ORALITY AS RELIGIOUS IDEAL: *THE MUSIC OF EAST-EUROPEAN JEWISH PRAYER*

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THE PROBLEM OF CONNECTING ORALITY TO THE CONCEPTUALIZATION AND STRUCTURE OF MUSIC

Since the nineteenth century, largely as a consequence of German Romantic aesthetics, the study of art has looked upon the process of copying with an unsympathetic eye. For the German Romantics, the use of any pre-existent element in an artwork precluded the presence of genius; in a sense, copying was diametrically opposed to art.[1] According to this notion, artistic creation was the property of genius and the

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This article is one of two "twin-articles" elaborating on related aspects of the traditional musical practice of the Jewish communities of East Europe: because of this, some basic notions have to be defined in both. Nevertheless, the main arguments of these articles are quite different and can be understood independently. The present article discussing the religious grounds for the orality, which dictates the individuality of prayer performance, while the other explaining the inseparable unity of text and music as representative of a philosophical concept of wholeness. See Frigyesi (2000).

1 A good summary of the development of the organicist theory can be found in Abrams (1958). An interesting introduction to the major philosophical issues of organicism can be found in Todorov (1982). In a recent article of mine, I elaborated on the significance of this theory for the conception of modern music. See also Frigyesi (1998).

artwork was born of necessity, by the force of nature. This concept negated the temporal nature of art. Once completed, an artwork was frozen in time, so to speak; every subsequent variant of it was necessarily viewed as an imitation, that is, as being corrupt. As a consequence of this attitude, great compositions of music — such as those of Beethoven — were often imagined as an abstract idea in the mind of the artist and that idea was believed to be inexpressible in any real form. To this thinking, performance, and even notation, were only pale approximations of the original idea.[2]

The assumed dichotomy between the true artwork and the copy greatly influenced the study of oral cultures. Orally transmitted poetry and music ranked lower than western art, mainly for two reasons. On one hand, the notion that an artwork had a single most perfect form discredited performance and transmission as carriers of the artistic idea. Orality was seen as being incapable of preserving faithfully the original form of the work, in fact, many scholars considered the very notion of 'the perfect artwork' to be the invention of the Western mind and incongruous with orality.[3] On the other hand, the individuality of the performance, contradicting such immutability, was seen as a mere outcome of practice. Variations that occurred in performance were not thought to be the expression of an intentional, communal aesthetic but rather as a necessary by-product of the limitations of memory. Thus literary and musical cultures which were transmitted exclusively without

2 This thought provided the conceptual framework for the by now widely applied methods of textual criticism and editions of "Urtext." The ideal aim of Urtext editions is to reflect the authorial intentions manifest in the work. The goal of the editor of a critical edition is to purify the piece from the "contamination" introduced by institutions, previous editors, publishers and performers. An interesting discussion of this problem can be found in McGann (1983). Blum (1973).

3 This idea is clearly expressed in the works of Parry and Lord and became part of what is known in the discipline as the "Parry-Lord theory" after their works regarding Homeric and Serbo-Croatian epic. See especially Lord (1968). Their theory was developed against the background discussion of whether the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were the composition of a single author or a composite construction of different layers. The studies of Parry and Lord demonstrated that the "formulaic" nature of Homer's style was similar to the oral compositions of Serbo-Croatian epic. Their approach had been widely accepted, and many scholars have continued to apply similar oral-formulaic analysis to texts of all kinds. For a summary, history and criticism of the Parry-Lord theory, see the chapter "Composition" and particularly the section "How valid is the formulaic theory?" in Finnegan (1992: 52–87, 69–87).

writing were relegated to the periphery of art: they were considered to be 'primitive' or 'folk'.[4]

In such a scholarly argumentation, the very notion of orality seems problematic and its discussion has by now generated an enormous body of literature. At the heart of this problem is the disbelief in the potential of memory. Can we, indeed, talk about exact repetition, in the case of orally transmitted music and literature? Is it possible to speak of a perfected artwork in the case of a piece that ceases to exist at the moment it is completed? And finally, is it imaginable that complex forms can be memorized and transmitted without change?

The disadvantage of treating orality in this manner was that it approached issues of transmission and structure with a preconceived idea about the limitations of orality. The structural aspects of individual pieces as well as variational procedures occurring in the course of transmission were expected to show traits of what was thought to be the marks of oral composition: frequent repetition, formulaic structure, variation confined to a type and the like. The various theoretical analyses of folk style and structures have viewed orality as the single most significant factor in shaping style. Thus essential aspects of artistic practice, such as individual and communal taste, creative power, aesthetic framework, tradition, ritualistic functions, etc. were all relegated to the background. Orality was not seen as one element in a complex web of cultural decisions but as the key in explaining how these cultures worked. Not until the late 1970s was this focus dismissed by scholars, among others by the comprehensive study of Ruth Finnigan (1992), which concluded that the delineation between the oral and the written cannot be drawn so easily. She successfully demonstrated that patterns of repetition, style and structure are not in themselves indicative of the mode of transmission: while pieces performed from memory often tend to be formulaic and partially improvised, these features are neither prerequisites of the oral cultures nor exclusively limited to them.[5]

4 Although I am discussing here a general theory of orality, it should be noted that there are great differences between the practice of verbal arts and music. An excellent summary of this problem can be found in Powers (1980: 1–60; 1993: 5–17) and also Feld (1974: 197–217). Nevertheless, the models of oral poetry had been often used to explain musical phenomena, especially the transmission of Gregorian Chant. In most of the musicological writings, however, even when scholars accept the relevance of Lord and Parry's theory, they also realize its limitations for the study of music. See Treitler (1981; 1974, 1994), Hucke (1981) and Jeffrey (1992).

5 See especially chapter 1, 4, and 5 in Finnegan (1992).

In fact, it is extremely difficult to relate the lack of writing directly to the alleged absence of artistic decisions. It appears that virtually anything that is possible to invent is also possible memorize, especially if we consider collective memory. An infinite number of examples could be cited to show the amazing potential of human memory: from the near memorization of the Torah and the Talmud within Jewish culture to the enormous repertoires remembered by blind pianists. In fact, we have ample evidence to suggest that, typically, memorization is found to be easier than original invention. In some oral cultures, the memorization of a body of material is considered a lower stage in the process of learning, the first step toward the art of improvisation. Of course, one should not underestimate the great intellectual demand of memorization and its effect on practices of art. But no longer can we assume *a priori* that orality would be the primary reason for the development of certain practices and structures. And, certainly, there is no universal paradigm of orality that could be applied to all oral cultures.

THE FLEXIBILITY OF EAST-EUROPEAN (EAST-ASHKENAZI) JEWISH LITURGICAL MUSIC — THE SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

It was necessary to elaborate on these points in order to put the study of traditional East-Ashkenazi Jewish liturgical music into proper perspective.[6] It is tempting to interpret patterns of transmission of Jewish liturgy as resulting from the dichotomy of written and oral. The text of the liturgy is fixed in writing and, during the service, the words are recited exactly the way they are written. However, the melodies for reciting these texts are rarely fixed. It would be natural to think, and it is indeed casually assumed in most studies, that the reason music has not been transmitted with the same precision as text, is that, traditionally, it had not been notated.

The tendency for variation, improvisation and re-arranging of East-Ashkenazi liturgical music is not an accidental by-product of oral transmission. I believe, rather, that the contrary is the case: orality was not the cause but the result of the flexibility of liturgical music. This flexibility was brought about by a common desire, among the East-

6 We can refer to the Ashkenazi Jews living east of the German speaking cultural region as East-Ashkenazi Jews. The territories of the East-Ashkenazi Jews could be further divided into West (Poland, Hungary, and to some extent Transylvania) and East (the Jewish territories of Russia and Romania).

Ashkenazi Jews, to allow for multiple expressive potentialities in the prayer. As we shall see, it was in this flexibility itself, that the idea of prayer, as the vessel of infinite ways of personal devotional expressions, became realized.

The musical system I am describing here relates to the core musical culture of the East-European Orthodox Jews, as it was commonly known among the traditional communities of that territory before World War II. From a musical point of view, I regard here as "traditional" those communities in which all (or almost all) elements of the liturgy are part of a communal practice, and where religious texts are learned and read exclusively with chant. Accordingly, I do not deal here with the post-World War II practice of the Orthodox and Conservative branches of the Ashkenazi communities in Europe, Israel and America, nor with the institutionalized, professional cantorial music.[7] My topic is an older communal tradition which was prevalent in eastern Europe and which could be called "liturgical folk music." I use the word traditional for this practice because this is how my informants generally referred to such practice.

