



KOL HAMEVASER

THE JEWISH THOUGHT MAGAZINE OF THE YESHIVA UNIVERSITY STUDENT BODY

MUSIC & SPIRITUALITY

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ABOUT KOL HAMEVASER

Kol Hamevaser, the Jewish Thought magazine of the Yeshiva University student body, is dedicated to sparking discussion of Jewish issues on the Yeshiva University campus and beyond. The magazine hopes to facilitate the religious and intellectual growth of its readership and serves as a forum for students to express their views on a variety of issues that face the Jewish community. It also provides opportunities for young thinkers to engage Judaism intellectually and creatively, and to mature into confident leaders.

Kol Hamevaser is published monthly and its primary contributors are undergraduates, although it includes input from RIETS Roshei Yeshivah, YU professors, and outside figures. In addition to its print magazine, *Kol Hamevaser* also sponsors special events, speakers, discussion groups, conferences, and shabbatonim.

We encourage anyone interested in writing about or discussing Jewish issues to get involved in our community, and to participate in the magazine, the conversation, and our club's events. Find us online at kolhamevaser.com, or on Facebook or Twitter.

Editors' Thoughts

BY: ADAM FRIEDMANN

Music is a ubiquitous human experience. In the modern world especially, we are inundated with an endless flow of sounds ranging from the simplistic to the intricate, which elicit a full spectrum of emotional reactions. As Jews, we must ask ourselves how to react to the daily experience of music. This discussion must begin with a pragmatic question: What is the place of music in our spiritual lives? What religious function does it fulfill? The archetypal instance of music in the Torah is *shirat ha-yam*, the Song of the Sea.¹ The beauty of this song is familiar to us from our daily prayers. The context of this shirah is also well known. At the splitting of the sea, *Bnei Yisrael* witnessed miracles of unprecedented proportions.² They were exposed to the unobscured hand of God, who was acting openly in history to save His chosen people. And yet, Tanakh is replete with stories of great miracles which did not elicit shirah. We are led, therefore, to ask what other factor catalyzed the experience of *keriyat yam suf* and allowed for it to become the well-spring of song.

This missing element is identified by the *Mekhilta*:

Great is faith before the Almighty for in the merit of faith the holy spirit (*ruah ha-kodesh*) rested upon them (*Bnei Yisrael*) and they sang a song, as it is written "And they had faith in Hashem and in Moses His servant. After this did Moses and *Bnei Yisrael* sing."³

The position that the Song of the Sea was the result of *ruah ha-kodesh* is broadened by the *Mekhilta* into a standard for all shirah.⁴

Unlike the Western school of music which built an intellectual musical "language" around tonal, and later atonal, structures, or contemporary popular music which relies heavily on emotional expression, shirah is the result of neither intellectual, nor even emotional productivity. Rather it is the impression of a revelational experience. The spontaneous declaration of shirah "indicates the elevation of the soul to lofty heights from which it looks

out, having been crowned in the most clarified manifestation of its intellect."⁵ Shirah is a spiritual expression wherein the soul enunciates an experience of God. The song constitutes a permanent record of the encounter which generated it. The Song of the Sea, with its powerful description of God's sovereignty and its clear depiction of His presence in history is the primary example of this spiritual-musical expression.

This conception of music is highly idealistic. In everyday life we are not aroused by *ruah ha-kodesh*, and even if we were, this revelational model only accounts for the production of music. It does not address the consumption of music. How then are we to place our everyday encounter with music into a spiritual framework? To this end we may consider another characteristic of music. Not only does shirah emanate from *ruah ha-kodesh*, we find that the converse is also true. Exposure to music may lead one to the heightened spiritual state required for prophecy.⁶ Is this influential power in music reserved for prophets and prophecy? What kinds of music have the potential for such inspiration? When the Temple was destroyed our Sages banned the public performance of music.⁷ In the midst of a discussion about a different topic the Gemara wonders why the vast Torah knowledge of the infamous heretic Aher did not protect him from falling to heresy. In answer to this the Gemara offers that Aher was vulnerable because "Greek melodies never left his lips."⁸ At first glance we would assume a simple explanation of this response. An affinity for Greek music is indicative of the systemic influence of Greek culture on Aher's worldview. This resulted in the weakening and eventual undermining of the Torah's own influence.⁹ Rashi, however, takes a strikingly different approach.¹⁰ He posits that Aher's mistake was that he did not heed to the general ban on music. Implied by this comment is that had the Temple still stood there would have been nothing problematic about Aher's musical tastes. This conclusion runs

contrary to our sensibilities. How can it be explained?

We have already seen that shirah is the product of an acute divine encounter. Perhaps the aesthetic experience of listening to music can also engender a recognition of the Creator, albeit in a more limited sense. The existence of the *Beit ha-Mikdash* concretized God's presence in the world.¹¹ From within the context of a society which centered around the Temple service and which was legislated for by the Sanhedrin¹² the spiritually enlightening elements of any music could be appreciated and deployed in the service of God. By experiencing the sublime beauty of music and identifying this beauty with its Creator, the musical-aesthetic experience could be sanctified. Even those tunes which stemmed from societies as philosophically at odds with *yahadut* as Greece could be engaged without concern for undue external influence. The loss of the Temple destabilized this religious cultural context. Without it the values and ideologies of those who produced music, with which musical works are indelibly impressed, threatened to undermine and replace those of the Torah.¹³ In this tumultuous setting we may truly say that the "ear which hears music should be uprooted."¹⁴ Aher exposed himself to these influences and in the end their power was so hypnotic that even his Torah erudition was unable to combat them.

Today we avail ourselves of leniencies which permit listening to music despite Hazal's decree. Nevertheless it behooves us to tread carefully, avoiding the potential pitfalls of musical exposure, and instead harnessing the affective power of music and its strong aesthetic appeal as a platform for enhancing our relationship with God. This approach to music is a complex one. It requires careful thought as it is applied to daily life. In this issue of *Kol Hamevaser* we address some of the issues which arise as music is considered from halakhic and hashkafic perspective. The collective staff of *Kol Hamevaser* welcomes its readers to a new year. We look forward to much

intellectual and spiritual growth together in the months ahead.

1 See *Shemot Rabbah* to *Beshalah* 23:4 which indicates that *shirat ha-yam* was the first shirah.

2 *Mekhilta de-Rabi Yishmael*, *Beshalah* 6.

3 *Ibid*, with emendations from *Hagahot ve-Biurei ha-Gr"a* where applicable. All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

4 See *Birkhat ha-Netziv* to *Mekhilta de-Rabi Yishmael* *ibid*, s.v. *ve-shartah aleihem*.

5 Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak ha-Kohen Kook, *Ein Ayah* to *Berakhot* 35a, note 2.

6 See *Melachim* II 3:? cf *Pesachim* 66b, and *Shabbat* 30b.

7 See *Sotah* 48a and *Gittin* 7a. Admittedly, the Mishnah in *Sotah* there ties the ban of music to the disbanding of the Sanhedrin. Rambam, however, explicitly describes the ban as response to the Temple's destruction (*Mishneh Torah Hilchot Aveilut* 3:14).

8 *Hagigah* 15b

9 This interpretation is advanced by *Maharsha* to *Hagigah* 15b s.v. *Aher mai*. He criticizes Rashi's explanation on the grounds that it does not account for the specifically Greek nature of the music in question. We consider a potential defense of Rashi's view against this criticism presently.

10 *Hagigah* 15b s.v. *zemer yevani lo pasak mi-beito*.

11 See *Berakhot* 8a

12 Consider *Talmud Yerushalmi, Sotah* 9:12 for an example of the extent of the Sanhedrin's authority in cultural matters.

13 In the modern day the extent to which popular music shapes our conception of notions such as love, success, and even suffering, and the insidiousness with which this influence is achieved are uncanny.

14 *Sotah* 48a.

Kol HaMevaser wishes Mazel Tov to editor-in-chief Adam Friedmann on his engagement to Sara Epstein of Toronto, Canada.



The Magic of Zemirot

BY: SIMA GROSSMAN

A similar scene has played out in my life hundreds of times. The setting is sometimes my camp's dining room, a high school retreat, a seminary Shabbaton, or, more recently, Koch auditorium in Stern. The people are different, yet the roles that they play are similar. It is the middle of one of the three Shabbat meals. Most of the food is gone from the serving plates, and the rate at which forks are being shoved into their respective owner's mouths has dwindled. "We are going to sing *zemiros* now," shout the singing counselors over the din in the camp dining room. "Girls, let's sing some *zemiros*," says the teacher in charge of the high school retreat. "How about some *zemiros*?" shouts one table of girls at the seminary Shabbaton. "Zemirot time," the message is passed along Koch auditorium.

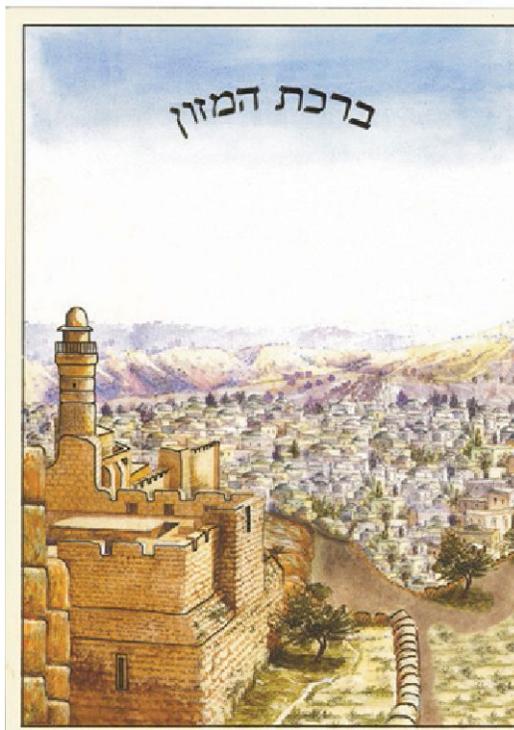
The familiar tune starts off softly. There are still whispers of conversation ringing throughout the room. Some people become self-appointed shushers. Soon the whole room is singing. Some sing loudly, others softly. Some sing in tune, others sing horrendously off tune. There is even some harmony mixed in. The quality of the singing may not be able to win any talent competitions, yet it is hard not to get caught up in it.

And as I look around the room, I start to notice some interesting things. The girl who I know would never be caught listening to Jewish music is singing with her eyes closed, pounding unconsciously on the table as she belts out the tune. The girl who is not the so called "mushy type," and who rolls her eyes at the "fluff" she proclaims her teachers teach, is putting her arm around the girl who sits next to her as she gets caught up in the melody. Even the shy girl whose voice is rarely heard is sitting with her finger pointing to each word in her *bentcher* as she softly sings along. Soon some of the more outgoing people are standing up and proudly doing hand motions as they sing. They try to get others to join them. If the atmosphere is particularly intense, soon the whole room will be on its feet, completely caught up in the *zemirot's* ancient words and tunes.

Yet it is not only when I am actively involved in the singing that I find myself lost in the words of *zemirot*. During my year in Israel I had the opportunity to visit many different neighborhoods and cities for Shabbat. Frequently my friends and I would take a Friday night walk after we finished our meal at our hosts. Some weeks I would find myself walking the narrow streets of Me'ah She'arim, while others I would be wandering around Ma'ale Adumim or the ancient city of Tsfat.

The roads may have been different, but there was always one thing that bonded all of these walks together—the Shabbat *zemirot*. As we passed next to the residents' houses, we would hear them singing the same *zemirot* our families sing back home. Sometimes the tunes would be unfamiliar, other times they were the exact tunes our fathers knew so well. Yet, whether or not we knew the tunes, we would often find ourselves caught up in the spirit of the singing. We would stand under the window for a few minutes, taking in the atmosphere and telling each other that we could feel the *kedushah* of Shabbat.

What is it about *zemirot* that enables these ancient words to elicit such a response from us? How has it come to be that Jews from all different walks of life can connect through the singing of *zemirot*? True, the melodies are beautiful and singing together with other people frequently produces a sense of comrade. However, to me, *zemirot* seem to have a power that goes beyond merely singing a good song with a bunch of other people. An analysis of the underpinnings behind the words of *zemirot* can help us understand the source of the power of *zemirot*.



