of the more memorable parts of his time at Temple of Aaron was creating a Jewish folk/rock band with many of the teens who were part of the synagogue community – most of whom he tutored for their *b'nai mitzvah*. The band, *Ruach Achshav*, started as a Jewish youth group or camp-like singing.

"He bumped it up a notch with his own music, arrangement, and stylings," said Mike Bell, who was part of the band. "In the early to mid-90s, I credit it for keeping me engaged and tied to the synagogue, even in my first couple years of college at the University of Minnesota."

Bell and friends were already in a band together, and he said *Ruach Achshav* grew up around that. But many of the members reunited with Kowitz in 2015.

"We sat around the table and just played with a couple guitars and sang all the old songs that we did back in the 90s," said Bell, who added that Kowitz's adoption of music on the *bimah* comes back to the earlier days of the synagogue, and Rabbi Bernard Raskas, who passed away in 2010.

"Mitch inherited a legacy that Rabbi Raskas started with a creative second day service where he sort of pushed the limits," Bell said. "Mitch came in, and he brought guitar to the mix, and was playing guitar on the *bimah* during Shabbat and holidays. It just sort of evolved from there."

"So much of who I am today is because of who he was when I was growing up."

Music with the teens of Temple of Aaron was an extension of Kowitz in his pre-cantorial life. He met his first wife – Joshua's mother – Jenna Zark at an audition in New York City. The two of them were in two different bands together, *Flamewood* and *Seizures*, and later wrote a musical called *Solidarity*, before Kowitz became a cantor.

“He really took songwriting and music very seriously. And plays, too,” said Zark, who became an accomplished author and playwright. “I admired how seriously he took it, and that helped me give myself permission to do the same. He was always very encouraging; he told me to keep knocking on those doors. And I never forgot that.

“That perseverance he had made him a great role model. I think he was that for a lot of people. I don’t think anyone would dispute that [Mitch] was a larger-than-life person.”

Kowitz’s widow, Denise, heard him sing long before she met him. He was part of a cantor’s concert at Temple Israel, where Denise was in the audience.

“I didn’t know who he was, but I heard that voice, and I was on the edge of my chair,” she recalled. and I said to my friend, ‘Who is this guy?’ And she said, ‘He’s Cantor Kowitz from Temple of Aaron. You know, he’s Broadway.’ I was just absolutely captivated by his voice.”

Denise Kowitz said that they often ran into people whose children the cantor tutored for their *b’nai mitzvah*.

“They would say ‘My kids were so much better because of you,’” she said. “It was unbelievable what he did, and he was selfless. He was so giving and loving. I’ve never met anyone like that in my life.”

Mark Divine, the president of Temple of Aaron, was among the many kids who learned from Cantor Kowitz.

“He just had a way of getting everyone,” Divine said. “He had this way of getting every kid to feel that they were going to be the star of their *bar* or *bat mitzvah* and push them to do more.

“He made it fun for people. Synagogues now, it’s a challenge sometimes for kids to get interested in doing what it takes to have a really great *bar* or *bat mitzvah*, but he was all about ‘the kid is the star.’ He really shined through in that.”

Diamond pointed out that his father’s Hebrew name, Moshe David, is after two legendary, radically different characters in Jewish history.

“David was strong. He was confident. He was a warrior. Moshe was humble and was an ultimate servant of God,” Diamond said. “My father had attributes of both of those people. But what I love about both of those figures is they’re also flawed, and yet they’re revered. And that’s my father in a nutshell.”

Cantor Kowitz is survived by his children, Cantor Joshua (Jamie) Diamond, Michael Kowitz, and Shelly Kowitz; grandchildren, Nora and Rose Diamond; his sister, Patricia Orban, and his wife Denise Kowitz. His memory remains a blessing to them and to the many people whose lives he touched.

## Hazzan Martin Leubitz (1948-2025)

*Remembered by Adriana Gasiewski, Akron Jewish News*

**M**artin Leubitz is remembered as a *hazzan* who always ensured congregants of Congregation Beth Am in Cleveland Heights and Temple Beth El in Rochester, NY felt welcomed, creating the lasting impression of being a “relationship builder.”