It is not easy to draw the exact boundaries of this tradition. Even though this conceptualization of music appears to be the "mainstream" among the Orthodox communities before World War II (effecting the life of millions of Jews in East Europe), it could not have been practiced uniformly and with the same intensity among all the East-Ashkenazim. It is also difficult to decide what tense to use when speaking about this culture; in certain regards it belongs to the past, to the religious life of

7 I cannot deal in this article with the relationship between the musical practices of all those communities whose musical systems developed within the context of the traditional East-Ashkenazi practice which I describe here. In spite of significant similarities, the conceptualization of music is often markedly different among those various communities which regard themselves to be part of the Ashkenazi tradition today. The practice of many of the American Ashkenazi Orthodox communities, for instance, differs from its traditional East-Ashkenazi counterpart in most of those concepts which are discussed in this article. In fact, some of the attitudes typical of the older East-European practice are unacceptable and would be considered "wrong" by many of the American Orthodox Jews today. Most conspicuously, the relationship of the modern communities to liturgical text is different from those of the East-European communities, clearly because Hebrew today is regarded, by most Orthodox Jews, not only as a liturgical, sacred language but also as vernacular. Whereas, in the East-European practice, religious texts were always "read" together with chant, in the modern American Orthodox practice, even when communal knowledge of the liturgy is present, liturgical texts are normally taught, read and analyzed without music, at least at some stage of the curriculum. For other, significant differences, it is useful to compare the practice I describe here with what is analyzed in Slobin (1989).

those East-European Jews whose culture had been destroyed during the Holocaust. Yet some of these attitudes are alive. They are perpetuated to some extent by Orthodox communities, especially but not exclusively, in Israel and among Hasidic Jews[8] on several continents. Individuals remember the musical practice of such pre-war communities even though the communities often do not exist any more. Although this tradition is often spoken about as "Orthodox," we have to remember that the use of this word reflects a nineteenth-century division among different streams of Judaism. Historically speaking, the religious practice that we call today Orthodox was not a separate branch within Judaism, nor was it an extremely rigid manner of religious adherence but the central and typical trend of the Jewish religion in East Europe.

It is equally difficult to decide on a proper use of gender. In the following, I will uniformly use 'he' for the third person singular, only because of the awkwardness of the now customary he/she form. The art of prayer recitation was practiced more consistently and usually on a higher level by men but it was by no means the property of men alone. In an Orthodox environment, women prayed in essentially the same manner and, in some large synagogues, the women's section had a separate woman precentor.[9] However, we have no information as to how

8 Even though some of the aspects of the religious life of the East-Ashkenazim were most clearly conceptualized in Hassidic thought, the religious practice described in this article cannot be viewed as belonging to the Hassidic communities alone and, as we shall see, it is unlikely that it had been created by the Hassidic movement. It seems rather that certain ideas of Jewish faith and philosophy became concentrated in Hassidism and, were then re-generated and perpetuated by the movement. It had a great influence on the East-Ashkenazi world at large, providing a source for religious and moral beliefs for the entire Jewish population, even for the assimilated and secular Jews.

9 There is evidence already from the Middle Ages, that Jewish families also considered it important to educate the girls in religious matters. See Kanarfogel (1992: 16, 38–39). I have heard of the practice of women precentors in several Orthodox synagogues in Budapest. I could record prayers only with one woman, Mrs. József Oberländer, neé Éva Rosenberg. Besides my recordings in 1993, she was recorded and interviewed by several others earlier. She explained to me that in the Jewish community in Szatmárcseke, where she was born and raised, women used to pray the same manner as men and her father considered it very important that her sisters knew the prayers as well as her brothers. The community of Szatmárcseke was a Hungarian-speaking, non-Hassidic Orthodox community which, according to her, lived in complete harmony with the Hungarians of the village. Mrs. Oberländer has a large repertoire of Hungarian folk songs which she used to sing together with her Jewish girlfriends. (In spite of the efforts of the sympathetic Christian inhabitants of Szatmárcseke, its Jewish community was entirely destroyed during the Holocaust. Mrs. Oberländer, who lives now in Debrecen, is the only survivor.)

exactly women precentors, and women in general, performed the prayers: whether they used the same or different melodies or recited the prayers in the most simple recitation tones. As far as I could establish, women did not practice cantorial art.

My conclusions are based on fieldwork carried out in Hungary, the Czech Republic and France since 1977. The majority of my informants were raised in Hungarian-speaking, non-Hasidic, Orthodox communities in small villages but moved to larger cities after the Holocaust. In the narrowest sense, my findings are valid for the tradition of this group alone. It is obvious, nevertheless, that the conceptual basis of this tradition is representative of the musical practice of the Ashkenazi communities of East Europe in general, and to a lesser extent of the Ashkenazi tradition in its broadest sense, including the German-speaking Jews of central and western Europe. In fact, some of these musical concepts may be universal among Jews the world over. Nevertheless, it seems to me at this stage of my research that the aspects of the religious practice discussed here present themselves in a more concentrated and intense manner among the East-European communities than among other Jewish groups. At any rate, the multiplicity of Jewish religious practices makes it necessary to limit one's focus to a particular area. Hence, in the following, I will talk about my finding as belonging to the East-Ashkenazim, leaving open the question of its relevance to other branches of Judaism. It will be the task of further research to define more precisely which one of these musical concepts may be practiced elsewhere among other Jewish communities.

In the existing studies, the flexibility of Jewish music has not been taken into account, nor has the significance of this flexibility to Jewish thought been discussed. Within musicological studies, Ashkenazi liturgical music has been treated as a 'repertoire' in which different musical performances were presented as variant musical renditions of a given textual excerpt. Whereas such an approach is justifiable in some cases, it does not help us understand the forces that govern the musical culture as a whole. Often the comparison of textually identical segments from different performances can tell us little of the nature of the musical decisions behind them, and such comparisons, in fact, could be misleading. East-Ashkenazi musical practice is flexible to such a degree that it demands a different method of comparative analysis in which the styles of individuals and entire services as integral wholes are compared

to each other alongside with the comparison of selected segments of performances.[10]

Only with regard to prayer can we speak of such flexibility and in that, the prayer is markedly separate from other recitations that occur during the public service. The cantillation of the Bible — leinen, as the East-Ashkenazi communities call it — has a strictly defined melody, musical structure, and performance style. It is set apart from the rest of the service by an introductory and closing ceremony. The purpose of the public reading of Scripture is primarily teaching. By this liturgical act, the congregation fulfills the obligation of listening to God's word as expressed in the Pentateuch (Torah) and in the Prophetic portions *(haftarah)*, or is manifest in other books of the Hebrew Bible. Hence the congregational role is limited to active listening. As the reader chants the text according to the traditional patterns, the members of the congregation follow by reading the text silently.

Contrary to *leinen*, the texts of the prayers, which account for the rest of the service, are recited by each member of the community. This recitation is carried out individually, but concurrently, in a non-coordinated, heterophonic manner. The need for coordinating the flow of the service and the demand that certain prayers be heard by each member of the congregation necessitate the office of the precentor. In the Ashkenazi rite, the precentor normally recites aloud often the beginning and almost always the last verses of psalms and other texts, the conclusion of certain benedictions, and, according to local practice, some other sections. He repeats all the benedictions of the *ʿamidah* for the sake of those who are incapable of reciting it properly. Essentially, the precentor is praying as an individual and there is not always a sharp dividing line between his style of recitation and that of the members of the community. In an Orthodox community any congregant could assume, and is occasionally entrusted, with the role of the precentor.

In Jewish worship, the obligation of the individual is to read the statutory prayers at prescribed times and preferably in the presence of the congregation. There are no requirements for performing the texts

10 Because of the complexity of this musical system, it is not feasible to illustrate my points with musical examples. In a sense, the arguments put forward on the following pages are a summary and, to some extent, a conceptual reinterpretation, of previous studies by other scholars and myself. In the following, I will refer to these studies with pointing out exactly which musical examples and analyses in these articles support my statement.

other than proper pronunciation of the words. Hence the question is not only why certain musical practices developed, but more significantly, whether musical choices have any religious significance or even whether music is at all necessary for proper worship from a religious point of view.