In the *zemer* "Yedid Nefesh" we tell Hashem "Your love is sweeter than honey from the comb (*mi'nofet tsuf*), than any taste."¹ The words "*mi'nofet tsuf*" correlate to the words in *Tehilim* "The command of Hashem . . . [is] more desirable than

gold, than even fine gold in abundance, and sweeter than honey and drippings from cones (*nofet tsufim*)."² This *pasuk* in *Tehilim* uses the same words to describe the *mitsvot* as the verse in "Yedid Nefesh" uses to describe love of God. Interestingly, the kabbalists, many of whom were authors of *zemirot* themselves, viewed *mitsvot* as tools to be utilized in order to connect to God. Thus, the value of *mitsvot* is not in the actions themselves, but rather in the connection that is created between man and the Omnipotent through doing the *mitsvot*.

Perhaps it is the pure yearning for a relationship with Hashem expressed in the *zemirot* which makes them so unique.

Additionally, as Rabbi Alan Haber explains in a *shiur* on *Yedid Nefesh*³, the kabbalists also taught that there exists a higher level of connecting with God, and that is without the use of *mitsvot* as intermediaries. Rabbi Haber explains that this direct connection to God is what the author of "Yedid Nefesh" is hinting at in the words "*mi'nofet tzuf*."⁴

According to Rabbi Haber, "Yedid Nefesh" speaks about a close relationship between Hashem and us akin to the passionate intensity that exists between Hashem and the Jewish people as is expressed in *Shir Hashirim*⁵. However, while in *Shir Hashirim* Hashem is always referred to as *Bnei Yisrael's* lover, "Yedid Nefesh" uses multiple comparisons in describing the relationship between Hashem and His chosen nation. In the first sentence of this *zemer*, Hashem is called our "friend" and "father," while *Bnei Yisrael* is called Hashem's "servant," implying that Hashem is our master. These three descriptions run the gamut of possible relationships two beings can have with one another.⁶

On Friday night we sing about our desire to connect to Hashem. "Tsamah nafshi le'lokim" — "my soul thirsts for God"⁷, we say. This is a direct quote from a *pasuk* in *Tehilim*, which finishes off by saying, "When shall I come and see God's face?" God answers, "No one shall see me and live."⁸ Since we cannot connect physically to God, Ibn Ezra, the author of this *zemer*, tells us about how God taught us "decrees, which if one performs them, thereby he shall live."⁹ Rabbi Haber points out that through doing God's commandments, we can create a closer bond between God and us. And even if we stray from what God wants of us, we can always do *teshuvah*. This concept is discussed in the words of

this *zemer*, "Those who have gone astray, if they wished, could turn from their way."¹⁰

In "Mah Yedidut," we laude the sanctity of Shabbat. "Mah yedidut menuhatekh at Shabbat ha-malka" — "how beloved is your rest, Sabbath Queen."¹² The words "mah yedidut" are taken from *Tehilim* where we tell God, "mah yedidut mishkenotekha," "how beloved are your dwelling places."¹³ Rabbi Haber explains that "dwelling places" is a reference to the *Beit ha-Mikdash*.¹⁴ The *Beit ha-Mikdash* was the place where *Bnei Yisrael* went to form a connection with God through worshipping Him with *korbanot*. By comparing Shabbat to the *Beit ha-Mikdash*, we are saying that Shabbat and the *Beit ha-Mikdash* can be used to achieve the same goals; both can be utilized to cultivate a closer relationship with the Creator of the World.

Perhaps it is the pure yearning for a relationship with Hashem expressed in the *zemirot* which makes them so unique. It is well known that Shabbat is a time to disconnect from the busy world around us and reconnect to our spirituality. Although we do not always feel as if we have a close relationship with Hashem, deep inside us our *neshamah* yearns for that feeling of closeness, "As the deer longs for brooks of water, so my soul longs for you, O God"¹⁵. The *zemirot* were written as an expression of this desire. When we sing these words, we are able to bring out these feelings that are within us.

The last stanza of "Mah Yedidut" proclaims "me'ein Olam ha-Ba yom shabbat menuha" — "a foretaste of the World to Come is the Shabbat day of rest."¹⁶ The traditional explanation given to this phrase is that Shabbat is one sixtieth of *Olam ha-Ba*¹⁷. The Gemara describes *Olam ha-Ba* as "there is no eating and no drinking and no relations, only righteous ones sitting with crowns on their heads and taking pleasure from the radiance of the *shehina*."¹⁸ Although this statement is esoteric, it is clear that the main activity in the World to Come will be cultivating a connection to Hashem that is unlike any connection that can be created in this world. On Shabbat we get a tiny preview of what this relationship will be.

What can we practically gain from the intensity that we often feel while singing *zemirot*? Surely the singing of *zemirot* is not a magic formula for creating a closer relationship with God. After all, relationships between mere human beings take time and effort to build. However, the memory of the feelings and desires that we experience while singing *zemirot* can serve as a reminder for us. If we reach a point in our lives when we are feeling uninspired in our *yiddeshkeit*, thinking about the

inspiration that singing *zemirot* has brought forth in us in the past can help us remember the desires that are harbored in the soul of every single Jew.

Sima Grossman is a junior at SCW majoring in biology, and is a Copy Editor and Staff Writer for Kol Hamevaser.

1 Translation from Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur* (Jerusalem, Israel: Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 2009), 688.

2 *Tehilim* 19:9-11. Translation from *The Book of Psalms With an Interlinear Translation* (New York, NY: Meosrah Publication Ltd., 2001), 44.

3 Rabbi Alan Haber, "Zemirot Shabbat: Yedid Nefesh," *YUTorah*, available at: www.yutorah.org.

4 *Ibd.*

5 Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur* (Jerusalem, Israel: Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 2009), 689.

6 Rabbi Alan Haber, "Zemirot Shabbat: Yedid Nefesh," *YUTorah*, available at: www.yutorah.org.

7 *Tehilim* 42:3. Translation from Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur* (Jerusalem, Israel: Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 2009), 394.

8 *Shemos* 33:20.

9 Translation from Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur* (Jerusalem, Israel: Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 2009), 394.

10 Rabbi Alan Haber, "Zemirot Shabbat: Tzoma Nafshi Le'lokim," *YUTorah*, available at: www.yutorah.org.

11 Translation from Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur* (Jerusalem, Israel: Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 2009), 394.

12 From the *zemer* "Mah Yedidut." Translation from Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur* (Jerusalem, Israel: Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 2009), 388.

13 *Tehilim* 84:2. Translation from *The Book of Psalms With an Interlinear Translation* (New York, NY: Meosrah Publication Ltd., 2001), 235.

14 Rabbi Alan Haber, "Zemirot Shabbat: Ma Yedidut and Ka Ribon," *YUTorah*, available at: www.yutorah.org.

15 *Tehilim* 42:2. Translation from *The Book of Psalms With an Interlinear Translation* (New York, NY: Meosrah Publication Ltd., 2001), 112.

16 Translation from Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Siddur* (Jerusalem, Israel: Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 2009), 388.

17 *Brakhot* 57b.

18 *Brakhot* 17a. Translation is mine.

Is *Teshuva* Fair? Two Contemporary Views Regarding the Mechanisms of Repentance

BY: ALEX MAGED

Ever since we were children our teachers have taught us to believe that God will forgive our misdeeds if we perform *teshuvah*. Year after year we review this cardinal teaching of our faith, so that by the time we have graduated out of the Jewish day school system we practically take it for granted. If we say sorry for some wrong which we committed then of course God will pardon us – indeed, why should He not? There is a neat reciprocity to this arrangement which appeals to our desire for some sort of higher order and predictability. Yet if we take a step back for a moment, I think we will reveal that as straightforward as it may come across, the notion of *teshuvah* is anything but intuitive. After all, our experience tells us that something done cannot be undone; this idea has even been codified scientifically, under the law of entropy.¹ Had we not been told otherwise, we would have expected the spiritual realm to function in exactly the same way. Simply stated, man cannot change his past – at least not in concrete terms. At first glance, then, something seems unjust about his receiving "credit" as though he had. It is for this reason precisely that many texts struggle to define the parameters of forgiveness. For myself, the most eye-opening of these has been Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower*, a symposium of sorts in which the world's leading thinkers and theologians debate whether the author should have graced a Nazi soldier who begged for forgiveness upon his deathbed. Actually, it was this text which first alerted me to the "problem" of repentance, if you will, and I highly recommend the work to anybody interested in probing one of the most fundamental tenets of Jewish faith.

That said, these questions are not new ones. The Talmud, written 1500 years ago, relates the tension that gripped Reish Lakish as he grappled with this very issue:

Reish Lakish said: Great is repentance, for because of it premeditated sins are accounted as errors, as it is said: Return, O Israel, unto the Lord, thy God, for thou hast stumbled in thy iniquity. 'Iniquity' is premeditated, and yet he calls it 'stumbling.' But that is not so! For Reish Lakish said that repentance is so great that premeditated sins are accounted as though they were merits, as it is said: "And when the wicked turneth from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby!" That is no contradiction: One refers to a case



[of repentance] derived from love, the other to one due to fear.²

In attempting to resolve a scriptural dilemma, Reish Lakish unwittingly exacerbates a philosophical one. Conventionally, repentance is conceived of as a process which nullifies one's sins. Reish Lakish takes it a step further. For this sage, repentance, ideally performed, represents an opportunity to recast one's transgressions as merits – an opportunity not only to remove but also to *revert* the moral force of one's actions.

If you are like me then you are probably wondering: how does *that* work? This is a question which Jewish scholars have been brooding over for centuries. Two contemporary thinkers have articulated what, at least in my opinion, constitute some of the best responses to this challenge. Let us present them here and then unpack them together.

Response #1 – R. Jonathan Sacks:

Any act we perform has multiple consequences, some good, some bad. When we intend evil, the bad consequences are attributed to us because that is what we sought to achieve. The good consequences are not: they are mere by-products, happenstance, unintended outcomes... However, once one has undergone complete repentance, the original intent is cancelled out.

It is now possible to see the good, as well as the bad, consequences of his act – and to attribute the former to him, since the meaning of his act is no longer defined by what he originally intended but by what part he played in a [series of events] whose [positive] outcome was only now fully apparent in retrospect. To paraphrase Shakespeare's Mark Anthony, the good they did would live after them; the bad was interred with the past. That is how, through repentance, deliberate sins are accounted as merits.³

Response #2: R. Akiva Tatz:

The definition of complete repentance [as defined in Maimonides' legal code] means that [the sinner] would not do the same thing again [if presented with the same opportunity to do so]. That means that the weakness has been eradicated – they're higher than they were before. The person who's fallen is a person who had a fall in their character, the fall has been used to reveal that, and they've used the opportunity now to eradicate the problem. The person now uses that experience of fall in order to weld together and eliminate the problem. They are now, through having fallen, a person who no longer has that



problem. The mechanism is that the fall has become an intrinsic and inalienable part of their rise. “*Ki nafalti, kamti*” – I have risen *because* I fell. A person who looks back on such an occasion will relish the moment that he fell, retroactively – he wouldn’t give it up for anything because that was the experience that became part and parcel, as it were, of his growth. That’s one understanding of how the transgression becomes a merit.⁴

R. Sacks and R. Tatz both spell out the ethical underpinnings of *teshuvah* quite cogently. Yet while their explanations may lead us to the same destination, close analysis seems to reveal two different points of departure. To highlight the tension between these two approaches we must pause to reflect on the role of intention vis-à-vis outcome in determining the morality of one’s actions – do we judge one’s actions purely based on what he or she *meant to do*, or is what one *actually did* also relevant? In ancient Rome these two spheres were distinguished with the terms *mens rea* (“guilty mind”) and *actus reus* (“guilty act”). More simply we might say, is it really the thought that counts, or, in the final analysis, do actions speak louder than words?