Leubitz was born on Dec. 20, 1948, in Akron, OH and grew up on the city’s west side. From a young age, Leubitz was surrounded by music as Barry Leubitz, his brother, told the *Akron Jewish News* that their parents, Nathan and Blanche Leubitz, always played music. “It was the radio,” he said. “There was the record player. We always had music on whether it would be Jewish music, secular music, instrumental, vocal, whatever it was. He and my Aunt Helen would always dance together.”

Because his parents were lifelong congregants of Beth El Congregation in Akron, Leubitz and his siblings spent about five days a week at the temple, attending Sunday school, evening meetings and choir rehearsals, Leubitz said.

Hazzan Martin Leubitz served Beth Am Congregation in Cleveland Heights for 22 years.

With his passion for music and dedication to his faith, Leubitz always wanted to become a *hazzan*, looking up to *hazzanim* Abraham Denburg (of Baltimore) and Jerome Kopmar (of Dayton, OH). He was further motivated to become a *hazzan* because of his appreciation for the *Neilah* service. Three months before his *bar mitzvah*, his father died at the end of Yom Kippur in 1961, Barry Leubitz said.

After graduating from Firestone High School in 1966 and attending The University of Akron for a year, he started at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he was ordained in 1972. In 1974, he was hired by Congregation Beth Am to serve as the *hazzan*, working alongside Rabbi Michael Hecht. Sheila Hecht, Rabbi Hecht’s widow, reported that Hazzan Leubitz and Rabbi Hecht worked well together. Together, the two organized a number of programs. On holidays like *Simḥat Torah*, Leubitz and Hecht would switch roles at the end of the second half of the service. “The cantor gave the sermon, and the rabbi did the singing,” Hecht, said. “They reversed it, they would sing, they livened up the whole service. They would sing it with ... popular hits.”

She recalled them singing the closing hymn, “*Adon Olam*,” to the tune of “*Turkey in the Straw*,” which has become a tradition at another local synagogue.

Leubitz spent 22 years at Beth Am, which Stephen Stein, former executive director of the Cantors Assembly, asserted is a sign of his strength and skills.

“You don’t last that many years in a congregation, unless you’re doing something right,” Stein said. “And, as I said, he had a long tenure at Beth Am and then he had a long tenure at Beth El in Rochester.”

In 1995, Leubitz moved to Rochester and continued to serve as a cantor at Beth El until he retired in 2018.

Ben Leubitz of Hollywood, Fla., Martin Leubitz' son, commented that his father was often seen smiling while working with children during his time at both temples. "Things can get a little bit monotonous, and I think whenever I saw him with kids, he was always smiling," he said. "He was always trying to make the kids laugh."

Ben Leubitz described his father as being a "relationship builder" because once people met him, he never left their lives. "You don't meet him and forget about him," he said. "You meet him and you share a laugh, you share a drink, you share a memory, and he's a part of your life forever."

From his warm personality, Barry Leubitz said his brother created a congregation that felt like a second family. "People went there to hear him (during the) High Holidays," he said. "They could tell when he led that he was leading from the heart, not just because it was his job – he really felt it."

Outside of his role as a cantor, Leubitz is remembered as a "big, big Cleveland Browns fan," until he moved to Rochester and became a Buffalo Bills fan, bonding with his son over his appreciation for the sport - as a spectator - and player. "He used to join us, and the (football) games were 12 kids versus 12 kids sometimes, and he would play," Ben Leubitz said. "Of course, you couldn't tackle him because he was Dad, but he was two-hand touch. He really enjoyed playing football and watching football."

Barry Leubitz will remember his brother for his hobbies, including woodworking, enjoying online flight simulators and being a radio enthusiast, he said. Stein said he learned from Barry Leubitz that Hazzan Leubitz had suffered from Parkinson's disease for close to a decade but battled it bravely. "He was really a terrific person, a terrific hazzan and I'm going to miss him a great deal," he said.

Leubitz will be remembered by his devoted family as a beloved husband, father and grandfather. His many congregants will remember him as well, for his beautiful singing, and for the joy he added to their lives.

## Leon Simon Lissek (1936 – 2026)

*Remembered by Sharon Nathanson*

Anyone who heard Hazzan Leon Lissek sing was immediately affected by his voice. His voice was tremendous; a powerhouse instrument somehow balanced with the most beautiful warmth one could imagine, embracing each soul in the room, no microphone necessary. And anyone who knew Hazzan Lissek personally knew that the big, beautiful, warm voice we heard was a reflection of his big, beautiful, warm heart. I grew up hearing that voice. I grew up inspired by that voice. And I grew up inspired by his heart. I saw how he cared deeply about the people of his community, and I took note as he celebrated and encouraged the talents of the people around him. He was my childhood hazzan, my teacher, and my mentor.