THE PROBLEM OF TEXTUAL AND MUSICAL GENRES

The musical aspect of a ritual is always more than the collection of all of its musical items. The transcendental meaning of ritual is expressed with and achieved through performance; ritual is always a performance acted out in time and this acting out has an auditory aspect. In its structuring of time by auditory means, ritual can be likened to a large-scale musical drama whose power derives from the contrasts, the developments and recapitulations in subsequent sections. It is typical for religious rituals that while the actual musical pieces may change, the large-scale structure of the service remains more or less fixed, and thus the sequence of musical-textual genres is stable. This concept can be found in rituals as different as the ceremony of the Mevlevi dervishes, the Zuni Katchina ceremony, or the Hungarian peasant funeral.[11] The case of the medieval services of the Catholic Church is illustrative of this common concept. For instance, it was typical to find in the Vespers, among other items of lesser musical significance, the sequence of five Psalms with five Antiphons, Chapter, Hymn, Versicle, the Magnificat with Antiphon. These genres normally differed in the style of their text as well as in the style and form of their melody (and presumably performance practice). It is important to realize that both the text and the music changed with each service, that is, different antiphons and different hymns were performed at different occasions. What did not change, however, was the

11 These rituals (which come from very different social environments and have different functions and artistic framework) are especially illuminating in regard to this situation since, in all of them, composition and/or extensive improvisation is greatly encouraged and sometimes essential to certain sections of the ritual. Yet these improvisations/compositions occur within a stable large-scale musical form. See Tedlock (1980; 1986), Kiss and Rajeczky (1966: 77–107). I am especially indebted to Dr. Walter Feldman for his generous help in explaining for me the musical structure of the Mevlevi dervish ceremony. I am also thankful to Cinuçen Tanrıkorur, composer and performer of the musical pieces *(ayin)* of the Mevlevi ceremony, for sharing with me his experiences of composition. A summary of the basic structure of the *ayin* can be found in Signell (1986: 18).

overall form of the service. Hence, in spite of the great variety of texts and compositions used, there was certain stability to the auditory experience, ensured by the more or less fixed sequence of musical styles.[12]

Like other rituals, the Jewish service could be described as a large-scale musical piece, which is structured through the alternation of musical/performing styles.[13] In the course of the service, transition from one musical style to another often has an almost dramatic effect as, for instance, when speech-like recitation is followed by highly ornamental and elaborate melodic improvisation. The most traditional aspect of the

12 The tradition of Gregorian Chant has to be viewed also as a dynamic musical culture rather than a fixed repertoire. It had been documented that not only melodic variations were common, but the order of pieces and, in cases, the order of genres within the same service followed local practices. See, for instance, the study of the research group of the "History of Monophony" of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and their effort to provide a computerized catalogue of the local practices of chant liturgy in Central Europe (Dobszay and Prószéki 1988). Nevertheless, variations notwithstanding, there existed a typical sequence of textual-musical genres used widely among the Christian communities. More important, however, the form of the service was always conceptualized in terms liturgical genres.

13 There had been no previous study of these styles. They could be roughly divided into two major groups:
(1) flowing-rhythm recitation which is performed by each individual and by the precentor in a simultaneous but independent fashion and
(2) metric and strophic songs which are typically performed in a co-ordinated manner, by the congregation together.
Within both of these categories, but especially within the recitation, several clearly distinguishable sub-styles exist.
Within the sphere of recitation the following further sub-divisions could be made:
(1) silent, barely audible reading (as the congregation's reading of the *ʿamidah*)
(2 almost speechlike, quasi non-musical, fast recitation (as the mourner's *qaddish*)
(3) simple melodic recitation on few notes without much melodic elaboration or structuring except for a sequence of lines (typical in services of lesser importance such as the weekday services or when the service is performed by the individual alone at home)
(4) the same as (3) with somewhat more elaborate melody and occasional quasi-strophic structuring (same function as above)
(5) melodic types often in a quasi-strophic form with more or less fixed overall melodic outline, typical rhythmic and melodic patterns but with ample ground for individual versions and improvisation (as in the *hallel* and many sections of the Sabbath evening and morning service)
(6)variation on the basis of more or less (melodically and rhythmically) fixed pieces associated with particular texts and function (typically the High Holy Day melodies including the so-called *Missinai* tunes)
(7) *ḥazzanut*: highly ornamental and melodically elaborate, personal improvisation based on or replacing any of the above styles.

Jewish service is perhaps the adherence to a large number of musical styles and to certain patterns of contrast created by their sequence.

But it is a peculiarity of the East-European Jewish tradition that, although the musical styles used in the service are more or less stable, neither their sequence, nor their association with a particular textual types are fixed. The various musical styles cannot correspond to liturgical or textual genres, for such genres do not really exist. It is true that the texts of the prayers are of diverse origin, style and language, including psalms, biblical passages, ancient prayer texts and blessings, and medieval religious poetry.[14] But as these diverse texts were rearranged and extended into the now accepted form of statutory prayers, the original boundaries of genres got lost and yet no new textual groupings developed. Prayers are known as individual, separate entities, such as the *šema*ᶜ or the ᶜ*amidah*, and there is no consistent sub-grouping within the generic category of prayer to which these or any other prayers would belong.[15]

In the East-Ashkenazi worship, unlike most rituals, the recurring aspect of the service is not its overall form but the text itself. For instance, the morning service of Sabbath has essentially the same prayers each week and similarly, the texts of all the other services are prescribed. Moreover, the core of all services consists of the same prayers. There is no statutory public service which does not include the prayer called the

14 Sometimes various biblical passages are combined and, often with the addition of other texts, together form a prayer. For instance, the closing blessing of the morning *shema* contains sections from the Pentateuch and from Isaiah; the opening acclamation of the prayer ᶜ*amidah* is a psalmodic verse; the sequence of Psalms 113–118 (with additional blessings) form a separate prayer known as the *hallel*. Some of these texts and textual arrangements might have functioned as prayers already at the Second Temple period and have been known as one textual unit since antiquity.

15 For instance, in the service, psalm texts are used in various combinations and, as part of the prayers thus created, these texts do not have a unified musical style. Psalm texts, which occur at various points of the liturgy, are performed in a variety of styles, none of which is particular to the psalms alone. The word 'psalmody' is often used to describe a musical structure which is similar to the stylized patterns of psalm recitation of Gregorian chant. This structure involves the succession of two similar musical lines both with an extended section of recitation on one note or note-group and with an opening and closing ending respectively (similar to antecedent and consequent). Even though the term 'psalmody' has been widely accepted in reference to this structural pattern in Ashkenazi music, its use is merely a musicological convenience. Unlike Gregorian chant, this structure cannot be associated with the performance of the psalm texts only (or even primarily), nor are psalm texts necessarily performed in this manner.

ᶜamidah or *tefillah* ('prayer' *par excellence*).[16] Furthermore, there are services which consist mainly of this prayer, as the *minḥah* (afternoon prayer), *musaf* (additional service) for Sabbath and other festive occasions, and the *neᶜilah* (the concluding service for the Day of Atonement). In the morning and evening services, however, the reading of the *šemaᶜ* precedes that of the *ᶜamidah* and also other prayers are added. Essentially, the textual differences among various services involve additions to and omissions from these and other core prayers. As a result, the majority of the texts are common to all services and only a relatively small percentage of the text is particular to one service alone.

The musical rendering of liturgical texts, however, varies with each service. The same words of the *ᶜamidah* are recited one way on weekdays, differently at each service of the Sabbath and again in a unique manner at each Holy Day. Hence, liturgical function is expressed in both textual and musical variations, by textual additions and omissions on the one hand, and by the musical presentation of these texts, on the other. However, in the case of the core texts, which remain the same with each service, it is the musical aspect that defines the liturgical function. As an American cantor explained, remembering the atmosphere of the synagogues of his childhood:

> When I was a child, even if you were dumb and blind and couldn't smell but you could hear — you could go to *shul* [synagogue] and find out what day of the week, what season of the year [because of the music that was used].[17]

THE FLEXIBILITY OF MUSIC: THE NOTION OF THE *NUSAḤ*

Since music is of primary importance in defining function, one would expect little change among different performances of the same liturgical section. In order for one to be able to distinguish between religious occasions on the basis of music alone (for they may have the same text), the music has to be easily recognizable and hence fairly stable, executed similarly everywhere and at each performance. But this is not at all the case. We find that services differ greatly with respect to each individual

16 The *ᶜamidah* (i.e. the prayer recited while standing) is also popularly referred to as *šemoneh-ᶜesreh* (Eighteen [benedictions]) although the number of benedictions is nineteen on weekdays, seven on the Sabbath and Holy Days and nine in the *musaf* service of Rosh Hashanah.

17 After Slobin (1989: 258).

segment of the text as well as to the overall form of the entire service. The musical executions are dissimilar to such a degree that the same service could last for two hours in one community and an entire morning in the other.

But for all these differences, the music is capable of expressing its liturgical function by adherence to a melodic–rhythmic framework that is associated with particular services and prayers and usually referred to as *nusaḥ*.[18] There is a general consensus in traditional communities that, except when the text is performed as a congregational song, the melody has to follow the *nusaḥ* proper to the given liturgical function. However, in attempting to define what exactly the word *nusaḥ* means in musical terms, one encounters great difficulties. As is common to oral musical cultures without a professional or theoretical tradition, musical ideas are verbalized only with great difficulty and musical terms are used in a rather ambiguous manner, even if the practice they describe is not ambiguous. In the common usage, *nusaḥ* means the traditional way (of singing) according to the given liturgical function and local custom, and this definition is as imprecise as the usage of the word itself. Does 'traditional way' refer to the tradition of the given community, the region, the cantor or the entire Jewish world? Does it mean the standardization of the melody, the tonal structure, the rhythmic or performing style?