To the Jewish mind, of course, all *hashkafic* questions of this nature hinge on *halakhic* considerations. When we turn to the legal codes, though, we find a most equivocal picture. Although several prominent authorities rule that *kavanah* is required in order to discharge one’s obligation of the religious commandments,⁵ others disagree.⁶ On the one hand, we seem to receive reward for interpersonal *mitsvot*, such as giving

charity and visiting the sick, even lacking any specific intention to fulfill a religious requirement.⁷ On the other hand, certain prayers are deemed invalid unless the one who recites them meditates on the meaning of what he or she is saying.⁸ Most commandments involve some form of explicitly physical action – then again, the six *mitsvot*⁹ which apply in all places and at all times are, in the plain sense, wholly

For [Reish Lakish], repentance, ideally performed, represents an opportunity to recast one’s transgressions as merits – an opportunity not only to remove but also to revert the moral force of one’s actions.

cerebral. In short, it is hard to tell whether intentions or outcomes matter more in Judaism. This debate bears directly on our question because when we seek to take back the past, as it were, we do not know what exactly we should be trying to take back.

Allow me to suggest that there are two ways of looking at this issue: rationally and ethically. Rationally speaking, only intentions seem open for revision: I can change how I relate to a given act or event long after said act or event has taken place. By contrast, actions are irreversible: effects can be neutralized but never undone. From this perspective, *teshuvah*, if it is to make any sense, cannot require man to undo his actions, as this is impossible. All we can do is change the way we feel and think about those actions, thereby claiming

their positive outcomes retroactively, as it were, as R. Sacks suggests. In purely logical terms, this explanation seems much more accurate.

And yet, something seems lacking. How morally potent is private regret, at the end of the day? Not very, we would have to admit. Certainly the victim feels no better just because the perpetrator feels worse. Moreover, if the sole result of one’s remorse is that one does not repeat one’s misdeeds moving forward, then he or she has essentially returned to “square one.” Perhaps we should restore such a person’s spiritual account to zero – but to throw in credit on top? That seems unfair. When we think about the issue in this light it would seem, as R. Tatz suggests, that sins can only truly count as *mitsvot* if those sins actually give rise to *mitsvot* in some causative sense. Granted, the connection to the initial sin may be less direct than the one proposed through the first approach: treating others with more care and compassion in the future does not change the fact that I treated them poorly in the past. Maybe in rational terms the arrangement is a little artificial. Still, on the most basic human level, *something* beyond a mere rectification of intent seems necessary. If an individual is to receive credit for his misdeeds then it should be because, in reflecting upon them, he has been moved to perform acts of kindness which he *would not otherwise* have pursued. Only then does the latent positivity within those earlier moments of sin reveal itself as the facet of one’s actions which ultimately endures.

Incidentally, it is interesting to note what would appear to be the *nafka minah* (practical difference) which arises from these two different perspectives. Consider the individual who never returns to his misdeeds but who, on the other hand, does not adopt any course of conduct aimed at redeeming his former mistakes through positive action. Has such an individual performed *teshuvah* to the degree implied by Reish Lakish? The answer would seem to depend on whether intention suffices for the purposes of repentance, as we have explored.

Ultimately, I would not insist upon this reading of the two responses brought above, for there may be other ways of interpreting them. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that the more philosophically-oriented R. Sacks seems to focus on one’s intention while the more mystically-oriented R. Tatz focuses on one’s actions themselves. I am sure both would agree that, ideally, *teshuvah* should feature not only a return to the sinner’s previous level but also a progression to a higher spiritual plane. Still, in purely theoretical terms, it is interesting to meditate upon what seem to be two different approaches to the mechanisms of *teshuvah*, apparently stemming from the two competing conceptions found in Jewish sources: do actions matter more, or do intentions?

Alex Maged is currently a Sophomore at YU and on the Writing Staff for Kol Hamevaser.

1 According to the law of entropy (also known as the second law of thermodynamics), energy expended for the purposes of work can never be fully recovered in a usable form.

2 *Yoma* 86b. Translation courtesy of the Classic Online Soncino, available at: www.halakha.com.

3 Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible: Genesis, the Book of Beginnings* (New Milford, CT: Maggid & The Orthodox Union, 2009), “The Future of the Past.”

4 Akiva Tatz, “Teshuva: Recreating the Personality,” available at: www.simpletoremember.com.

5 The Bahag (Berachot 2:7) rules that *mitsvot* require *kavanah*. The Rif (Rosh Hashana 7b), as understood by most commentators, also rules this way. See Deuteronomy 11:13 and 26:16 for two scriptural sources commonly adduced in support of this position. The Talmudic source for this opinion seems to be R. Zeira’s request that the individual blowing the *shofar* on his behalf have him (i.e. R. Zeira) in mind before doing so. This incident can be found on Rosh Hashana 28b.

6 Rabbenu Chananel (Berachot 13a), Rashba (ad loc) and Ritva (Rosh Hashana 28b) all rule that *mitsvot* do not require *kavanah*. This would seem to be the clear implication of Berachot 13a, where the Talmud rules that one who reads the text of *keriat shema* from the Torah without the intention of fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *keriat shema* can nevertheless fulfill his obligation. See also Rosh Hashana 28a, where Rava rules that one can fulfill the *mitzvah* of listening to the *shofar* if he blew the *shofar* for musical purposes.

7 See *Kovetz Shiurim* II 23:6. The author, R. Elchanan Wasserman, differentiates between *mitsvot* which require *kavanah* and those which are discharged through the proper execution of the act. For these latter *mitsvot*, the concern lies with the result of the action much more than with the intent accompanying it. R. Wasserman cites many interpersonal *mitsvot* as examples of such result-oriented *mitsvot*.

8 See *Mishna Berura* 60:7. The author rules that one must repeat the first verse of the *shema* if it was not recited with *kavanah*; the same holds true for the first blessing of the *shemoneh esrei*.

9 According to the *Sefer ha-hinukh* the following *mitsvot* apply constantly: (1) to believe in God; (2) not to believe in any power besides God; (3) to believe in God’s oneness; (4) to fear God; (5) to love God; (6) not to stray after the heart or eyes.

Jewish Music for Carnegie Hall

By: MOSHE RUBE

The cliché goes, “Music is a language of the heart.” As a Yeshiva University music major, I believe this claim as long as we take out the last three words. To say that music only speaks to the heart is like saying that Torah only speaks to the mind. Like any other language, music can express intelligence, deep meaning, passion, cleverness, or anything a master composer wishes. Different movements throughout both musical and Jewish history have given to modern times a variety of ways to approach music and Judaism, ranging from the emotional to the intellectual.¹ We can easily recognize the difference between a scholar or composer who strives for maximum emotional expression and a scholar or composer who thrives on intellectual exploration. However, we must also recognize the difference between another set of categories which I call the advanced and the simple.

To elucidate, emotional/intellectual refers to the quality of the idea, while advanced/simple refers to how the composer or Torah scholar develops the idea. For example, the Rav demonstrates intellectual Torah when he defines different religious personalities in *Halachic Man*². If the Rav had simply provided definitions, then his thoughts would have been in the simple stage. However, because the Rav builds strong foundations on each idea and makes connections to many aspects of Judaism, forming a coherent philosophical treatise, we can claim that *Halachic Man* represents advanced Torah. For Torah ideas that tend to set emotions aflame rather than the intellect, we look to many of the *divrei Torah* NCSY tells its participants. For instance, I once heard a rabbi relate to teens on a Chanukah Shabbaton that looking at Chanukah candles without your glasses on puts you more in touch with the holiness of

your soul. Advanced stages of this kind of Torah can be seen in Hasidic works like the *Tanya* or *Netivot Shalom*³, whose authors develop sophisticated emotional concepts

emphasis on creating music that expresses the angsts and joys of their hearts. However, as stated before, both ideals can become advanced pieces of art. If a composer

However, the music produced for public Jewish consumption remains strictly in the emotional and simple stage. Most Jewish music we hear blaring on speakers, or sung during shul or at a kumzits consists of musical ideas with hardly any development. There barely exists any forum for advanced Jewish music.

like *dveykut*, or cleaving to God, as well as other elements of inner Jewish experience for many pages.

The written word can also serve as an illustration for these categories. Everyone understands the difference between intellectual writing and emotional writing, but the difference between simple and advanced writing requires clarification. Instances of simple writing include aphorisms and baby books, where the author presents ideas and characters in an undeveloped and one-dimensional stage. However, to write a good novel, the author is required to have an assortment of different characters and plot elements that all tie together to form an organized whole. Harry Potter deserves accolades because of Rowling’s ability to develop the many characters and settings into one story that converges towards the single stream of Harry’s struggle with Voldemort, which climaxes at the end of *The Deathly Hallows*. Almost everything she mentions has a point and hints to something that will happen later on. Also, anyone who has seen a few episodes of *Seinfeld* can testify to the writers’ abilities to weave all kinds of plot elements and characters into a single thread.

The same system applies to music. Musical ideas can be intellectual or emotional. Many of the musical ideas of Johann Sebastian Bach do not sound like a man outpouring his emotions, but rather like a scientist (as Bach described himself) exploring all the possibilities of triadic harmony.⁴ In today’s universities, many senior music professors write music with complex intellectual frameworks instead of the framework of feeling.⁶

Usually, the populace gravitates toward music that treats emotional expression as the ultimate goal of music. Most of the artists that we hear about from classical composers like Mozart and Beethoven to pop and rock musicians place the greatest

builds his emotive or intellectual musical ideas into a skillfully weaved, coherent musical setting that can hold its ground for longer than a few minutes, then we call that music advanced. Throughout history, composers have developed different forms to create advanced structures. For instance, the classical Sonata form developed by Haydn has a composer state a few different themes in a first section. In a second section, the composer combines all his presented themes in creative ways. The more advanced the piece of music is, the more each musical idea stated will fit in with the greater whole.

One popular example of this is Beethoven’s Fifth symphony. The famous first theme consists of four dramatic notes, while the second theme is a sweet and lyrical melody. Throughout the piece, Beethoven manipulates and combines both ideas with a sense of elegance and excitement. We can hear the opening rhythm in the background of the second theme as well, giving the Symphony an even better sense of organized structure. Like a good novel or movie, everything comes together at the end in a satisfying way. However, if a composer just states his musical idea with the minutest amount of development (as in the high part in a pop song), then we call that piece simple.⁷

All categories have their time and place. Yet in our beloved Orthodox society we see a great discrepancy between the way we use music and the arts and the way we use Torah and science. We have emotional, advanced, simple, and intellectual Torah. We have “*chassidische vorts*”, thick books on Torah philosophy, and hour long *shiurim* on the proper feelings we must have during *shofar* blowing. Science, in our times, has become incorporated into all fields of Jewish study. Thank God.

However, the music produced for public Jewish consumption remains strictly in the emotional and simple stage. Most



Jewish music we hear blaring on speakers, or sung during *shul* or at a *kumzits* consists of musical ideas with hardly any development. There barely exists any forum for advanced Jewish music. Cantors and modern Carlebach followers⁸ have the skills to advance the music we hear in shul, the most apt setting for more advanced Jewish music. However, we only invite them on an annual or semiannual basis, if at all. The *Shulhan Arukh* testifies to the importance of a proper and deep emotional and musical experience when it states, "If a congregation needs to hire a Rabbi and a *chazzan* but can only afford one, unless the Rabbi is a Gadol Batorah, the *chazzan* should be hired first."⁹ While we treat Torah as though it is our nourishment from which we must partake of all its different food groups, we treat our musical life with an unsettling narrowness.

This arrangement would be adequate if advanced music or any advanced emotional expression has no significance in our Jewish lives. But it does. The Rav states in *Worship of the Heart*:¹⁰

"Man is also able to approach God through his great and passionate love for Him, through an ecstatic experience which enables the finite being to transcend the bounds of finitude and to rise above the limited and relative to the heights of absoluteness and endlessness. Man, many Jewish philosophers and mystics maintained, may reach God not only through the intellect, but also through the heart."

Regarding music specifically, we plead in the *musaf* prayer of the festivals for the return of the "*Kohanim* to their service, and *Leviim* to their song."¹¹ With this statement, we equate the fulfillment of the technical halachic minutiae of the sacrifices to the emotional experience of hearing the *Leviim*. Why do the discussions of the complex experience of the modern Jew appear in our publications and community wide forums, but not in our music?

