

Chazzan Paul Kowarsky

March 15th, 1981

Lecture for Jewish Music Month

The Musical Elements of a Properly Constructed Synagogue Service

The topic that I have selected to discuss with you this morning, as part of the Jewish Music Month program, is: "The Musical Elements of a Properly Constructed Synagogue Service." The reason for my choice of subject matter is that I believe that it is important to deal with pressing practical issues, rather than ones which are merely informative, and serve no useful purpose in synagogue life today.

I will confine my remarks to a traditional Conservative Synagogue in North America today, such as Beth Tzedec. In other words, I will be talking about a synagogue in which there is no instrumental accompaniment during religious services (other than weddings, of course), and where the regular traditional text and order of the prayers is generally followed. Needless to say, I will not be dealing with the musical format of the Sephardi type synagogue, which is totally different, as those of you who were in shul yesterday must have observed, when the major portion of the service was conducted by a Sephardi Chazzen in his traditional style, in honour of "Shabbat Zachor."

In a nutshell, I will be talking about the individual and collective roles of the Chazzen, the Choir and the Congregation insofar as the music of the service is concerned. I will deal with these roles as they were in the past, as they are, and as they are developing into the future.

The synagogue, as a place of congregational prayer and public instruction, had come into existence long before the destruction of the Second Temple and the cessation of the sacrificial worship. It is generally assumed that the Synagogue had its beginning during the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century B.C.E. when the Jewish People were separated from their Temple and its centralized sacrificial system, and was brought to Judea after the restoration of Zion and the rebuilding of the Temple.

It has been estimated that approximately four million Jews of the Diaspora had more than a thousand synagogues by the time the Second Temple was destroyed in the year 70 A.C.E.

Prayer is the natural expression of the religious feelings of the human being. In the Jewish Tradition, prayer occupies a central position. The Hebrew prayers are for the most part in the first person plural, because the Jewish People have always been intensely group-conscious.

Primarily designed for congregational worship, the Hebrew liturgy was well established in the period immediately following the destruction of the Second Temple. Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple contains all the four elements of Hebrew prayers: **thanksgiving, praise, confession and intercession**. Down to the last days of the First Temple, there were no formally prescribed prayers, not even a general command to pray. The Hebrew psalms stand out unique among

Chazzan Paul Kowarsky

March 15th, 1981

Lecture for Jewish Music Month

the prayers of the entire world by their simplicity, power and majestic diction. They were widely in use during the period of the Second Temple. They are the songs of the human soul, timeless and universal.

The development of congregational worship is a distinct contribution of Judaism to the other faiths that sprang from it. The public reading of the Torah was introduced by Ezra the Scribe. After the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.C.E. the Synagogue became the only centre uniting the Jewish people throughout the Diaspora. From this time onward the sages endeavored to establish uniformity of services.

During the period of the Second Temple the vocal musical elements of the service were in the hands of the Levites, who sang the psalms and portions of the Torah (Idelsohn-"Jewish Music" p. 19). Originally, the Jews chanted the Torah using the "Tamei Hamikra", also known as the "Cantillations" or the "Trop." The word "Trop" comes from the Greek "tropos" which means: manner or mode. The Trop is used as a means of musical interpretation of the text. Each Trop represents not one tone alone, like the notes in modern music, but rather a group of notes, or a musical motif. When we connect the motifs we create what is called a mode.

The cantillation used for the Torah reading is well known to you at Beth Tzedec. When we come to the "Sh'ma" during the service, we chant the first paragraph with the traditional cantillations: (example "v'ahavta"). When the Haftorah (the weekly reading from the Prophets) is chanted on Shabbat, usually by a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the melody of the prophetic cantillations is used. For example: the Bracha before the Haftorah is chanted like this: (Illustrate) The melody of the cantillations used for chanting the Torah portions on the High Holidays is different to the Shabbat melody used. Also, the melodies for the cantillations used for the Megillot are different. For example, the melody for "Echah" ("Lamentations") sung on "Tish'a B'av" goes like this: (Illustrate) and the cantillation melody for "Megillat Esther" is different too, as we'll hear next week. Finally, there is one more cantillation melody used for "Shir Hashirim" - "The Song of Songs" ("Pesach"), "Ruth" ("Shavuot") and "Kohelet" ("Ecclesiastes") ("Succot").