I have encountered *nusaḥ* used to mean any one and any combination of the above interpretations. One precentor explained to me that a cantor always deviates from the *nusaḥ* occasionally — "he steps out of it," as he said — but only in order to highlight his returning to it. According to him, the capacity of "going in and out of the *nusaḥ*" is the mark of a great cantor.[19] But when I discussed this with another precentor, he disagreed: "He was wrong in saying that he steps out of the *nusaḥ*. One only steps out of the melody, that is, from the motives of recitation, and one improvises perhaps to the extent that the melody can no longer be recognized. But in his head, he still follows the *nusaḥ*.

18 The term *nusaḥ* is largley missing from cantorial treatises of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although we can suppose that the usage of the word for musical practice had been in use. The cantorial treatises usually analyze the melodies according to scales. A bibliography and short overview of these works can be found in chapter 16 of A. Z. Idelsohn (1929).

19 Interview with Jenő Róth, Budapest, 1977.

Because one never leaves the *nusaḥ*." But then, after pausing for a while, he added. "Well, it may happen that one leaves the *nusaḥ* entirely for a while. When one tries to express something unusual, one can just go away. But even then, one has it somewhere in the back of his mind and will return to it."[20] Both precentors described the same musical practice, only the first identified *nusaḥ* with the simple basic melody, while the second considered a broad range of possible improvisations to be still the *nusaḥ*.

However, two things are clear. First, *nusaḥ* always means musical framework, that is, it is neither an entirely fixed melody, nor entirely free invention. Second, the musical meaning of *nusaḥ* changes with each liturgical function. For instance, in the case of some of the High Holy Day melodies, *nusaḥ* means an almost entirely fixed melodic progression which is executed only with minor variations and added ornaments. In other cases, as for instance in the case of the *hallel*, the *nusaḥ* is essentially a melody type. In the recitation of *minḥah* for the Sabbath, *nusaḥ* is used to mean a very general tonal-rhythmic outline and a few typical melodic patterns that could be realized in multiple ways in the performance. For someone unfamiliar with this tradition, various realizations of the same *nusaḥ* may seem to be entirely unrelated melodies but in these realizations, the members of the community feel the same basic musical idea, a kind of latent background.[21]

As long as the *nusaḥ* is adhered to, the text could be recited in almost any manner within the framework of traditional recitative styles. The precentor is almost always free to improvise his own melodic version of the *nusaḥ*. But quite often he has much more freedom than that; he may choose any other of the traditional musical styles thus changing the melody, tempo, rhythm, form, the articulation of the text as well as the overall emotional effect of the performance. He may perform the same prayer as a simple, almost speech-like reading, as a more melodious and structured recitative, or as an elaborate cantorial fantasy. He can also

20 Interview with Zoltán Simon, Budapest 1978.

21 These techniques and usages of the *nusaḥ* are demonstrated in several articles mentioned above. The question "what constitutes the notion of *nusaḥ* in seemingly very different melodies" was the topic of several of my articles where I discussed this problem through the analyses of a number of musical examples. See especially Frigyesi and Laki (1979/80) and Frigyesi (1982/83 and 1993).

dispense with the recitative entirely and replace it with a metric song.[22] This means that not only the melodic outline is different with each performance but the basic musical style could also be changed resulting in radically different overall musical forms.

Naturally, respect for tradition as well as practical considerations put limits on the cantor's personal invention. Not every service is flexible to the same degree. In the High Holy Day services, for instance, there is ample occasion for melodic variation but relatively few possibilities for essential tonal or structural changes. Since these services are performed only once a year, the traditional melodies that highlight their memorable texts are regarded as so important that it is inconceivable that anyone would dispense with them.[23] In contrast, the weekday services leave little room for original invention, because of their relative unimportance. For instance, in some communities it is customary, although by no means necessary, to perform one elaborate improvisation in the midst of quick recitations during the weekday morning service; this is usually done in order to honor a guest or a member of the congregation recently deceased. But it would be unacceptable to have the entire service performed in such a manner, for the simple reason that the congregation would be late for work.

The primary occasion for individual invention is the Sabbath service — naturally, because the Sabbath is the only regularly recurring holy day. But here, too, there are many limitations. On the whole, the cantor should follow the tradition of the community, introducing new elements only gradually and always with a good sense of proportion with regard to each of the traditional styles. In all these, local tradition should be respected. In some regions, many metric tunes are sung during the service, while elsewhere the basic style is recitative. Certain East-Ashkenazi Orthodox communities prefer the simple recitative style for most of the services while others include many elaborate, ornamental pieces. Almost all traditional-cantors improvise to some extent and introduce new musical ideas occasionally, although it also happens that a

22 Avenary has observed this phenomenon previously: "If a particular prayer is sung to a *nusaḥ*, its original free rhythm may change into measured time when taken over by the congregation, and the *ḥazzan* may execute the simple pattern in elaborate coloraturas" Avenary (1971: 610).

23 The melodic variations, however, could be quite substantial, resulting in different ornaments, melodic progressions, modalities and modulations. See Avenary (1987) and Frigyesi (1982/83).

cantor develops an exceptionally successful version and repeats it week after week without much change.

But even within these practical limitations, we can find that Jewish worship shows a remarkably flexible form. It is unlikely that two communities, even if located only a few streets apart, or two precentors even of the same community would have exactly the same sequence of musical styles for the entire service, let alone the actual melodic progressions. A section of the text that is performed in one community as a simple recitative could be performed in another as a metric song; what is normally recited to a simple melody could be elaborated for a special occasion as an ornamental cantorial fantasy.[24] There is only one instance of an absolute rule for the performance, which involves the individual's praying and not that of the precentor: the *ʿamidah* should be always recited with a barely audible voice, almost silently.[25]

THE FLEXIBILITY OF MUSIC: HETEROPHONY AND *ḤAZZANUT*

The most apparent musical expression of this flexibility can be seen in the overall heterophonic nature of the service on the one hand and in the cantorial art (*ḥazzanut*) on the other. The East-Ashkenazi Orthodox service is heterophonic because each member of the congregation recites his prayer individually. Over a period of many years, each participant in the congregation developed his particular manner of accentuation, of pace, of dynamics, of voice quality, in other words, a personal style of praying with which he feels comfortable within the given communal context[26].

As each person has an individual style, each community has a particular aural-musical atmosphere that allows for the co-existence of

24 For instance, in the Hungarian territory, it is customary to perform the *hallel* prayer as an alternation of quasi-strophic simple recitative sections and metric songs. This is a commonly accepted practice. Nevertheless, I have heard and recorded the *hallel* several times with the recitative sections performed as an elaborate, cantorial piece, as a series of metrical tunes omitting almost all recitatives and also as a simple non-strophic recitation throughout without metric songs.

25 There are some other prayers, typically belonging to the individuals and not to the precentor, which I have heard performed always in the same manner. For instance, in some communities the mourner's *Qaddiš* is recited with a speechlike, almost un-melodic fast recitation. It is not clear, however, whether this custom follows a religious rule or is the result of practical considerations.

26 I demonstrated one such personal difference which occurs during the precentor's reading of the *ʿamidah* for the Sabbath *minḥah* in Frigyesi (1993).

the personal styles of its members. Thus superimposed on the personal recitations, there is a communal pace and style; certain prayers are recited faster in one community than in another, in one congregation the precentor does less elaboration than in the other, and so on. For the outsider the heterophony of these communities may sound very similar but, for the participants, there are great differences. Because the auditory context is so important, members of the community very much depend on each other; they together create an environment in which each individual can find his place. According to their own testimony, they remain with their community not only because of the social relations but because their own personal style of worship is integrally intertwined in the communal texture.[27]

Similar to the individual styles of recitation, the art of *ḥazzanut* could not have been developed without a flexible approach toward the performance of the prayer. The *ḥazzan* is not simply a solo singer who performs the traditional melodies of the service: if he is nothing more, he is a precentor, and is referred to as *šeliaḥ ẕibbur* (the delegate of the congregation) or *ba'al tefillah* (the leader of the prayer). The precentor's function is fulfilled as long as the prayers are recited with their proper melodies. The *ḥazzan*, however, accomplishes more than that. He does not simply reproduce a preconceived piece of music, but gives a personal rendition of the text, an original musical realization of the prayer within the general framework of the *nusaḥ*.