Aside from the halakhic and *hashkafic* sources, we admit that we need advanced emotional expression. We admit it when we go to the symphony hall. We admit it when we go to the movie theater. We admit it when we complain about *tefilah* going ten minutes overtime, but beg for more when *The Matrix* ends at a short 136 minutes. I do not blame anyone or myself for acting this way. Why should we have to sit in shul any longer than necessary if we don't hear any significant musical expression of the words of prayer? Praying more slowly only serves to highlight what is not musically there. People who feel a need for advanced music within a Jewish setting should have a place to go, but they

do not. While shuls should be fulfilling this need, they have instead become repetitive, drab, and simply a place to fulfill our requirement to *daven*.

To properly rectify the schism between music and Torah may take just as long as it took to properly rectify the schism between Torah and science. We can start though, with a simple realization. To advance our Jewish musical life we must treat it as a field of study in its own terms. Instead of trying to force Torah and Judaism upon an undeveloped musical framework¹², we must first make our general musical language powerful enough to properly contain the deep concepts we wish to impart. As I will show, we must give fields of knowledge the space they need to develop if we want to incorporate them into Torah life in the best possible way.

First we start with science, the 21st century's biggest Jewish hit. Common sense and history dictate that any self-respecting scholar who wishes to become a master of the intersection between science and Torah must understand science on its own terms. Years must be spent in study (preferably with attainment of degrees) in the chosen scientific field before trying to combine it with Torah. Torah on its own terms then meets science on its own terms, and the two can find where they can fuse. Gerald Schroeder (author of *Genesis and the Big Bang*) earned his doctorate in physics, and Rabbi Slifkin studied zoology in depth before illuminating the Torah with his unique perspective. Not to mention the

Rav, who received a PhD in philosophy before integrating it with Torah.

To take this even further we look to the Yeshiva College Dramatics Society. Through my time at YU I have had the privilege of participating in four top quality stage performances: *1776*, *The Foreigner*, *Twelve Angry Men*, and *Mister Roberts*. Lin Snider, a professional director, along with professional set designers, helped make shows that rival other universities. We achieved success in implanting drama within the Jewish community by focusing on perfecting our dramatic art rather than performing mediocre plays with more overtly Jewish themes. Had we done so, we would have lost respect from our audience and from ourselves. Drama would become just another hobby that some Jews do when they get out of the lab or the *beit midrash*. Instead, we demanded the space for drama that the Jewish world allowed for science. Namely, we let the rules of drama dictate our course, while keeping within Torah's halakhic boundary. Only then could the honor of the Torah increase tenfold when we showcased high dramatic art within its framework.

We cannot treat music differently from science, Torah, or drama if we want to tap into its real power. Like science and drama, music possesses its own history, traditions, and rules which require years of rigorous study to master (preferably with attainment of degrees). Instead of settling for simplistic musical frameworks unfit to handle the depth of our Jewish texts and feelings, we can create advanced music in our community by studying and respecting music on its own terms¹³. Only then will we be able fuse Torah and music in the most sophisticated and powerful way. Only then will we access the true power

of emotion within Judaism, and only then will Jewish music be worthy enough to grace a shul, or at least Carnegie Hall.

1 For example, compare German Baroque (Scientific Intellectual Music) with Italian Classicism (Emotional Music) in the musical realm, and the Lithuanian and Hassidic approaches to learning Torah.

2 For example, consider the Rav's development and contrasting of *homo religiosus*, cognitive man, and halakhic man.

Joseph B Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 4-95.

3 See Shalom Noah Brazovski, *Netivot Shalom Al ha-Torah: Devarim* (Jerusalem: Machon Emunah ve-Da'at, 1994), 89 for an example of a discussion on *dveykut*.

4 It is impossible to fully understand this concept without listening to his music. I have done my best here through the writing medium. For further study I direct the reader to You Tube to listen to a Bach fugue or Toccata.

5 In fact, music critics like Johann Adolph Scheibe and even his own congregation lambasted him for loading his music with "artificial," non-naturally emotive elements.

6 See Milton Babbitt's essay "Who Cares if You Listen."

7 Obviously, plenty of gray area exists. Depending on the skill of the composer and level of development, music can be somewhat advanced or somewhat simple.

8 Such as Eitan Katz and Yehudah Green.

9 Orah Hayim 53:24. Writer's Translation.

10 Joseph B Soloveitchik, Sahlom Carmy (ed.), *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Pub. House, 2003), 5.

11 Writer's Translation.

12 For example, consider the simple, constantly repeating melodic and chordal progressions present in Eli Gerstner songs, and most other Jewish pop music. As stated, it has its place but is nowhere near advanced.

13 Granted, many do not have time for such study, but we can all at least recognize the breadth and depth of the musical language and the value in advanced emotional expression.

In Plenty and In Time of Need

1. 08

יְהוָה יְהוָה וְעַתָּה וּבְיָמֵינוּ, כִּי הָיָה הַיָּם וְהַיַּבֵּשׁ, וְהָיָה הַיָּם וְהַיַּבֵּשׁ.
 The Lord has been the pe-ople's guide for past three hun-dred years. We shall still on-
 we need the need from which our pride is spring. A pride that makes us want to boast
 the pe-ople's side, we have no doubts or fears. Up-ward and on-ward we shall go,
 of what it has with-stood, that leads our hearts from coast to coast, the pride of na-tion-hood,
 keep cool, en-able ing, free, and great as will our na-tion-grow in strength and as it is.
 We, by al sons and daugh- ters all, do here by make it known. These fields and hills be- yond re-call
 are now our re- ty- ers. We write our names in his- tory's page with de- poot la-
 tions great. Strictly just- dices of our her- i-tage, firm crafts- men of our fate.

Infinite Glue: *Niggunim* in Chabad, Yeshivot, and Beyond

BY: ELISHA PEARL

"I have five days of music in my iTunes library." "When do you listen to it?" "In my room to chill out, or while I'm exercising."

"[Clueless Freshman (a.k.a. Me)] Why isn't there any singing on campus? [Well-adjusted Super Senior] No one has time."

Melody has been a critical part of Jewish life from the dawn of the Jewish nation to the present day.¹ With the inception of the Chasidic movement, sacred melody, or *Niggun*,² became an increasingly prominent mode of *Avodat Hashem*, in theoretical discussion and in practice. Through an analysis of the spiritual qualities and historical uses of *Niggun*, we can better evaluate how we use *Niggun* within our own communities and to what extent we are satisfied with our current *Niggun* practices.

Imagine the following scene: the hour hand on the clock resting in the back of the *beit midrash* moves to four p.m. It is Shabbat afternoon in Yeshiva, and the time has come for the second stage of afternoon *seder*. The Yeshiva students close their books, and begin pushing their tables toward the center of the room to form one long table. Everyone takes their seats, and slowly wordless melodies begin to waft through the *beit midrash*- *Niggun Seder* has begun.³ Over the course of the next hour, the assembled students sing *Niggunim* together, thereby experiencing and perpetuating the living tradition of *Niggun*. Such is a typical Shabbat experience at *Tomchei Temimim* schools, the Chabad movement's global network of *Yeshivot Ketanot* and *Gedolot*.

Niggun is a lynchpin of Chabad life and religious experience.^{4,5} The Yiddish term *Niggun* stems from the Hebrew root *N.G.N*, a word often used to refer to musical compositions in *Tanakh*⁶, songs with earthly notes whose distinction is that they are dedicated to Hashem. *Hasidut* sees itself continuing this hallowed tradition of sacred song, embodied by David *ha-Melech* and the *Leviim*⁷, to achieve a level of divine service that has been largely ignored since the destruction of the *Beit ha-Mikdash*. *Niggun* uses melody to engage the voice and arouse the soul to serve Hashem, making it a primary method of spiritual connection.

To understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to investigate Chabad's musical philosophy. The *Niggun's* philosophical underpinnings certainly were nurtured in the thought and practice of *Baal Shem Tov*, but for Chabad, the crystallization of *Niggun* philosophy truly begins with Rav Schneur Zalman of Liadi, Chabad's first leader and author of the *Tanya*, also known

as the *Alter Rebbe*. The *Alter Rebbe* views Jewish observance as all-encompassing—that is to say, for the *Alter Rebbe*, Judaism demands a relationship between the Jew and God that must involve every faculty of the human experience. According to the *Alter Rebbe*, people possess different levels of self-expression, ranging from physical actions, to speech, to thought, and finally at the highest level, the subconscious will of the soul. A Jew must use all of these faculties to fully connect to God.⁸ *Niggun* plays a critical role in reaching the peak of Divine service, which incorporates all forms of human expression, because it is the vehicle by which one can express the depths of the soul.⁹ Wordless *Niggunim* go a step further—unfettered by the limitations of language, they achieve the most exquisite and moving revelation of the human soul. As Rav Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson often said, "The tongue is the pen of the mind, the *Niggun* is the pen of the soul."¹⁰

Niggun is not just a means of deep self-expression. Perhaps even more importantly, it is a vehicle for spiritual journey, for one to access the depths of his or her own soul, or to engage in self-discovery and self-purification, and ultimately through this process achieve *teshuvah* and an intimate relationship with Hashem. *Niggun* is a primary medium by which one can access the depth of feeling necessary for this type of relationship with Hashem, achieving the profound love of God that Jews are called upon to attain in the recitation of the *Shema*.

While discussing the power of *Niggun*, a word of caution is in order. I should emphasize that it is not the *Niggun* itself that accomplishes these great things, it is the *Niggun* singer's internal state and intentions that do. Much like prayer, *Niggunim* mouthed without intent cannot be expected to move a person. *Niggun* is simply a powerful tool that can catalyze certain feelings that allow the individual to achieve spiritual goals, which often translate into tangible lifestyle modifications.¹¹ The *Alter Rebbe* saw the practice of *Niggun* as a continuation of songs found in the *Tanakh*, where the *Leviim* and David *ha-Melekh* would use song as a mode of passionate *Avodat Hashem*.¹² However, fundamentally, *Niggun* is just a form of deep musical expression that may be used for good or evil.¹³

Thus far, we've discussed *Niggun* from a general standpoint within the *Alter's Rebbe's* philosophy, and by extension briefly examined how the individual can use *Niggun* to enrich his or her *Avodat Hashem*.

However, *Niggun* is certainly not limited to the individual experience, and may wield tremendous power on the communal level.

Niggun's unique communal power can be demonstrated through stories like the following one, which take place every week on college campuses across North America.

In an upstate New York university, amid the raucous Friday night partying, a different sort of party is taking place in a small house one block off campus. Yossie and Bracha, the campus Chabad *shaliakh* couple, are seated around a crowded folding table, with a white, lace tablecloth. A sophomore sporting long curly hair



under a trendy cap complemented by a Phish T-shirt plants his arm on Yossi's long black coat. A junior wearing denim shorts provides a similar contrast to Bracha's long skirt. But as this motley group shares *Niggunim* late into the night, these differences don't seem to matter, the shared *Niggun* breaks down barriers if for only a moment, and makes them one.

Niggun has a striking ability to create unity among disparate groups of Jews. At Chabad *Farbrengens*,¹⁴ Jews who usually might not have much meaningful conversation or commonality come together, and while they sing together, their differences seem inconsequential. In the context of a *Farbrengen*, Jews from highly disparate frames of reference are able to share the experience of *Niggun*. *Niggun* belongs to all Jews, from the ex-convict to the Torah scholar. *Niggun* is in a sense democratizing. All Jews, no matter their level of ritual comfort, are able to participate together in this simple but powerful form of *Avodat Hashem*.

Although *Niggunim* can be a powerful force of internal Jewish unity, paradoxically

they also have an exclusionary quality: different Jewish groups are set apart from one another by the *Niggunim* they sing (or don't sing). When a person is not familiar with a particular group's *Niggunim*, he or she can try to sing along, but will still in a sense be excluded from the group. In personal experience at *Farbrengens* and *Seudat Shelishit* gatherings, people who knew the in-group's *Niggunim* and could begin *Niggunim* were immediately recognized as insiders, while those who could not were identified as outsiders. While some might deplore the potential exclusiveness such a phenomenon creates, by adding a deeper level of complexity to a group's ethos, *Niggunim* become a means of solidifying a group's shared identity. A group who shares deep, moving experiences together becomes closer to each other and identify more strongly, allowing them to accomplish more together. The deeper the connection people share, the fewer the boundaries between them and their ability to act and interact as a unit.