His passing is a tremendous loss to his communities and our hearts go out to his wife, Michal, his children Devorah (Joshua Barash), Shmuel (Zohara Cohen) and Shira, as well as his six grandchildren.



Leon Lissek was born in Paris in 1936, with World War II just around the corner. When he was five years old, his father, who happened to be a cantor, was deported and murdered in Auschwitz, and Leon and his two little brothers spent the war in hiding. From 1941-43 they were in Litele, France; 1943 – Lyon; and from 1945 to 1946 various French suburbs. Then from 1946 to 1948 they were in Fontainebleau. An International March of the Living article about the Hidden Children offers this account from Hazzan Lissek: “My first memories are of being kindergarten age in Le Marais . . . I remember the beautiful music in the Synagogue de la rue Pavée. My mother was a seamstress and sewed clothes for the nuns at a nearby nunnery, and so when the war broke out, they took us in, around early 1941. I was never baptized, but I had to learn all the hymns and I loved the music.”

After the war, his mother reclaimed Leon and his brothers and they immigrated to the US, where he continued the education he had missed out on during the war. He eventually graduated from the University of Buffalo and then went on to the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, his love of music and Jewish life leading him to the cantorate. His first pulpit was in Philadelphia, where he met and then in 1968, married his wife, Michal.

In 1969 they moved to St. Louis, Missouri, and Leon Lissek became the beloved and honored hazzan of Congregation B’nai Amoona for 30 years.

As his family shared in his obituary in the *St. Louis Jewish Light*, “The congregation relished Cantor Lissek’s love of singing and depth of knowledge of the Jewish musical tradition. Known nationally as a cantor’s cantor, he drew people to hear his striking tenor voice. Over decades, he taught hundreds of *b’nai mitzvah* students, hosted a weekly radio show on Jewish music, directed children’s and adult choirs, and presented annual and holiday concerts, performing with dozens of artists he brought to

the Midwest. In addition, he recorded several albums in the US and Israel and performed both with the Israel Philharmonic and as a soloist on Israel's *Kol Israel* radio."

In his office, in which I now have the honor of sitting, there is a little room. Students often ask me what that room is for, and I'm proud to tell them that that's the special room in which Hazzan Lissek recorded his weekly radio show, *The Cantor's Voice*. I love seeing how impressed they look. I also have in this office several of his original recordings on vinyl, including *Michal*, a loving tribute to his wife, recorded with the Israel Symphony Orchestra; *The Roar of the Lion*, an album of favorites in Hebrew and Yiddish sung with an impressive B'nai Amoona choir; and the *K'dusha Symphony*, a work of original music by Abraham Kaplan commissioned in 1981 to celebrate the congregation's centennial. The album is signed by Roberta Peters, who came in to be the soprano to Hazzan Lissek's tenor. It is a beautiful pairing to listen to. We are fortunate that many of his recordings are now online due to another of his students from B'nai Amoona, soon-to-be-Hazzan Eitan Kantor, lovingly uploading several of them.

In 2015, Hazzan Lissek received the David Putterman Award for Lifetime Achievement at the 68th annual Cantors Assembly (CA) convention. According to the Cantor's Assembly, "As B'nai Amoona's Hazzan Emeritus, Lissek was chosen for his 30 years of outstanding service to his congregation and community, his tireless efforts directed toward the future of the cantorate through fundraising for student scholarships at the Cantorial School of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and his commitment to musical and pulpit artistry of the highest level. Lissek lives in Teaneck, New Jersey, where he is active in teaching young cantors and on the placement committee of the CA."

I am honored to have been one of those young cantors that Hazzan Lissek mentored. When I became a *Bat Mitzvah*, women were just beginning to be part of the cantorate in the Conservative movement, and Hazzan Lissek was quick to tell me and to tell my parents, on more than one occasion, that I should become a cantor. He was always looking for talent, always looking for ways to lift up others, to celebrate the people around him. As talented as he was, he could have been content with being at the center of everything, but instead he was passionate about bringing others into the circle of ritual leadership and Jewish life through music. I can only hope to continue that legacy.