Ḥazzanut therefore is an original art form but one that is a natural extension of the musical aspect of the simple prayer as it is practiced by all members of the community. It transcends the simple "folk-art" of recitation not only by means of the sophistication of musical structure and vocal virtuosity but also by its expressive power of religious

27 There are countless examples for this attitude. For instance, in Budapest, the community of the Rumbach Street synagogue continued to pray together even after the building could not be used any more (it was severely damaged during the World War II) and most of the members of the congregation died or emigrated. The few people who remained of the community that once numbered several hundreds, however, have not joined another congregation (although there have been and still are a number of other functioning Orthodox synagogues in the neighborhood) because they maintain that they can pray only with their specific "Rumbach *nusaḥ*." This means that a handful of people (by now only about a dozen) remained with their community against all odds for almost fifty years. I am thankful to Mr. Emil Goitein, one of the precentors of the community and a faithful "Rumbach member" to record for me the musical tradition of the community and explain its history.

devotion.[28] With due precaution, this practice can be dated back at least to the twelfth century. The tunes notated down at that time by Obadiah, the Norman proselyte, seem to show a free improvisation based on a melodic line similar in style to what we usually associate with *ḥazzanut*.[29] It is true that, throughout the centuries, there were a number of rabbinical objections to cantorial art. But it is usually the empty virtuosity and artistic indulgence of the *ḥazzan* that was criticized while the legitimacy of individual musical expression was not called into question.[30] In East Europe, chronicles of Jewish martyrdom from the seventeenth century bear witness to the communal belief in the spiritual power of *ḥazzanut*. One such account describes how, in the terror of their captivity, the whole congregation burst forth in tears upon hearing the prayer of a great *ḥazzan*. The emotional power of his singing brought about the release of the community by evoking the compassion of the captors.[31]

Clearly, the practice of *ḥazzanut* is possible only because Jewish prayer does not have a codified musical form. In a general sense, a cantorial piece is always the replacement of some other, simpler musical style. The particular text, which may inspire such musical expression of personal religious devotion, is not prescribed, and perhaps could not be prescribed, although there are some traditionally favored prayers. The *ḥazzan* was believed to possess the capacity of uncovering some deep religious meaning in a section of the text that was hitherto recited without much attention. He had the talent to highlight such sections by

28 There is an enormous literature on the character of East-Ashkenazi *ḥazzanut*. For a brief summary and bibliography, see Avenary (1971).

29 In Avenary's interpretation, one can recognize elements characteristic of *ḥazzanut* in the repetition of words, the expressive motives, and "the lively 'pulsation' around a single note." Avenary (1971: 589). See also Adler (1965), Avenary (1966), Golb (1965: 153), Levi (1966: 185), Gerson-Kiwi (1967: 64) and Adler (1975: 552, vol. 1).

30 This issue is so complex and has such an enormous literature that it cannot be discussed here in detail. On the whole, one can find that music as an art was often opposed by the pious, but there was little objection to the use of music for religious expression and, of course, no objection to it at all when occurred in the recitative of prayer reading. In fact, as we shall see later, even the aesthetic pleasure of music was not completely in contradiction with religious ideas. For summary and references regarding the Medieval opinions about the practice of the *ḥazzanim* see Avenary (1971: 599).

31 This chronicle of martyrdom, the *Yewen Meẕulah* tells of the surrender of four communities to the Tatars in 1648. A similar story was told much later of the *ḥazzan* Rasumny. Both improvisations were based on the text *El male raḥamim*. See Avenary (1971: 627-628).

delivering the words with an unusually artistic, emotionally charged musical elaboration. In this way, he interpreted anew, so to speak, both text and music for himself and for the community. As a cantor in Budapest explained to me:

Here is this text, for instance, *mitraẕe be-raḥamim*. Well, just read it up to this point. It is beautiful, isn't it? This is a prayer for weekday morning but a *ḥazzan* can make it into a piece, do you understand? When, one prays on a weekday, he just reads it like this [he demonstrates a quick and simple style of recitative]. That's all, [a few seconds] and it is over. But when one realizes what one is actually saying! Then one elaborates this into a piece and that is beautiful.[32]

THE FLEXIBILITY OF MUSIC VERSUS THE RELIGIOUS DEMAND FOR EXACT REPETITION

On first impression, the high degree of flexibility that is tolerated in the performance of sacred texts appears almost incongruous with the principles of the Jewish religion. It seems to contradict the overall emphasis on exact repetition, an idea essential to Jewish religious practice and thought. Orthodox Jewish practice is bent on precision and codification. Even everyday actions are often performed as ritualized reiterations of a prescribed model. The candles should be lit in a specific manner, along with a certain prayer, the washing of the hands before eating has to follow a prescribed ritual, and so on. The idea that simple acts should be performed in an exact manner over and over again, is not the result of narrow-mindedness or religious rigidity. The fact that these motions are not arbitrary reinforces an awareness of sacred totality, the consciousness that even simple gestures of everyday life partake in a common and eternal higher order. In this way an everyday existence is drawn into the domain of the sacred world.

But if exact repetition is so essential to this religious world, why is the musical aspect not fixed too? Why is the practice of music so different? The answer to this question is not immediately evident. There is good

32 Interview with Márton Fóti, cantor of the synagogue at Hunyadi Square, Budapest, July 21, 1993. Mr. Fóti refers to the closing section of the *taḥanun* prayer which follows the reading of the *ʿamidah*. In this section the believers ask that they may succeed through pleading, in arousing God's mercy. Mr. Fóti made me read an expressive poetic Hungarian translation of this prayer.

reason to expect that the music of prayer would also be drawn into this sacred order of life. For a variety of reasons, music has been traditionally viewed as an inseparable part of the ritual reading. Melody has been considered essential to the transmission of the meaning of the text and therefore the sacred texts were memorized, since antiquity, as chanted texts. To ensure fixed repetition, a notational system was devised around the tenth century. This system prescribed the sequence of the musical motives of the biblical cantillation.[33] Until today, the ritualized, public reading of the Torah has been carried out strictly according to these melodic notational symbols, called *ṭe'amim*. Biblical readings were not subject to improvisation; even though differences are observable among various performances, the intention is to preserve.[34]

What is striking, however, is that this practice of fixed chanting was not applied to prayer. This is rather surprising, since the idea of preserving and reiterating the "original" text was significant not only in the case of the biblical readings, but also in that of the statutory prayers of the liturgy. As we shall see, it was the unalterable nature of the text that elevated prayer onto the level of divine worship. Individual expression in prayer was never forbidden, but it had to be expressed through additions to the existing statutory prayers whose words could not be modified at all.

The religious necessity to codify the prayer text on the one hand and the indispensable nature of melody for its understanding on the other, were powerful forces that might have called for the codification of the melody in prayer. Yet, despite such tendencies, the melodies of the prayer have never become fixed. We cannot say that the reason for this was the lack of notation since, as we have seen, a specific Jewish musical notation had existed for several centuries. To be sure, *te'amim* notation was not precise, it did not define the exact pitch and rhythm, but it could

33 The development of the biblical accents was a prolonged process completed only between 900 and 930 by Aaron b. Moses Ben-Asher of Tiberias. The Masoretes developed and codified accents for 24 biblical books maintaining that "whoever reads shall hear, whoever hears shall understand, and whoever sees shall grasp." Moses Ben-Asher, autograph colophon of the Cairo Codex of the Prophets, dated 895 C.E., quoted in Avenary (1971: 584). The issue of the necessity of chant in order to convey the meaning of the text will be discussed further in the second half of this article. See also Avenary (1963) and Shiloah (1982).

34 For literature with regard to the musical aspect of the Masoretic accents see Avenary (1978), Herzog (1963; 1971), Idelsohn (1929: 35–71), Rosowsky (1957), Sharvit (1980; 1982), and Cohen and Weil (1990/1991).

give a fairly clear image of the overall structure of the melody. At the very least, the application of such a system would signal a demand for the codification of the prayer melodies. However, the melodies of prayer texts are not fixed, even in the case of those texts that derive from the Bible and have been already assigned cantillation signs. These signs are carefully respected when the text is performed in the context of *leinen* (public reading of the Torah). But when the same text appears as prayer, the musical signs are ignored in the performance and, for the most part, they are not even printed in the prayer book.[35]

Moreover, Jews have known the western system of musical notation for many centuries and a considerable number of cantorial manuscripts have been compiled since at least the eighteenth century. However, the overwhelming majority of these manuscripts contain compositions in a contemporary western style and traditional cantorial recitatives are notated only very rarely (Adler 1989 and Frigyesi 1993-4). The reason for this hiatus on the part of the musically literate Jews cannot be explained by the difficulty in notating the non-metric Jewish recitative. The suggestive and approximate notation of rhythm that was customary for the notation of recitatives at that time, and was in fact used in some manuscripts, would not have been at all difficult to apply more widely. Rather, a deep conflict and contrast of traditions is expressed in the attitude toward notation; only pieces which were considered 'compositions' in the Western sense — and which were presumably composed anew — needed to be notated. But to fix the music of the prayer *per se* was thought neither necessary nor desirable.