Particularistic *Niggunim* are used within group contexts on different occasions to evoke memories of the past, as theme songs for leaders; as calls to action, to contemplation, to express collective joy, and to express intense gratitude to, or yearning for, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. *Niggun* is a poignant means whereby a large group can share as one in expressing and sharing such feelings, often when these feelings are so profound such that they transcend verbal expression.

In Chabad philosophy, where each Jewish individual is part of a larger, integrated unit, the unifying and shared identity building fostered by the *Niggun* is critical. It is a tool that allows *Am Yisrael* to reach spiritual peaks as a community, and ultimately fulfill their duty as a manifestation of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu's* will and presence in this world.

In this context, *Niggun Seder* in Chabad *Yeshivot* can now be more fully appreciated. The *beit midrash* is a place where *Am Yisrael* attempts to connect to God through Torah and *tefillah*, it is a place where tradition grows and continues; it is also a place where the religious identity of young Jews is often formed. Applying the term *Seder*, a term normally reserved for formal study of *Gemara* in the *Beit Midrash* context, to *Niggunim* effectively puts them on the sacred level of Torah study, implying that the *Niggun* has a primary role in building the Jewish people and their connection to Hashem.

If *Niggun* has such a sacred quality, what

separates it from an ordinary song? Some melodies go through an explicit process that changes them into a *Niggun* and will conform to a certain genre of music. Often, however, the process is more spontaneous; as previously noted, "The *Niggun* is the pen of the soul."

The same notes that comprise a song can also comprise a *Niggun*; the divide between the two is simply a matter of the composer or singer's perspective. Music and song in the modern era are often treated in a consumptive fashion, becoming part of a capitalist, consumer driven ethos. For many, music is merely used for cheap entertainment or quick emotional release, instead of as a means of deep spiritual expression. But even when music is a creative experience or an act of profound cathartic expression, it still is not sufficient to become a *Niggun*. A *Niggun* is a song that, from the perspective of the singer and the singer's experience, expresses the full range of the individual or communal emotion in the context of divine service--it is a medium to sanctify individual and community. What defines a *Niggun* then is the perspective of the singer, not the song itself.

Given the enriching nature of *Niggun*, could the broader Jewish population, and the American Jewish community in particular, benefit from a stronger relationship with *Niggun*? R. Hershel Reichman, a longtime Rosh Yeshiva in the Yeshiva Program at YU, argues that *Niggun* is a most critical mode of *Tefilla* in the modern American context. R. Reichman references the *Sifrei* on *Parshat va-Etkhanan*¹⁵, which lists ten modes of prayer, including *rinah*, a word denoting song. The common denominator between these ten types of prayer is that all are forms of *shefikhat ha-lev*¹⁶ (a means of "pouring out the heart" to *ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu*). R. Reichman argues that praying in Hebrew can be a means of *shefikut ha-lev*. However, pouring out one's heart in *tefillah* is easier when one is praying in a language he feels comfortable in. Thus, in America, where most Jews, even in Orthodox communities, do not speak Hebrew as a native language, *Niggun* serves as a universal language whereby all Jews can engage in prayer from the depths of their heart. True prayer, argues R. Reichman, involves becoming "enwrapped" in the relationship with Hashem, and for many this only happens in the context of *Niggun*. In his role as Rosh Yeshiva, R. Reichman has seen the power *Niggun* has to electrify a room of *mitpallelim* (congregants). R. Reichman notes that though it is difficult to gauge to what extent American Jews recognize the importance of *Niggun*, the phenomenon of *Carlebach Minyananim* may be an indicator that American Jews are beginning to actively recognize and employ the power of *Niggun*. "*Niggun* is here to stay, and its having a bigger and bigger impact," R.

Reichman claims. This growth of *Niggun*, he says, is a tremendous change from twenty-five years ago when the general trend of American Jewish congregations, including those at Yeshiva University, was

Ultimately, we have much to learn from Chabad's conception of Niggun. Jewish music isn't just another means of entertainment, it's a way for us add another element to our spiritual lives, to our life as a Jewish community, and to our relationship with God.

to sing minimally during prayer if at all.

Although he emphasizes the importance of *Niggun* in enhancing *tefillah*, R. Reichman also feels that *Niggun* plays an important role in religious experience outside of *tefillah*. He lamented that the people involved in singing *Niggunim* are generally a self-selecting group. He says, "It's hard for people to change if *Niggun* isn't what they're used to growing up, but I'm not *me-ya'esh* (despairing) from these people."¹⁷ R. Reichman said he hopes to introduce programming at YU that will make *Niggunim* relevant to a broader range of the University population.

A teaching fellow at MTA, who has been involved in Jewish summer camps and high-schools for the past five years, shared R. Reichman's optimism, and related that *Niggun* has seen a strong rise in its influence on high-school communities, especially as an independent experience outside of *tefillah*, "Nearly all kids in camp are involved in *Niggunim*," he argues. However, he also observed that as these same students leave high school and enter college or the workforce, *Niggun* begins to play a much smaller role in their lives. "It's part of a larger issue; high-school students are into spirituality, [but this feeling tends to decline] as people get older and shoulder more responsibility, or take on the American workforce mentality wherein they see themselves as 'more down to earth,'" These kids leave *Niggunim* behind as a juvenile relic. The challenge then, for young people on the cusp of adulthood and adults of all ages, is to re-examine *Niggunim* and see them not as pleasant childhood camp songs, but as powerful spiritual tools used by the greatest of Jews.

Ultimately, we have much to learn from Chabad's conception of *Niggun*. Jewish music isn't just another means of entertainment, it's a way for us add another element to our spiritual lives, to our life as a Jewish community, and to our relationship with God. Even when we sing songs for spiritual purposes, it is important not to see music as a simple aesthetic enhancement of spirituality. *Niggun* is the unique transcendental spiritual tool that is "the pen of the soul"¹⁸, allowing the expression of that which cannot be expressed through the limited medium of words¹⁹. We should recognize its power, study it, and consume ourselves in its

experience, thereby achieving a fresh type of *Avodat Hashem* that is "the intense love resembling the flame that flashes out of the lightning"²⁰.

Elisha Pearl is a Sophomore at Yeshiva College.

1 For a history of Jewish song from *Tanakh* to the modern era, see Shmuel Zalmanov (ed.) *Sefer HaNiggunim: Niggunei Chasidei Chabad, Mevoh*, (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot Publication Society, 1984).

2 The usage of the term *Niggun* and its theological underpinnings has spread beyond the Hasidic world and permeated all elements of Jewish religious expression, including those outside of Orthodoxy. See Aaron Sokoloff, "The Power of a Well Placed *Niggun*," *Journal of Synagogue Music* (2008): 205. For an example of the popularity of *Niggun* in non-Orthodox congregations see <http://urj.org>.

3 *Niggun Seder* is held either between *Minkha* and *Kabalat Shabbat* or after *Minkha* on *Shabbat* afternoon, depending on the branch of *Tomchei Temimim*. According to *Tomchei Temimim* tradition, the practice was started by a young student named *Notte Peharer* in 5666 (1905).

4 I encourage the reader to read Ellen Koskoff, *Music in Lubavitcher Life* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001) for the best treatment of the *Niggun* and its philosophical and social place in Chabad as a religious philosophy and as popular movement.

5 Although all Hasidic groups use *Niggunim*, and may in fact bear strong similarity to Chabad, both in their philosophical underpinnings and popular expression, these aspects are emphasized most strongly within the Chabad movement. Therefore, this article will generally limit its discussion of the Hasidic *Niggun* to Chabad.

6 See *Melachim* I 2:15 where *Elisha* needs a "menagen" (musician) to play melodies to calm him and allow him to attain prophecy. The term "nagen" occurs frequently throughout *Tanakh*, especially in the book of *Tehilim* where *David ha-melekh* praises God. See also *Havakuk* 3:19 and *Yeshayahu* 38:20.

7 See *Tanya* 50 where the *Alter Rebbe* uses the Levitic *Niggun* as a paradigm for *Avodat Hashem* as the final step in achieving the purest quality of *Ahavat Hashem*. This metaphor appears with some frequency in the *Alter Rebbe's maamarim*.

8 See *Tanya* II: 9 for a particularly clear explication of *Alter Rebbe's* qualitative levels of human spiritual expression.

9 See *Tanya* I, 50 where the *Alter Rebbe* writes: "The service of the Levites was to raise the voice of melody and thanksgiving, with song and music, with tunefulness and harmony, in a manner of "advance and retreat" which is the distinction of the intense love resembling the flame that flashes out of the lightning, as is mentioned in the *Gemara* (*Chagigah*, ch. II). It is impossible to elucidate this matter clearly in writing." *Tanya* Bi-lingual edition *Kehot* 1998, Nissan Mindel trans. The reference to *Chagigah* is found on 13b.

10 The attribution of this statement is somewhat murky. It never appears in Chabad writings before Rav Yosef Yitzchak. Rav Yosef Yitzchak used multiple versions of it in his spoken addresses. Most often, he attributed it to the anonymous "Wise Man," (see *Likkutei Dibburim* Hebrew edition p. 714, see *Sefer HaSikhot* 5709 p.299 for a variant version) although in one instance he attributes it to *Alter Rebbe* (see *Sefer HaSikhot* 5702 p.122). The *Rebbe*, Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson used the phrase often in spoken addresses most often attributing it to his father in law or referring to it as "the well-known fact." The first clause, "*HaLashon Hu Kulmus Ha-Lev*," (the tongue is the pen of the heart) is a quote from *Hovot HaLe'avot Shaar Bet, Shaar HaBekhinah* V.

11 See *Torat Menakhem Hivaaduyot* 5747 I, 92.

12 See *Tanya* I, 50.

The *Alter Rebbe* also argues that *Niggun* was a critical element of *Moshe Rabbeinu's Avodat Hashem*. See *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5562, Part 2, p. 341 s.v. *Kametz B'Keter, U'Patach B'Hokhmah* etc.

13 See *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5572, s.v. *Be-Shabbat SheBarach Admor MiTzarfat*, p. 282. There the *Alter Rebbe* refers to the intensely negative spiritual expressions of *Yishmael* and *Esav* as *Niggun*.

14 *Farbrengens* (Yid.) Also known as *Hivaaduyot* (Heb.), are Jewish communal gatherings characterized by *Niggunim* that take place in myriad contexts, among Jews of all persuasions. Although the term was once limited to the Chabad movement, its usage has since extended beyond this community.

15 *Sifrei Devarim Parshat Va-Etkhanan* 26 s.v. *Davar Akher Va-Etkhanan El Hashem*

16 Rav Reichman's take on "*Avodah Shebalev*." See *Mekhilta D'Rabbi Shimon Bar Yokhai* 23:25

17 R. Hershel Reichman, Personal Communication, September, 2013

18 *Ibid*, note 15.

19 *Tanya* I, 50.

20 *ibid*.