We remember a man who was not just a huge musical talent, but a multi-faceted human being. As *The Jewish Light* printed, "Throughout his life, he was a devoted husband, a loving father, and a light-hearted grandfather who always knew how to make his grandchildren laugh. Seemingly gruff on the surface, he quickly won everyone over with his true nature as a gentle giant with a loving heart."

What an amazing thing, with all of the upheaval of his young life, that he maintained this loving heart. As his daughter, Cantor Shira Lissek, said about him during his life, "My dad is very positive . . . He's a humanitarian to the fullest and respects everyone, no matter their faith. He doesn't put one person on a higher level than another because of religion or nationality. Everyone's equal to him because he was dependent on the kindness of strangers and he treats strangers with utter kindness."

May we learn from his example and may Hazzan Lissek's memory be a blessing.

## Linda Semi (1947-2026)

*Remembered by Lea Loeb*

**L**inda Rosenbloom Semi was a gifted musician, cantor and anchor of her San Francisco congregation whose impact stretched across generations of Bay Area Jews.



A longtime cantor at Congregation B’nai Emunah in San Francisco, Linda died on Jan. 21 at the age of 78 in Knoxville, Tennessee. Semi served at B’nai Emunah for more than a quarter century, from 1991 until her retirement in 2017. She became a cantor emerita and served in that role at Congregation Am Tikvah, which was created when B’nai Emunah merged with nearby Congregation Beth Israel Judea.

Even after retiring, Semi regularly returned to lead services, officiate at lifecycle events and tutor *b’nai mitzvah* students, remaining a constant presence in a community she helped hold together through decades of change. “She just was the common thread that really tied the community together,” said longtime B’nai Emunah and Am Tikvah member and former B’nai Emunah president Sharon Bleviss.

Semi was widely regarded as the unifying presence during some of the congregation’s most uncertain years. When Rabbi Ted Alexander retired in 2005, B’nai Emunah was without a rabbi for an extended period. Semi assumed full pastoral responsibility during that time, leading all services, providing counseling, officiating lifecycle events and ensuring that communal life continued uninterrupted.

In 2008, the congregation welcomed Rabbi Mark Melamut, who served B’nai Emunah for a decade. “He was straight out of seminary, so she really helped show him the ropes and together, they worked as a team to create the next chapter,” said Bleviss.

Cantor Semi’s presence was especially felt in moments of crisis. Congregants regularly requested that she continue to officiate funerals because of her deep personal relationships and the emotional power of her voice.

Linda’s musical and spiritual grounding began early. She was born on Feb. 28, 1947, and grew up the youngest of three children in Olean, New York, where Judaism was the center of daily life in her childhood home. Her daughter, Jane Olman, spoke about her mother’s upbringing at her burial service in Modi’in, Israel, on Jan. 25, and relayed anecdotes from Semi’s brother, Oscar Rosenbloom, about their childhood.

“We had a musical family with an unusual knowledge of traditional Jewish liturgical music at home,” Olman relayed from Rosenbloom’s recollections. “The highlight of our year was the observance of Passover. We waited impatiently to get to the highlight of things, the

singing of the many songs at the end. We knew them all and blended our voices into what any guests found to be something superb.”

Music filled Semi’s childhood household, as relatives formed an all-family choir that sang major portions of the High Holiday liturgy in their synagogue. The choir was led by Semi’s uncle and together the family performed European cantorial music in the tradition developed in Odessa, where Italian operatic influence shaped a distinctive cantorial style. That blend of classical music and Jewish prayer would later define Semi’s own approach on the *bimah*.

Linda earned a degree in music education from Syracuse University and completed her cantorial training at the University of Judaism (now part of the American Jewish University in Los Angeles). She was inducted into the Cantors Assembly in 1997.

One of Semi’s most enduring musical legacies at B’nai Emunah was her teaching of Louis Lewandowski’s setting of Psalm 150, “*Halleluyah*.” Semi patiently taught the many layered vocal parts to the choir, transforming the piece into a congregational tradition. Bleviss recalled returning home after Rosh Hashanah one year to find her 3-year-old son marching down the block with a broom held like a Torah, chanting “*Halleluyah*” like Semi’s choir.