FINDING A CONTEXT FOR MUSICAL FLEXIBILITY IN JEWISH RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

I suggest that the flexibility of the musical rendition of liturgical texts answered to the unique need of prayer of Judaism. Prayer is an abstract concept, the concentration of multiple devotional expressions and

35 Sometimes, prayer books include the cantillation signs for the prayer *šemaʿ*. However, most Orthodox precentors and cantors I have worked with, used prayer books without cantillation signs even for this text and it seems to me that the preference for including these signs reflects an intellectual trend among the Orthodox groups rather than adherence to tradition. It should be noted, however, that the melodies of the Torah cantillation might have influenced the shape of certain *nusaḥ* melodies.

religious capacities. The development of such conceptualization of prayer in religious thought encompassed several centuries beginning with the Babylonian Exile and continuing throughout the first few centuries of the common era during which time the texts of the Mishnah and the *Gemara* were created. But neither the beginning, nor the endpoint of this development could be defined with exactitude; in truth, the conceptualization of prayer remained an ongoing process in Judaism. The quest for penetrating into and realizing in practice the religious meaning of prayer was as immediate for the Jews of East Europe in the twentieth century as it had been for the *tanna'im* of the first and second centuries. Indeed, with the teachings of the Hasidim in the eighteenth century, a new religious attitude found its expression in the prayer form which, however, evolved in an integral manner from the existing ones (Buber 1960, Jacobs 1978, Scholem 1972 and Schatz Uffenheimer 1993).

When referring to the conceptualization of prayer as a continuum which bridges two millennia, the modern practice and that of antiquity, we have to keep in mind that such continuity was not an accidental and unique feature of a few, isolated communities. For pious Jews, the spirit of the religious concepts of antiquity is a living reality. Until today, the Talmud has remained the primary source through which Jews penetrate into the understanding of religious matters. In this context, the Talmud does not belong to a historical past; it is a timeless source of teaching that is relevant to the immediate present.

Therefore, when we attempt to understand the meaning of modern religious practices, the concerns of antiquity which found expression in the Talmud cannot be thought of simply as some sort of "historical background." In fact, the Talmud cannot be at all treated as a "document" in the sense written sources are normally viewed in humanistic studies. It was never thought of as a completed book but rather as a point of departure to perpetuate the continuous oral tradition of study and thought. Hence it could be interpreted only from within the tradition, with the help of oral interpretation and the deep knowledge of religious practice. The religious meaning of musical practice can only be elucidated through interpretation of this text. Yet when, as a musicologist and as someone without religious education in the Talmud, I attempt to interpret the musical relevance of some of its passages, my conclusions can be only hypothetical and subject to revision by those who have access to a more scholarly approach.

It should be emphasized that in turning toward Talmudic passages, my aim is not to discover the origin of Ashkenazi music. I regard the Talmud as a source that illuminates the intellectual and spiritual outlook of the Ashkenazi Jews in the modern era, an outlook that has greatly influenced their conceptualization of music. Nevertheless, it would be simplistic to suppose that the religious ideas imbedded in Talmudic discussions necessarily call for specific musical systems and styles. The fact that a certain group developed a musical culture which appears to be an expression of religious thought, as I believe the Ashkenazi communities did, does not imply that theirs was the only possible musical expression of the Jewish religion.

Nevertheless, two points are certain. First, the traditional musical culture of East-Ashkenazim does not seem to be based on extant non-Jewish musical systems. Even though some interchange between the music of the Jews and that of the neighboring people had to take place, the system of the East-Ashkenazi musical culture as a whole appears to be an internal development. (For instance, there is no parallel, in the musics of the surrounding people, to the particular East-Ashkenazi practice of heterophony, *ḥazzanut*, and flexibility in liturgical genres.) Second, the East-Ashkenazi traditional liturgical music appears to be strongly linked to such religious thoughts which have been prevalent in Judaism since antiquity and can be seen be most directly in the Talmud — as this will be explained subsequently.

It is not yet possible to interpret this situation in historical terms. It could be that in the practice of the East-Ashkenazim the Jewish music of antiquity has been carried on from generation to generation up to the modern era. But it is also possible that the musical culture as we encountered it at the time of the first recordings was an internal development that took place within the Ashkenazi community during the past few centuries. In the course of this development certain elements of the previously existing musical culture might have been reinforced to express more clearly some essential religious ideas.

THE DUAL IDEA OF PRAYER IN JEWISH THOUGHT: *ʿAVODAH* (DIVINE SERVICE) AND *Ẕ̱EʿAQAH* (PERSONAL OUTCRY)

Already, when prayer first appeared as a legitimate form of divine worship, it had a dual character: it was not only an official, divine *service* but also a personal *outcry* to God. The prayer kept this dual function in

the Jewish worship until our days. In the Bible, the notion of prayer encompasses, in its broadest sense, any communication from man to God. As I. Abrahams described, prayer could be "petition, expostulation, confession, meditation, recollection *(anamnesis)*, thanksgiving, praise, adoration, and intercession" (Abrahams 1971). It is not insignificant that the noun *tefillah* that means prayer as a genre does not appear in the Torah at all, and the verb *hitpallel* that would eventually become the standard term for prayer occurs only a few times and then with a very specific meaning. These various communications to God were not the same as the divine service; they were spontaneous outcries, a matter of the individual at times of utmost duress. Apart from a few elaborate, quasi-liturgical pieces (such as David's prayer in 2 Sam 7:18–29, and Solomon's dedication of the Temple in 1 K 8:22–61), passages identified as prayers are short, spontaneous, almost inarticulate. The adjective "ejaculatory" and the expression "outpouring of the heart" seem to be well chosen to describe this type of prayer as these are often described in the Bible as outcries by the Hebrew verbs קרא *qara* and צעק *za'aq*.[36]

As long as the Temple existed, the Temple sacrifice was the only legitimate form of worship. Even prayer at fixed times, which was already alluded to in the Bible, could not assume this function; it was rather a practice of individuals with unusual devotion.[37] On the whole, prayer was not thought of as a substitute or even an extension of the Temple sacrifice but as a religious expression separate from the sacrificial worship. As T. Kaufmann stated:

> Prayer belonged almost exclusively to the popular religion...it was a spontaneous "cry" and "shout" to God for mercy. Prayer developed independently from the priestly realm; in the Bible it is almost entirely separate from sacrifice.[38]

36 In the discussion of the ancient prayer and the Temple service, I relied on the following literature: Abrahams (1961), Brown (1978), De Vaux (1961), Durkheim (1965), Elbogen (1970), Petuchowski (1970; 1931), Ellul (1973), Friis Hvidberg (1962), Heinemann (1977), Heinen (1973: 103–105), Idelsohn (1932), Kaufmann, (1960), Sendrey (1974). I am greatly indebted to Peter Laki whose unpublished paper "The Outcry as a Form of Prayer and Lament in the Hebrew Scriptures" served as a basis for the observations concerning linguistic usages and their meaning with regard to the Biblical prayer.

37 *Daniel* 6: 11, *Psalms* 55: 18.

38 Kaufmann (1960).

In contrast to prayer, Temple worship was not an outcry to God and not even primarily a petition on behalf of the people: it was no more than divine obligation. It was the duty of the people, regardless of their momentary needs. Its beneficial effect on the population was not necessarily seen in a direct manner but it was believed that the ongoing worship of God ensures lasting prosperity for the people at large. The Temple sacrifice was not for worshipers as individuals, but for the population as a whole. Individual ideas and feelings had little to do with the worship. Its effectiveness was ensured by the fixed and ritualized form of performance by the selected "professional" caste of priests and musicians.

The circumstance that prayer was practiced coeval to the Temple sacrifice but for some time, without assuming the function of divine service, allowed it to develop as an independent and fundamentally different form of communication toward God. Prayer belonged to the individual having an immediate and intimately personal meaning. While the Temple ritual had no raison d'être without its specific time, place and form, prayer had no meaning without a unique and exceptional state of mind, an intense feeling of devotion. Because of this reason, prayer could not have a prescribed form, nor could it be restricted to particular times and place or performed with regularity.

Why is this ancient condition relevant to the modern practice of prayer? After the destruction of the second Temple, prayer became the divine worship — and now is the only form of divine worship. But it kept also its original character as outcry. This duality, then, has defined the function of prayer up to our days. This was not a sudden development; prayer had functioned as a kind of service in the synagogue already for centuries. But however gradual its historical formation, "prayer as worship" was a radically new idea of ritual, different from either the sacrificial rite of the Temple or its predecessors in the personal and spontaneous biblical prayer. Prayer could no longer be regarded only as the spontaneous outcry of the individual. In order for prayer to become a legitimate form of divine worship, it had to be assigned fixed times and fixed forms.[39]

Another significant innovation of the synagogue ritual involved the conception of community and individual. The statutory text made prayer

39 An excellent summary of this development can be found in the first chapter "The Statutory Prayers: Their Nature, Origin and Content" of Heinemann (1977: 13–36).

accessible to everyone; as long as he was able to read or memorize a text even to the simplest member of the congregation could perform the service in its legitimate form. From its inception, "prayer as service" was envisioned as an individual act, which effected not only the individual but the entire community. One does not pray alone for himself but also for the community; each individual prays separately for himself and for the community as a whole.[40]

This duality, however, created conceptual and practical problems, that relate directly to the (musical) performance of prayer. It is evident that the two aspects of ritual, that is, regular service defined in time and form on the one hand, and devotional outcry on the other, cannot exist together with any consistency. One could imagine perhaps that, in an especially elevated state of mind, the individual's heart may be filled with a religious spirit that could be expressed exactly with the prescribed words and exactly at the prescribed time of the prayer. But it is impossible to imagine that all individuals or even the most pious persons could recite these words as a spontaneous outcry, fully from their heart, three times every day at exactly prescribed moments. (Of course, it would be even less likely that members of a congregation could invent spontaneous prayers for each of the prescribed times of the service, and it is partly for this reason that the introduction of the statutory prayer was necessary in the first place.)