Music To My Ears: A Scientific Elucidation of *Kol Isha*

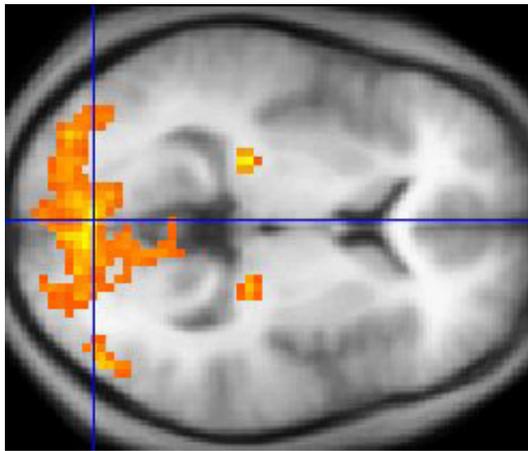
BY: DEBORAH FARBER

The interpretation of the prohibition of hearing a female voice has evolved through halakhic discussion. A woman's voice, as assessed by the Jewish sages, is considered to be attractive and/or sensuous and therefore, the rabbis set up laws to prohibit men from hearing female voices when necessary. The halakhic discussion of the prohibition of hearing a woman's voice starts with the concept of "*kol be-Ishah ervah*" (a woman's voice is nakedness). This concept is primarily discussed in two Talmudic sources: one in *Berakhot* and one in *Kiddushin*. In *Berakhot*, several rabbis discuss the concept of *ervah* (nakedness). R. Yitzchak teaches that a woman's hair is *ervah*, and R. Sheshet opines that a woman's legs are considered *ervah*.¹ Shmuel expresses the idea that a woman's voice is *ervah*.² Shmuel's statement is fundamental to the concept of *Kol Isha*, which will be the focus of the present discussion. Shmuel cites a poignant statement from *Shir ha-Shirim* as proof of his position: "For your voice is sweet and your appearance attractive."³ In the second passage that discusses this concept, the Gemara in *Kiddushin*, R. Nahman asks R. Yehuda if he could send regards to Yalta, R. Nahman's wife. R. Yehuda responds, citing Shmuel that a woman's voice is *ervah*, and therefore it would be inappropriate of him to send greetings to R. Nahman's wife.⁴

These two passages present several inconsistencies with regards to the prohibition of listening to a woman's voice. According to the Gemara in *Berakhot*, the prohibition would seem to apply to a woman's singing voice based on the source in *Shir ha-Shirim*. However, the Gemara in *Kiddushin* discusses the prohibition with respect to a woman's speaking voice. Prominent rabbis over the centuries seemed similarly torn about this compelling issue. Most German *rishonim*, including R. Eliezer b. Yoel ha-Levi, interpret the sources in *Berakhot* and *Kiddushin* as an indication that a man is prohibited from hearing a woman's singing voice while reciting *keriyat shemah*. This ruling was made in order to avoid distraction while partaking in religious activities that require one's full attention. Later rabbis extended the application of this prohibition to other activities as well. Another rabbi who gives his *pesak* on the issue of *kol isha* is R. Yosef Karo, author of the *Shulhan Arukh*. He advises, rather than prohibits, that one avoid hearing a woman's singing voice, not her speaking voice, during *keriyat shemah*. Citing R. Yosef Karo, rather than merely advisory in nature, R. Moshe Iserless believes the law

to be in fact prohibitory.⁵

R. Saul Berman, a contemporary rabbi and professor at Stern College for Women, points out a major issue with the rabbinic interpretations of *kol isha*. The rabbis who discussed this issue previously considered only the Gemara in *Berakhot*, which prohibits hearing a woman's singing voice. However, they ignore the prohibition of hearing a woman's speaking voice, as stated in the Gemara in *Kiddushin*. In R. Berman's article "*Kol Isha*," he regards the interpretation of Rabad of Posquieres to be



significant because Rabad dealt with the inconsistency between these two Talmudic sources. Rabad deems the restriction applicable to the woman's speaking voice, not just her singing voice, as does Meiri.⁶ In his article, R. Berman also cites the opinions of R. Alfasi and Rambam. According to these two opinions, the prohibition of *kol isha* applies to a woman's speaking voice in addition to her singing voice, and it seeks to ban the illicit social relationship between a man and a forbidden woman.^{7,8} These two sources seem to indicate that hearing a woman's speaking voice, along with her singing voice, is included within the prohibition of *kol isha*.

A widely accepted opinion regarding *kol isha* is that of R. Gumbiner, commonly known as the Magen Avraham. He states that the singing voice of a married woman is always forbidden, while her speaking voice is permitted.⁹ This is a generally accepted approach among many Orthodox communities. However, there is much room for debate, given the plethora of halakhic discussion on the topic of *kol isha*.

Not only does the Talmud address the issue of *kol isha*, but scientific research also assesses how hearing a woman's voice could potentially be perceived as sensuous. A recent study performed at the University of Sheffield, under the guidance

of psychiatrist Michael Hunter, changes our perspective on the application of the modern prohibition of *kol isha*. Along with Hunter, Professor Peter Woodruff's group in the Department of Psychiatry and the Division of Genomic Medicine shed light on the true nature of a woman's voice, and, as a result, its classification as *ervah*. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), researchers monitored the brain activity of 12 men while the men listened to voice recordings. The subjects received 96 stimuli consisting of voices that were identifiably either male or female and unaltered in pitch, and voices that were gender-ambiguous (pitch-scaled) of both males and females. The researchers found major differences in the way the voices were processed by the male brain depending on the gender of the voice stimulus. Male and female voices each activated different areas of the brain in male listeners.¹⁰

The researchers found that perception of a male voice results in activity in the mesio-parietal precuneus of the brain, an area involved in episodic memory and imagining of sounds. In contrast, female voices resulted in activation of the right anterior superior temporal gyrus (STG) near the superior temporal sulcus (STS), an area functioning specifically in the perception of the melodic and emotive aspects of the human voice. This finding is consistent with the idea that brain processes that attempt to attribute human qualities to

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voices are more involved in the perception of female voices than male voices.¹¹

Regarding the study, Hunter explains, "Voices allow the brain to determine various factors about a person's appearance, including their sex, size and age. It is much more complex than most people think and is an extremely important tool for determining someone's identity without having to see them."¹² The findings from Hunter's experiment allow us to re-conceptualize our modern thoughts on *kol isha*. Given that a woman's speaking voice triggers a different part of the male brain than does a male voice, it is plausible that

a woman's speaking voice, similar to her singing voice, holds the potential to trigger sensual thoughts in male listeners. In the halakhic realm, Meiri also recognized this notion in his claim equating a woman's singing voice with her speaking voice.¹³ Hunter's scientific experiment supports this halakhic opinion that the prohibition of *kol isha* applies to both a woman's singing voice and speaking voice.

Today, in Western culture, the prohibition of *kol isha* is seldom applied to a woman's speaking voice. While I am in no way offering a halakhic *pesak*, by taking Hunter's findings into account, we are able to recognize the reasoning behind those less prevalent opinions, such as those of R. Alfasi and Rambam, who apply the prohibition of *kol isha* to a woman's speaking voice in addition to her singing voice. Even though these opinions may not be treated as *halakhah le-ma'aseh*, this experiment gives us the ability to appreciate the basis of this approach, ultimately teaching us that "*eilu ve-eilu divrei Elokim Hayim*"—these and these are the words of the living God"¹⁴

Deborah Farber is currently a senior at SCW and is concentrating in pre-health sciences.

- 1 *Berakhot* 24a
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 *Shir ha-Shirim*: 2:14, translation mine.
- 4 *Kiddushin* 70a
- 5 *Shulhan Arukh, Orakh Hayim*, 75:3
- 6 *Hidushei ha-Rashba Berakhot* 25a
- 7 Saul J. Berman, "*Kol 'Isha*," in *Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein Memorial Volume*, ed. by Leo Landman (1980), 45-66
- 8 Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Keriyat Shemah* 3:16
- 9 *Magen Avraham to Shulhan Arukh, Orakh Hayim* 75:6
- 10 Sokhi, D. S., Hunter, M.D., Wilkinson, I.D., Woodruff, P.W.R. (2005). Male and Female Voices Activate Distinct Regions in the Male Brain. *NeuroImage*. 27:572-578.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 "Male and female voices affect brain differently." University of Sheffield. MediaCentre, 12 July 2005. available at www.sheffield.ac.uk
- 13 *Berakhot* 24a
- 14 *Eruvin* 13b

Prayer To A Beat

BY: GABI WEINBERG

This summer I sat towards the back of a Kabbalat Shabbat service in the Slifka Center at Yale University as an advisor on the Tikvah-Straus High School Summer Program. In front of me stood the opening of a joke: a Roman Catholic, a Lutheran, a Conservative Jew, and an Orthodox Jew following the service together. When we all rose to sing *Mizmor le-David* to the Carlebach melody, I began to beat box, providing a beat to the tune. This was not the first time I brought some of my own beat to *tefillah*, and when one of the students turned to me and said, "Gabi, you need to do this for real," we quickly brainstormed a name. On that Friday evening "Beat-Box Shabbat" was born.

Including song in prayer is not a novel concept – melodies joined Jewish prayer centuries ago. During Yamim Noraim many people cannot fully enjoy a prayer that departs from the tunes of their youth. To paraphrase a friend of mine, "Once you leave your home for Yom Kippur *davening* it's not the same, even when you come back." Many who return from spending a year or two in their yeshiva in Israel have a hard time adjusting from their yeshiva tunes, and will spend time reminiscing with their friends during breaks in the *tefillah*.

A community of sorts results from these traditional tunes, and emphasizes the power tradition has to shape our prayers. For these reasons, I have worries about inserting beat boxing into *davening*. Granted this innovation might invite some scorn or snickers, but on a more fundamental level there will be confusion and some discomfort with making this addition.

Traditionally, there are two sources for prayer: some claim prayer is meant to reflect the three prayer a day system established by the *avot*, and others claim *tefillah* was instituted as a replacement for the *temidim* – the daily sacrifices in the temple. While the record on how the *avot* prayed is limited, there is an argument in *Arakhin* 11a between R' Meir and the *Hakhamim* as to whether the song of the *Leviim* that accompanies the daily sacrifice is *meakev*, prevents the sacrifice from being

valid. R. Meir claims that music does in fact prevent the validity of the sacrifice, while the *Hakhamim* do not. Clearly, however, according to all opinions music was an important part of the service, and according to R. Meir, the song was integral enough to invalidate the entire service.

Cantor Sherwood Goffin, a teacher at the Belz School of Jewish Music, expounds on this topic quite extensively in his article, "The Music of the Yamim Noraim."¹ He quotes a gloss of Rama, Rav Moshe Isserles, saying "One may not change the custom of a community even as to its customary prayer melodies ("Maharil")."² According to the

Maharil, not only do tunes simply add a musical atmosphere to *tefillah*, they also should be considered as sacred as any other community *minhag*.³ Maharil believed the tunes of *tefillah* to be so important that in his effort to rebuild Jewish communities of Europe he went from town to town determining which melodies were "authentic tradition for each community."⁴ As he compiled a compendium of melodies, he dubbed them "*mi-Sinai*," not literally implying that the tunes actually were revealed at Sinai, but rather that these tunes are important and integral to community prayer.

Halakhic sources clearly take to heart issues of changing the *tefillah*, however the more pertinent question is how and when can changes be made to better serve the community.

Logically, one would presume that some specific tunes from important holidays are considered even more sacred and would require more effort to alter. For example, R. Soloveichik is quoted in *Divrei ha-Rav*, a book of recollections of the Rav's Torah and ideas written by R. H. Schacter, as considering the tunes that we use on the Yamim Noraim and other holiday traditional tunes to be an integral part of the Jewish experience. He explains that the Ramban's interpretation of the requirement to "remember what happened at Sinai" actually relates to more than merely recalling the commandments. Important as well is what he calls the "*mesorah* of

the Jewish experience" that cannot be overlooked and is built into the auditory experience of prayer. These exceptional tunes, such as Kol Nidrei, which we classify as part of this essential *mesorah*, should remain lynchpins of the holiday service, while other tunes may need to evolve to be more relevant to the prayers, but also need to be revered – a difficult balance to strike when trying to spruce up the prayer service

Based on the multitude of melodies used in *batei kneset* and *batei midrash*, in our times few melodies remain immutable. This transition of tradition opens new doors for how a community practices the singing portion of their service. While using new tunes is the common way to make acceptable changes to *tefillah*, beat boxing would seem to provide an alternative mode of expression and enhancement for *tefillah*.

Two types of issues will hold back the integration of beat boxing into *tefillah*. On the one hand there are halakhic sensibilities that need consideration. On the other hand, some spiritual considerations need to be taken into consideration as well if beat boxing is to be properly mixed into *tefillah*.⁵

In the halakhic sphere, a couple of considerations exist. Two separate points of interest come up when considering using songs and tunes in *tefillah*, which result in two separate points of interest: (1) fitting tunes into the words of prayer and (2) making sure not to repeat words. A classic example where tunes lead to the repetition of words, cited by R. Herschel Schacter, refers us to the *pasuk* recited

while returning the Torah scroll to the ark of "*Hadesh yameinu k'kedem*," popularly sung with repetitions as "*Hadesh, hadesh yameinu, hadesh yameinu k'kedem*."⁶ While popular, R. Schachter explains that these repetitions are inappropriate.⁷ The source for the problem of repetition is at its core based in the Talmudic passages printed in both *Megillah* 22a and *Ta'anit* 27b, which state, "Any verse which was not divided by Moses, we may not divide." The Maharam Schik, a 19th century halakhic scholar, expands on this issue by saying that when one repeats words you make it look like you are changing what the *Hakhamim* wrote, or that you are making a *hefsek* in the *tefillah*.⁸

The problem of repeating words and the use of melodies that disrupt the actual meaning of *pesukim* is not a modern phenomenon. Rabbi J.D. Bleich points out how this problem has a long history when it was, "common practice for cantors to embellish the prayers with musical renditions designed to exhibit musical accomplishment," or more caustically "exhibitions of cantorial vanity." According to Bleich these acts did not "arouse spiritual fervor,"⁹ and the cantors would butcher pronunciations and readings resulting in the words taking different meanings. Halakhic authorities consider certain embellishments that change the meaning of the words a significant halakhic problem.¹⁰ The earliest appearances of sources prohibiting repeating or changing the meaning of words comes from the *Shulhan Arukh*, OH 53:11, where 13th century





Talmudist Solomon ibn Adret (Rashba) is quoted as the prevailing opinion in terms of the problem of embellishment in the tunes during the prayers – saying it was impermissible.