Semi’s liturgical standards were high and she was known as a “stickler for good *nusah*.” Students preparing for *b’nai mitzvah* learned quickly that she expected precision, preparation and respect for the sacredness of the work. At the same time, she was deeply encouraging. One congregant who trained with her for an adult *bat mitzvah* recalled struggling to hit the proper notes and match Semi’s vocal range. On the day of the service, Semi congratulated her excitedly, saying “You got it all!” - words that remain, decades later, a treasured seal of approval.

“Her patience and willingness to teach gave me so much more confidence to sing and read Torah and even encouraged me to lead prayers and take a more active role in prayer services at my high school,” said Audrey Ingerman, a senior at Jewish Community High School of the Bay who was tutored by Semi for her *bat mitzvah*.

Elena Ingerman, Audrey’s mother, described Semi as “a source of immense Jewish knowledge, strength and musicality,” noting she had a “beautiful voice and sharp sense of humor” that was apparent when teaching and leading services.

Linda had what her daughters described as a “zany” sense of humor, recalling how she loved corny jokes, gag gifts, costume parties, traveling and dancing late into the night. She was also a devoted sports fan, fiercely loyal to the Buffalo Bills, New York Yankees and Golden State Warriors. She was known for cheering loudly and texting friends during games with commentary as spirited as her singing.

In her final days, Semi was surrounded by love and music. In an announcement to the congregation noting her passing, her daughters reported that they played selections from *Fiddler on the Roof*, family Passover melodies and her favorite classic songs at her bedside. They also wrote, “We even managed to share a shot of slivovitz. Okay, Mom’s was more like a little taste, but she definitely knew what it was and she gave us a large grin as we toasted.”

Semi’s family said she had long dreamed of spending the final chapter of her life in Israel. Though her health prevented her from making *aliyah*, her family fulfilled that wish after

her death and ensured she was buried in Israel. She is survived by her daughters, Margaret Toon and Jane Olman, and their spouses; her brother, Oscar Rosenbloom; and eight grandchildren.

Her family, and the community she served for so many years, will continue to treasure her memory.



חֲסֵד-וּמִשְׁפָּט אֲשִׁירָה לָךְ ה' אֱמוּנָה:

*I will sing of faithfulness and justice;*

*I will chant a hymn to You, O Eternal One*

Psalm 101:1



## Pharrel S. Wener (1949-2026)

*Remembered by his Family and Friends*

Pharrel Wener was born and raised in Cape Town, South Africa, attending South Africa College School. He graduated from the University of Cape Town, receiving a master's degree in finance with a Bcom CA Honors. In Cape Town, Pharrel was a partner in Rozensweig & Wener, CA and continued to work in business and finance in the United States.



Pharrel officiated the High Holy Day services as a Cantor for 57 consecutive years starting at age 19 in the wilderness of South Africa until he retired as sole officiant at Brooksby Village in Peabody, MA.

In addition to being a classically trained opera singer, Pharrel was a scholar, steeped in the traditional melodies of the liturgy which he chanted with power and passion. He was committed to teaching and sharing his vast knowledge with students of all ages.

Pharrel was somewhat of an impresario, producing and performing in numerous concerts and stage events in both South Africa and the U.S. During the 100th Anniversary Celebration of Temple Ahavat Achim, Pharrel produced a moving and memorable Kabbalat Shabbat service. Many in the area remembered him as Buffalo Bill in *Annie Get Your Gun* at the Annisquam Village Players (AVH). From early childhood he was obsessed with music of all genres, including Rock, Country, Broadway, Classical and Opera. His encyclopedic command of performances and recordings was staggering and led to creating a business that preserved, recut and distributed CDs. As a result, new generations of music lovers had the opportunity to hear and appreciate famous, important even obscure out-of-print recordings.

Pharrel was the beloved husband of Jennifer Lee Levitz-Aronson; loving father of Paul and his wife Gina Wener and Brett and his wife Tanya Wener; and the dear grandfather of Sophia, Isabella, and Lia; dear brother-in-law to Sandy Levitz and husband Chet Lunner and Michael David Levitz; Jennifer's cousins Shmuel and Susan Ferency and Gershon Ferency; as well as numerous and fond Beck and Wener cousins worldwide.

*Yehi Zikhro Barukh*



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

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