The contradiction between the idea of "prayer as outcry" and "prayer as worship" was felt almost immediately once the practice of the statutory prayer gained status. What kind of service is that which takes place in the heart? We must answer, "It is prayer!"[41] In this basic definition, prayer is understood as "divine service," yet it is immediately qualified as coming "of the heart."

MUSIC AS THE LINK BETWEEN THR TWO IDEAS OF PRAYER: THE TENSION BETWEEN "PERFECT" PERFORMANCE AND MOMENTARY/ INDIVIDUAL FEELING

In the broadest sense, the problem of Jewish prayer, as it presents itself in the Talmudic discussions, enlightens us about a basic tension of human

40 It is characteristic that almost all prayers use verbs in the first person plural and not in the first person singular.

41 *B. Ta'anit, 2a.*

behavior, the tension between performance and feeling. Once an act is ritualized as a social or religious performance (and most patterns of human behavior are), there is the possibility that appearance separates itself from emotional content. We find even in everyday situations that the performance of the individual is necessitated by an external demand but is expected to come from an internal urge. This problem was most apparent in the case of the prayer. Prayer had to do with the innermost feelings of the individual and, in a sense it had to transcend all external, formal demands. And yet such formal demands could not be eliminated. Most conspicuously, the idea that prayer is to be performed at certain times could not be given up because this was the sine qua non of prayer's power as sacred ritual.

Indeed, great emphasis was laid on the idea that the act of reading of the statutory prayer be a true equivalent of the Temple sacrifice. As we can read in the first section of the tractate *Berak̲ot*:

From what time may one recite the *šemaᶜ* in the evening? From the time when the priests enter [their houses] to eat their terumah until the end of the first watch.[42]

The lengthy extemporization of the Gemara on the proper time for the reading of the *šemaᶜ* in relation to the Temple sacrifice is not merely symbolic. These discussions were aimed at ensuring that the time of the reading of the statutory text corresponds to the original time of the Temple sacrifice, and hence qualifying the prayer as divine worship. It was also not forgotten that the time of the Temple service paralleled cosmic time, that the "watches of the night" were the measurements of an original, heavenly temporal order. As we can read in the Gemara:

He holds indeed that the night has three watches, but he wants to teach us that there are watches in heaven [among the ministering angels] as well as on earth.[43]

But the question arises: Is it conceivable that the prayer would come from the heart at all these times? Or could the execution of the text without devotion still be considered prayer? Is devotion or the faultless recitation of the text the primary obligation of the individual? The answers to these questions are contradictory. We can read, for instance, in the tractate *Berak̲ot* a detailed account of the discussion regarding the

42 *B. Berak̲ot, 2a.* The basis for the English translations of quotations from *B. Berak̲ot* is Simon (1935).

43 *B. Berak̲ot*, 3a.

reading of the *šema*ᶜ. Some of this discussion reads as follows:

One who reads the *šema*ᶜ must pay proper attention [*šeyekawwen libo*, literally: 'direct his heart'] to what he says...

... R. Zutra says: "Up to this point extends the command of *kawwanah*,[44] from this point only the command of reciting [*qeri'ah*] applies. Why this difference in the application from this point of the command of reciting? [Presumably] because it is written 'to speak of them'; here too [in the first] also it is written '*and thou shalt speak of them!*' What he means is this: Up to this point applies the command of both of *kawwanah* and reciting; from this point onwards applies the command of reciting [even] without *kawwanah*..."

The Master stated [above]: 'R. Josiah said: Up to this point extends the command of reciting [*qeri'ah*]; from this point onwards the command of *kawwanah* [devotion] applies'. Why this difference in the application from this point onward of the command of *kawwanah*? [Presumably] because it is written, *'Upon your heart?'* There too [in the first section] also it is written *upon thy heart?* — What he meant is this: Up to this point applies the command of reciting and *kawwanah*, from this point onwards applies that of *kawwanah* [even] without reciting.[45]

This rather difficult Talmudic passage pertains to the central problem of Jewish prayer. The immediate concern of the rabbis relates to the performance of the first two sections of the *šema*ᶜ. What kind of religious devotion and performance do these sections demand? To this question, the rabbis try to find the answer in the text of the prayer itself. It is most interesting, however that they come to a conclusion which could not be entirely deduced from the text. Similar to the first section, we find a double command in the second: it is clearly said that "thou shalt speak of them" and that these words should be "upon thy heart." In other words, the second section also calls for both devotion and recitation. Yet the rabbis demand less from the simple individual. Rabbi Josiah asserts that the command of *kawwanah* is sufficient for the second section of the *šema*ᶜ. This means, as we learn from the Gemara, that it is allowed, in

44 Although in the translation of Maurice Simon, the word *kawwanah* is rendered as devotion, it is not entirely certain that this is what is meant by *kawwanah* in the context of the reading of the *šema*ᶜ. The word *kawwanah* has various meanings such as "devotion," "religious intent," "concentration," "attention," or any combination of these ideas depending on the context. According to some other interpretations, here it rather means "intention," that is an awareness of the importance of this prayer as a declaration of faith. This would be somewhat less than what is usually understood by devotion in English.

45 *B. Berakot*, 13b. Author's additions appear in bold.

this section, to read the words without audible melodic recitation — as long as this reading is done with devotion/concentration. Contrarily, Rabbi Zutra thinks that, for this same section, the command of *qeri'ah* applies, that is, the individual may read the words without devotion as long as he is reciting it properly.

Clearly, the intention behind these opinions is not to encourage the separation of mental and spiritual concentration on the one hand and presentation on the other hand. The question was to define the minimal requirement, so to speak, of one's obligation and also to highlight the absolute importance of the first section of the *šema*ᶜ, which should always be read in the proper manner and with concentration. It is most interesting, however, that the duality of performance (chanted reading) and personal devotion is so openly discussed, and that apparently both commands carry equal weight; one rabbi would accept proper performance without devotion while the other prefers devotion even without proper performance.

That reading without mental and spiritual concentration is allowed and that it is no more unnatural to the prayer than reading without audible recitation can come as no surprise. We have to remember that the statutory prayers are not considered as texts in an everyday sense of the word. They are not "read" in the manner one reads a book, for the sake of attaining information or even inspiration. Reading of the statutory prayers is an active participation in the divine essence, an event of revelation for and by the individual.[46] The act of reading of these texts is in and of itself the divine rite, and vice versa, only the reading of the liturgical texts fulfills the obligation of worship.

The fact that public worship is equated with the recitation of the text and that such recitation alone suffices to perform the worship has utmost consequences for the practice of music. Text alone is not ritual, it becomes worship only when it is chanted, hence the reading of the prayer is always at the same time a musical performance. Music in this context is not chosen intentionally for the sake of artistic representation but has a continuous presence as part and parcel of the text.

In a sense, the musical presentation of the prayer, the act of chanting, is the realm where the idea of *qeri'ah* and *kawwanah* connect. Chanting

46 The inseparable connection of words and melody in sacred reading is discussed in Frigyesi (2000).

ensures that the text is elevated to a sacred level, above everyday speech even when devotion is lacking. But chanting is also the potential vehicle for personal expression. To say that the text is performed "with music" would be misleading, since this presupposes the differentiation between reading without and with melody and also between reading as an intellectual understanding and music as an artistic expression. But in the practice of Jewish prayer, there is no sharp dividing line between music (which is, to us, a form of art) and reading (which is, to us, an intelligent presentation of text).[47]

Ideally, the act of reading sacred texts involves not only the intellect or artistic expression, but rather incorporates the intellectual, the spiritual and the ritual. Another Talmudic passage is illuminating in this regard:

> One should not stand up to say *tefillah* save in a reverent frame of mind [with heaviness of head]. The pious men of old used to wait an hour before praying in order that they might concentrate their thoughts [*kawwanah*] upon their father in heaven. Even if a king greets him [while praying] he should not answer him: even if a snake is wound round his heel he should not break off [from the text].[48]

This paragraph bespeaks the extreme difficulty in fulfilling the obligation of worship without losing the devotional intent of prayer.[49] The rabbis were keenly aware of the fact that the merger of these two aspects was an enormous demand on the individual's emotional capacity. Since prayer had a set time and text, the heightened spiritual state of mind that would be appropriate to the original intention of prayer could no longer be expected to come about in a spontaneous manner. Prayer now needed mental and spiritual preparation. Only the most pious men were able to arrive at the mental state that was thought to be appropriate for prayer and even they needed a period of time set apart to achieve this desired state of mind.