Tunes in prayer are not just an aesthetic addition; the Magen Avraham actually considers added tunes without words part of *tefillah*. The ramification of this opinion is that even at points when other breaks would constitute a *hefsek* – such as during *birkhat kohanim* – a tune may be inserted as long as they are not “too long” (the definition of which is found in other sources).¹¹ The responsibility of singing in prayer rests on the *shaliah tsibor* with built in safeguards against one who sings, “because he likes his voice.”¹² Alternatively, “if the *shaliah tsibor* sings because it adds to the happiness in his heart when praising God, he should be praised.”¹³ The leader of the service needs to strike a delicate balance between too much and too little music in the prayer.

Fortunately, my initiative of “Beat Box Shabbat” does not touch on the question of repetition or changing the meaning of words because beat boxing will not change the order or pronunciation that the *hazzan* uses. The beat boxing provides a backup to the *hazzan*, much like a choir might provide backup harmony. However, are there halakhic problems with simply making sounds with one’s throat and mouth on Shabbat? A couple of questions similar to this one do arise in *halakha*. Although whistling on Shabbat also involves possible imitation of a musical instrument, R. Moshe Isserles allows the practice on Shabbat to “call to your friends,” and does not mention any problem of doing it at any other point.¹⁴ Based on this source, using your mouth to beat box to add to the prayer service should be allowed as well. Another concept similar to beat boxing actually

occurred in *Beit ha-Mikdash*. In a Talmudic passage from *Yoma* 38b, we are told that the *Leviim* would put their thumbs in their mouths to sing. This is probably as close to actual beat boxing as one will find in the Talmud, and it was a common practice of the *Leviim* in the *Beit ha-Mikdash*.

However, even if the halakhic issues surrounding beat boxing could be resolved, hashkhaic caveats may still remain. R. Bleich points out the need for solemnity in prayer and regards certain types of music inserted in *tefillah* as a “marring” of the service with tunes that generate, “an aura of a concert performance rather than of divine worship.”¹⁵ What, however, is

However, what does the prayer serve if a connection cannot be forged between man and his maker? It only creates a service of distance, which is not conducive to a strong connection between man and God.

the source for the concept of the need for “solemnity of prayer?” In *Orakh Hayim Hilkhos Tefillah* we are advised on how to properly compose oneself during *Shemoneh Esrei* – “one should stand for *tefillah* in fear and submission, not in laughter and levity and busy with meaningless chatter and not in anger, rather in a state of joy.”¹⁶ The emphasis on focus recurs in the discussion about one’s mental state during prayer as “in front of the *shehina*” and one must, “remove all thoughts that ruin his concentration so he can properly pray.”¹⁷ One obligation for prayer is focus, while

one must also be moved in his prayer and interested in participating. The melodies used in *tefillah* serve the purpose of moving one through prayer and keeping him focused. I believe beat boxing could add to participants’ focus by adding rhythm to the service so it is not just the melodically inclined who enjoy the prayer.

The same folio in *Arakhin* mentioned above in reference to song during the bringing of sacrifices mentions the importance of *simha* when involved in the *avodah*, the sacrificial service, the *simha* here referring to the songs the *Leviim* sang during the sacrifices. Interestingly, we see that during this *avodah*, the way *simha* is aroused is through song. The place of song in the house of worship is a common theme in Tanakh as well and is implicit in our tradition. At times embracing song during *tefillah* may remove some of the solemnity associated with asking for something from or singing praise to God. However, what does the prayer serve if a connection cannot be forged between man and his maker? It only creates a service of distance, which is not conducive to a strong connection between man and God. I believe that adding beat boxing into *tefillah* will enhance people’s prayer even if some may see it as a frivolous practice. While it may not be appreciated in certain environments, there are other places of worship that would appreciate a beat-centered addition.

R. Bleich compares the traditional *hazzan* to one who makes prayer into a concert; however, I believe not all concerts present the same feeling or outcome. In the case of the *hazzan* where embellishment and showmanship takes center-stage, the participants in the prayer remain on the sidelines as ancillary parts of the service, and this produces a dry experience for many. This is reminiscent of a classical music concert, where the audience only rises at the end to appreciate the beauty and remains apart the rest of the show. Alternatively, when adding a beat to the music, the *beit kneset* can attain a sense of a participatory concert, in which the community sings along like a group at a concert where everyone knows the songs and stands from start to finish – for those who know, a truly invigorating experience.

Beat box Shabbat lends itself to group participation, and should serve a usually marginalized demographic and interest group. Perhaps it will open people up to a new and reinvigorating mode of prayer. Perhaps *tefillah* with beat boxing can help change the vibes to rock the *beit tefillah*.

Gabi is a senior at YC majoring in English, and recently started studying Semikha at RIETS. He has plans to write more about relevant topics in his future.

1 Goffin, Sherwood; *The Music of the Yamim Noraim*, YU Rosh Hashana To-Go

Tishrei 5769.

- 2 *Shulhan Arukh; Orakh Hayyim*, 619:1
- 3 Yaakov Molin; *Sefer MaHaril*, page 339 se’if 11
- 4 As quoted by Goffin, *ibid.*
- 5 This is not to say all prayer services need beat boxing, rather, if beat boxing can be ruled as halakhically permissible, it would make sense to utilize it in communities that would benefit from its integration into prayer.
- 6 Lamentations 5:21
- 7 Schacter, Hershel; Jubilee Celebration edition of the Belz School
- 8 *Maharam Schik, Orakh Hayyim Siman* 31
- 9 Bleich, J.D., *Contemporary Halakhic Problems* (2), 34
- 10 For example dragging out the word Amen leads to incorrect pronunciation of the word. Another common context for this mistake is when cantors put the emphasis on the beginning versus the end of the word (*mi-leil* and *mil-ra*), which changes the meaning of the words.
- 11 *Magen Avraham* 124:14
- 12 *ibid.*
- 13 *Shulhan Arukh, Orakh Hayyim* 53:11
- 14 Rama, *Orakh Hayyim* 338:1
- 15 Bleich, J.D. *ibid.*
- 16 *Shulhan Arukh, Orakh Hayyim*, 93:2
- 17 *Ibid.* 98:1



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An Interview With Cantor Beer, Head of the Belz School of Jewish Music

BY: DOVI NADEL

Cantor Bernard Beer has been on the staff of the Belz School of Music since 1967, and has been the head of the school since 1985.

DN: When were you inspired to become a professional hazzan (cantor)?

CB: I would say, in a way, I was almost born into it. I lived in Borough Park. In Borough Park in the fifties every synagogue had a *hazzan*. You were surrounded by some of the greatest *hazzanim* too, like the great Moshe and David Koussevitsky. At that time, people were very inspired by the *hazzan*. The majority of people who lived in Borough Park at the time were either from Europe or had parents that were European and grew up with the kind of prayer services that you don't really hear in America today. There were great *hazzanim* and *ba'alei tefillah* who inspired people with their *tefillot*, and with their *nusah* (traditional melodies). I was raised in a home where my father was a well known *baal tefillah*, and he brought this kind of inspiration into our home through *zemirot* and *tefillah*.

DN: Did you have some sort of formal training? Did you learn your tunes from a specific hazzan?

CB: My father taught me how to lead services at my bar mitzvah, a rarity at that time in a large synagogue. I guess it sounded good to people; they made a great fuss over me. By the age of nineteen, I had already been the *hazzan* for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services, even though, at the time, doing so was questionable because I was still young and unmarried [requirements for being a *hazzan*]. When I came to YU, it was only in my third year that I took classes in what was then called the Cantorial Training Institute. Once there, I saw a different world. I wasn't just repeating melodies; I was learning about the musical and liturgical structure of prayer in an academic manner from top-notch teachers.

Dr. Karl Adler was director of the school at the time. He had been the head of a Music conservatory in Germany, and he was forced to flee during the Holocaust. When he arrived in New York in the 1940's, he approached Dr. Belkin about starting a music department at YU. At first, he volunteered his services for a couple of years without salary, until the music department and Cantorial Training Institute were officially founded.

DN: You've mentioned the mesorah of the Belz School of Music, how about the mesorah of Jewish music? How old are some of the melodies

that we sing?

CB: We don't know exactly. They have been passed from father to son for generations. We know that during the time of the Maharil, a leading *posek* and also a great *shaliah tsibbur* in Germany in the 14th century, the state of music in *tefillah* was in disarray. He started the movement to return to the "original melodies." He restored our old melodies and codified our *nusah*. In a way, one could label the time as one of a great renaissance in the *nusah* of prayer.

There are some tunes, whose origins are very old, which we refer to as *mi-Sinai* tunes (melodies from Sinai). Many of the tunes that we sing during the high holidays fall under this category. Melodies such as *Kol Nidrei*, the various tunes for *Kaddish*, and the annual blessings for dew and rain. These melodies are referred to as *mi-Sinai* not because we absolutely know that they go back to the time of Moshe on *Har Sinai*. Rather, we treat the melodies as if they are so sacred that they go back to the days of Sinai.

In truth, the most authentic Jewish melodies in existence probably belong to the Sefaradic Jews. Their melodies may go back to the times of the Beit ha-Mikdash. This was proven by the famous musicologist Abraham Zevi Idelsohn, known to be the first person to prove the existence of Jewish music. In the early 20th century, he travelled around the world recording melodies of the various Sefaradic communities. Idelsohn proved that that many of the Gregorian Chants were borrowed from the music of the Sefaradic Jews.

DN: What are your thoughts on changing tunes or inserting new melodies into prayers?

CB: We do have a problem. People take any tune that they hear, and because it sounds nice, they insert it into prayer. We have fixed tunes. The *mi-Sinai* tunes we mentioned before are also sometimes referred to as "Skarbova" tunes. The word "Skarb" comes from the Polish word meaning "official." These melodies, the ones we mentioned, and many others are the official tunes that can be used for

prayer. These melodies are fixed, and you cannot change them.

You can't do Carlebach for *atah zocher* [part of the High Holiday prayers]. Now, there is nothing wrong with Carlebach; he had some great tunes that really fit the words. But as the Maharil says "*al yishaneh mi-minhag ha-ir afilu ba-niggunim*- one may not change the custom of a community even as to its customary prayer melodies."¹

The Rav, in the 1970's, commenting on the prayer *mi-sod hakhamim* criticized a *hazzan* for using simple tunes instead of the traditional *nusah*. The *nusah* that was handed down from father to son was meant to be an interpretation of the words of prayer. The traditional tunes and the meaning of prayer are lost when the melody is changed.

DN: How do you think music enhances prayer?

CB: Words without music don't jive. It's dry. You need music to inspire.

DN: It's been said, that sometimes a beautiful tune will cause a person to latch on to the melody instead of the prayer's words, do you agree?

CB: Carlebach was a great prayer leader, but if you look at his songs, they do not always seem to fit the words. People, in general do not concentrate on the words.

When we talk about the influence of music on prayer it's important to understand that melody is meant to interpret the text. In other words, the text is supreme. You can't sacrifice the meaning of a text for a nice Carlebach melody. You can sing congregational melodies for almost anything, but the melody should fit the *nusah*. That is what proper *nusah* is all about; it is about making prayer beautiful and understandable.

DN: To what do you attribute the decline of the role of the professional hazzan in tefillah?

CB: Most people feel that they can rely on capable volunteers to lead services. Many, in truth are relatively knowledgeable. They can sing nicely, and they can manage without the *hazzan*. Also, the generation that enjoyed *hazzanut* has dwindled.

But it is also indicative of a major sociological change. People today have no patience, and they are always on the move. Many just want to "get rid of davening" fast. Also, people do not like formality in the synagogue anymore and prefer a more informal davening.

DN: Do you think a return to traditional nusah would fulfill people's spiritual needs in prayer?

CB: People are definitely looking for spirituality in prayer. They are looking for spirituality, but they are not focused in the right direction. People first have to learn the basic *nusah*, it's structure and its historical development in order to appreciate and connect to prayer.

DN: Do you have a favorite melody?

CB: In the last 10 years, I've seen people going back to some of the old classic hassidic tunes. They are beautiful, intricate, and appropriate for the text; I guess those would be among some of my favorites.

DN: Do you have a favorite prayer moment?

CB: "*Hineni*." It is the prayer that the *hazzan* recites immediately before *Mussaf* on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Granted, it's not the most important prayer. It can even be omitted. According to some, only certain parts are actually recited out loud. The prayer is inspiring though. It is meant for the *hazzan* to humble himself before God, and to ask for the strength of mind and voice to properly represent the congregation in prayer although he feels unworthy.

DN: Any last comments to YU students?

CB: Today, people need to learn how to read and understand prayers properly. They need guidance to learn what proper *nusah* is, where it comes from, and what it means. It's amazing. Nowadays, children need to be *talmidei hakhamim* by the third grade, but their *yeshivot* end up missing the basics. They don't teach them how to pray properly. Knowing how to pray and to use one's voice properly should be a goal for everyone. Just as Torah is not meant only for rabbis, but for everyone in the world, *nusah* is not meant only for *hazzanim*, it is for every single Jew who wants to cultivate a meaningful and genuine connection to God through prayer.

1 Shulhan Arukh; Orakh Hayyim, 619:1

Creative Arts

Images and information provided by the Yeshiva University Museum



Impressionism and Jewish Art

BY: JOSHUA SKOOTSKY

I had something I painted from my window in Le Havre: the sun in the fog and in the foreground some masts sticking up. They wanted to know its title for the catalogue; [because] it couldn't really pass for a view of Le Havre. I replied, 'Use *Impression*.' Someone derived 'Impressionism' from it and that's when the fun began.¹

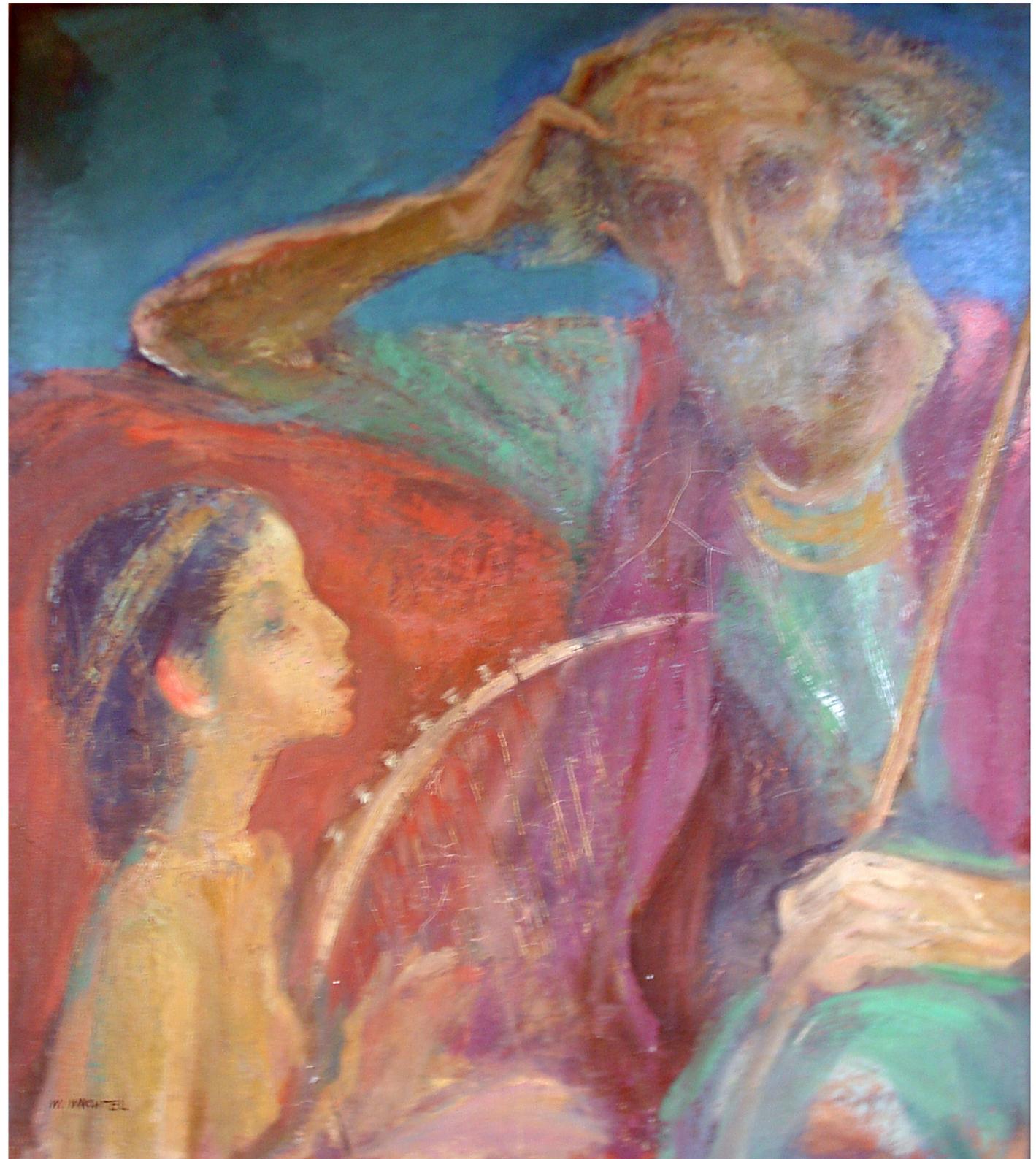
- Claude Monet

During World War II, Erich Auerbach, a German-Jewish professor of Philology, took refuge in Turkey, and wrote his masterwork, a collection of essays analyzing almost all of Western literature, titled *Mimesis*. The first essay, *Odysseus' Scar*,² compares the narrative structure of two examples from two literary traditions of antiquity: Greece and Israel, drawing on Homer's *Odyssey*, and the *Akeidah* narrative from Genesis 22:1-19. In the *Odyssey*, "no contour is blurred... [the story is] orderly, perfectly well-articulated... brightly and uniformly illuminated, men and things stand out in a realm where everything is visible."³ Literarily, Homer paints a picture exquisitely and uniformly, clearly, even copiously, defining events, people, and places. Auerbach asserts "The digressions are not meant to keep the reader in suspense, but rather to relax the tension."⁴

In contrast, the *Akeidah* narrative depends on the blurring effect created by the economy of detail. "God says, 'Take Isaac, thine only son, whom thou lovest.' ... he may be handsome or ugly, intelligent or stupid, tall or short, pleasant or unpleasant – we are not told. Only what we need to know about him as a character in the action, here and now, is illuminated."⁵ We are only told about the crux of the story: Isaac's intense significance to Abraham. Extraneous details are omitted, and we never wander amidst the individual trees, unable to see the forest. The *gestalt* lies before our eyes, and we always feel the arc of the narrative.

II

Paintings tell stories. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a 19th-Century artistic movement based in England, gorgeously



detailed their deliberately complex compositions, showing us each unique tree of the narrative forest in its own light, shade, and texture. The effect stuns the viewer. In Sir John Everett Millais' painting *Ophelia* (c. 1852, part of the permanent collection of the Tate Britain),⁶ the exquisite detail lavished on every lily, leaf, and flower causes the viewer to forget the larger narrative significance of Ophelia floating down the river. We see a suicide, but we do not feel grieved at the sight of a life cut short. Combined with her unpaired, beatific facial expression, *Ophelia* deliberately focuses our attention away from the larger narrative context, despite the decision to anchor the painting in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Auerbach's analysis, written for the *Odyssey*, could easily be transposed onto *Ophelia*: "The broadly narrated, charming, and subtly fashioned story... with all its elegance and self-sufficiency, its wealth of idyllic pictures, seeks to... make him forget what had just taken place."⁷ Since I have linked the *Odyssey* with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the *Akeidah*, too, should be able to be linked to a style of painting that uses the blurring of detail to tell a story.

The blurred lines and the suppression of detail in an Impressionistic painting, in which aspects of the piece blend together, creates a united work, telling a story without distracting details. For example, Joseph Turner's *Whalers* (1845, now in the Wolfe collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art),⁸ focuses the viewer on the elemental power of the ocean and the whale. To depict the hunt with every wooden plank's grain and every bubble in the sea would take away from the focus on natural forces, in the same way that a discursion on Isaac's hair color would disrupt the narrative tension of the *Akeidah*. For an artist, visual or lyrical, concealing and revealing are two sides of the same coin.

III

Samuel Hirzenberg's oil painting, *Miriam's Song*, (from the collections of the Yeshiva University Museum) uses a palate somewhat similar to Turner's *Whalers*, but restrains the use of detail to accomplish a very different goal. In the center, set against a dazzling white background, a thin arm triumphantly holds up a tambourine. This identifies the woman as the biblical Miriam; "Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing" (Exodus 15:20, NIV). Perhaps already hinted to by its warm, earthy tones, *Miriam's Song* emphasizes both the humans depicted and their display of human emotions. The background was deliberately blurred to focus our attention on the more sharply defined humans. The artist could have chosen to show in great detail all of their clothing and jewelry, or to show the sea whipped into a fury. Instead,



we see only a few people, and only enough of them to fit into the focus of the very human salvation. Outstretched arms in worship or adoration, a few figures bow on their hands and knees, and more join in Miriam's song. The figures are clothed like Hebrews who left Egypt, but Hirzenberg lavishes only just enough detail to set the scene. The Impressionistic painting style once again prevents the trees from obscuring the forest.

Reuven Rubin's oil painting, *The Flute Player*, uses an even brighter palette than *Miriam's Song*, the warm pinks and reds balancing with the cooler blues and purples, and the background is even less defined. There is no solid suggestion that anything independent of the flute player exists, the "background" a shadowy aura surrounding and reflecting the central figure. We see energy coming from the bright clothing and joyous features of the flutist, the clearly defined, textured, and lined face and flute dissolving into the misty, ethereal light. The motion and mystery are created by the deliberate decision not to paint in a photorealistic style.

We continue to see the effect of an Impressionistic style to emphasize certain elements in Wilhelm Wachtel's oil painting, *David*



Playing for King Saul. The heart of the painting is the contrast between the tired old man, Saul, and the boyishly youthful David. The musical harp in David's hands, and the royal scepter in Saul's, serve to identify the figures, and to establish the dramatic tension between the two. Saul's eyes look into ours, perhaps knowing, like us, that the boy will one day take his throne. Saul wears a royal purple vest, but David is surrounded by a field of red, and Saul's arm seems to be holding the blue away. When his arm grows weak, the red and blue will mix, and a new royal purple will emerge. If Wachtel had adopted a more detailed, realistic style, it would have created an additional level of artistic interpretation, which would have necessarily distracted us from the dramatic human tension underlying the painting. The smoky,

imperfect lens of the Impressionistic style, wielded by skilled artists, can paradoxically allow us to see more clearly. Good painting - and good narrative - does not always have to be photographic.

Joshua is a junior majoring in Chemistry at YC.

1 Diane Kelder, *The Great Book of French Impressionism*, (Abbeville Press Publishers, New York, 1980, Second Abbeville Edition),

125.

2 Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus's Scar," in Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask. (Princeton: Doubleday Anchor, 1953, repr. 1974) available at: www.westmont.edu.

3 Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," *Mimesis*.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 available at: www.tate.org.uk.

7 Ibid.

8 available at: www.metmuseum.org.