But what should happen to the common people, to those who were not able to arouse in themselves such high level of spiritual attention.

47 The Talmud does not distinguish between reading and recitation but refer consistently to reading (*qeri'ah*) of the prayer which means recitation.

48 *B. Berakot*, 30b.

49 This devotion is something like a spiritual state of mind and not to be confused with the understanding of the text: the object of concentration is not the actual meaning of the words *per se* but rather a general religious orientation "toward their father in heaven."

The rabbis did not overlook their needs either. As another passage of the Talmud teaches:

> Our Rabbis taught: "When a man prays, he should direct his heart to heaven.... Such was the custom of R. Akiba; when he prayed with the congregation: He used to cut it [i.e. the *tefillah*] short and finish in order not to inconvenience the congregation [for the congregation would have waited for him]. But when he prayed by himself, a man would leave him in one corner and find him later in another, on account of his many genuflections and prostrations".[50]

R. Akiba's example teaches that the exceptionally pious man should not force his standard on the rest of the congregation. These and similar passages attest to a sort of tolerance which at first sight appears to be contradictory with the meticulousness of other prescriptions with regard to prayer. The truth is, however, that although it was crucial to define what the ideal and proper manner of prayer should be, prayer had meaning only if it remained a living practice of the people. The pious, whose directions of life had led the way for the community, looked to the moral needs of the common people while they did not loose sight of the more abstract obligation of Israel, the worship through the transcendental power of meditative prayer which was, in reality, practiced only by few.

CONCLUSION: ORAL MUSICAL PRACTICES AS THE EXPRESION OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT AMONG THE EAST-EUROPEAN JEWISH

I believe that the flexibility of the musical system is the expression, in the communal religious practice, of the very thought of prayer. We see here two interrelated ideas. First, there is a tendency to regard prayer as an abstract concept in which two contradictory religious expressions may concentrate, namely divine service and personal outrcry. Prayer becomes a reality in practice in a variety of forms, none of which encompasses fully both of these potentials that are embedded in the abstract idea of prayer. Second, there is a tendency to place the responsibility for the execution of the prayer with the individual, which means handing down the "original" idea of prayer as a personal outcry.

50 *B. Berakot*, 30b, 3a.

What matters for such religious expression is not the musical system *per se*, but that the practice of presentation remains flexible. But since the performance of prayer consisted of melodic recitation, it was dependent on the musical aspect. Had the musical style been defined, it would have involved the fixation of tempo, melodic range, vocal quality, articulation of the text and the large-scale structure of music — in other words, parameters through which the individual spiritual quality of the reading could be expressed.

Thus orality here is not simply "the lack of writing," it is a mode of communal, religious expression.[51] Orality provided the framework in which the complex and abstract concept of prayer was articulated; it was the realization, in practice, of cardinal points of religious thinking. Such merger of communal practice and religious philosophical thought may not be typical of Judaism at all times and all places. In this regard, the East-Ashkenazi tradition may be somewhat different from that of the Jewish communities of North Africa and the Middle East and, in fact, also from most religious practices outside of Judaism as well.

What happened in East Europe was that sophisticated, esoteric religious-philosophical thought, which could be fully understood only by very few, became acted out in everyday religious behavior. It did not remain the property of a religious elite generating some sort of monastic tradition, but was put to practice for the entire community. The spiritual leaders of the East-Ashkenazim reflected very deeply on the Talmud and reached, in their thought, a level where religious issues merged with essential theological, social, ethical and even existential questions.[52] However, they did not aim at creating a literature comparable to the great monuments of Judaism such as those that were produced, for instance, during the Middle Ages in Spain. Yet this hiatus is not the sign of the inferiority of this culture but the result of its inherently oral nature, which found expression primarily

51 I am greatly indebted to Professor Walter Feldman for our discussions which stimulated the following paragraphs of my article.

52 I think here primarily of the mystical trend of Judaism and, in relation to it, of Hasidism. The thoughts, which evolved through the conceptualization of prayer, were on a especially high level with the quietist trend of Hasidism. See Scholem (1972) and Schatz-Uffenheimer (1993). Although, this thinking may be most evident in the mystical trends of Judaism, it characterizes the world of the East-European Jews as a whole. It is not insignificant that Jewish and particularly Talmudic thinking inspired Emmanuel Lévinas, one of the greatest philosophers of our era. See especially Emmanuel Lévinas (1976).

in the living practice of the people. The fruits of deep religious-philosophical thinking were transferred directly into a life-orientational experience for the community at large. This capacity to create and value an oral culture as an expression of religious thought was perhaps the greatest achievement of East-Ashkenazi Judaism.[53]

It is for this reason that the East-Ashkenazim dispensed with most of the theatrical aspects of the service and created a ritual, which, on the whole, is not attractive for the outsider. The East-Ashkenazi service was a stage of multiple performances where everyone was at the same time spectator and performer but where, for each participant, his own performance had the highest religious power. The individual was trusted to be capable of reaching out to the supernatural and establish a link that was unique and intimately personal. This practice demanded intense spiritual involvement on the part of each individual.[54] It was not enough to know that one felt the prayer in his heart; it was also necessary to create a clear auditory reflection of such feeling. The community wanted each of its members to pray with full attention ('from his heart') — and wanted to hear and see such individual participation. The aural experience of the synagogue reflects this demand; it is a communal space vibrating with many sounds.

The religious orientation, which saw prayer as inalienable from the individual, reflects a central element of Jewish thought. To this thought,

53 The importance attached to a "mode of life" in Hasidism was the reason for which Buber regarded it "the greatest phenomenon in the history of spirit": "The Baal-Shem belongs to those central figures of the history of religion whose effect on others has arisen through the fact that they *lived* in a certain way. These men did not proceed *from* a teaching, but moved *to* a teaching, in such a way that their life worked as a teaching not yet grasped in words...Within [their] community...arise a series of men with the same kind of life...these together form the core of the movement — the formation of community and the spiritual begetting of disciples who form communities...In an otherwise not very productive century...the 'unenlightened' Polish and Ukrainian Jewry brought forth the greatest phenomenon in the history of the spirit, greater than any individual genius in art and in thought: a society that lives by faith." Buber (1968: 35–37). It is also interesting to consider Scholem's explanation for the reason of the popular appeal of mystical though in Hassidism. See Scholem (1972: 36–37).

54 It should be noted, nevertheless, that in accordance with what was explained above, there was also a certain tolerance that allowed members of the community to "walk in and out" from such intense involvement with praying. As a result, in an Orthodox synagogue, not all the members of the community at all times pray with the same intensity; some may discuss other religious or even entirely secular matters while others pray. For discussion of this phenomenon see Heilman (1976; 1982).

prayer is the active realization of the duality of the original concept of prayer that is at the same time an expression of personal feeling and a means to establish harmony between the human and the cosmic world. At its best, prayer is the road that leads the individual toward a transcendental state of mind in which one feels one's self dissolved in the universe. In its ideal form, prayer recaptures the lost paradise, the first meaning of human existence, which is also its ultimate meaning. The recapturing comes only to those who await it; the experience regards the individual alone, it is inward looking and momentary.

One may wonder whether, in our modern world, such a religious-musical tradition is still possible. Clearly, it has meaning only as long as the people at large look at prayer as the single most important personal act in the domain of the spiritual. The music of the East-Ashkenazim directly depended on such religious orientation creating a context in which each member of the community was a "connoisseur," or even better, a "professional performer." Such "professionalism" can be achieved only through the continuous and intense practice of praying and, in truth, it is worth mastering only if one regards such practice as central to human existence. In the modern context, where one no longer can view prayer as the exclusive sphere of spirituality, the East-Ashkenazi musical tradition could be preserved only at a very high cost. Indeed, for most modern Jews, even those who regard themselves as Orthodox, the Ashkenazi tradition means a "repertoire" of pieces and usually this repertoire is the property of the cantor.

But for the Orthodox communities of East Europe, tradition meant primarily not a repertoire but a framework for practice; one was given guidelines for praying and not a clearly defined model. The idea of exact imitation is alien to this tradition and it could be said that imitation would mean the end of the tradition. In the East-Ashkenazi practice, as long as such a practice existed, tradition was expressed not only in the overall characteristics of the musical style but also in its adaptability, that it could be — and, in fact, had to be — shaped by the individual. Only in such a tradition could prayer remain an abstract concept of multiple potentialities, a vessel of the always changing, individual religious devotion.

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