It is not only by chanting the Torah and prophets that Jews have come before G-d with rejoicing and singing. "Come before Him with rejoicing and singing." This was the slogan of the Jewish people before the destruction of the Second Temple. In the "minor temples"--the synagogues in Israel and the Diaspora, people gradually developed a style of public prayers, or more correct, of song and prayer. From these times onward, the Jewish people produced musical forms of prayer, of supplication, of complaint and a dialogue with G-d. Jewish prayer is in essence, song. In our daily prayers (in the "Yishtabach") just before the "Bar'chu" everyday we say that G-d Himself chose music as the highest form of thanksgiving, as we proclaim: "Song and Praise, Thanksgiving and Music - Evermore" and we conclude with the "Bracha": "He who chooses songs."

Chazzan Paul Kowarsky

March 15th, 1981

Lecture for Jewish Music Month

The melodies of prayers were transmitted informally from generation to generation. In this manner they were collated into a body called "Nusach". The term "Nusach" (plural in Aramaic which is used more frequently than the Hebrew plural form is "Nuscha-ot") has two meanings. One: in regard to the prayer service, it signifies an established form of text, for example: "Nusach Ashkenaz" or "Nusach Sepharad."

In the sense that I will use the term "Nusach", I mean "a basic underlying melodic theme or musical pattern which permeates the chanting of the text of our prayers." The definition is my own. Chanting the prayers in accordance with the accepted melodic themes, that is, in accordance with the correct "Nuschaot" has become not only traditional, but in some cases, has taken on the character of being obligatory. Let me illustrate what I mean, by giving you some examples.

1) Take the text for the end of the first paragraph of the evening service after the "Bar'chu" and see what the different Nuschaot are (Illustrate):

(a) Weekday evening (b) Friday evening (c) Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (d) Shalosh Regalim.

2) Let's take another even more familiar text, and see how the "Nusach" differs from service to service: "the Kaddish." (Illustrate)

(a) Regular Kaddish "Titkabeil" - full Kaddish

(b) Mourner's Kaddish

(c) Half Kaddish used Friday evening before the "Amidah" or at the conclusion of the Torah reading on Shabbat morning

(d) Half Kaddish used for the weekday evening service

(e) Half Kaddish used for the High Holiday Musaph service

(f) Half Kaddish used for evening service on the High Holidays

(g) Half Kaddish used for the Ne'ilah service at the end of Yom Kippur

(h) Half Kaddish used for the Musaph service when the prayers for "Tal" (dew) ("Pesach") and "Geshem" (rain) ("Shemini Atzeret") are recited

(i) Half Kaddish for Mincha on Shabbat

3) Take the Nusach for chanting the Kabbalat Shabbat service on Friday night: (Illustrate)

Chazzan Paul Kowarsky

March 15th, 1981

Lecture for Jewish Music Month

4) Take the most beautiful (in my view) of all Nuschaot - Mincha for Shabbat. Illustrate with "Ata Echad."

5) Take the Nusach for the Shabbat morning "Amidah" and other parts of the service (Illustrate).

I hope now that you have a good idea of what I mean by "Nusach." Some "Nuschaot" are known as "Scarbova tunes" or "Missinai tunes" as if handed down from Mount Sinai. To this corpus of melodies belong, for example, the melody for "Aleinu" on the High Holidays, (Illustrate) or the "Avodah" service. "Vehakohanim" (Illustrate). Also, some of the melodies for the "Kaddeshim" that I illustrated earlier. Also the melody used for "Kol Nidre". Imagine starting a Yom Kippur service with a melody for Kol Nidrei other than the traditional one - (Illustrate).

Now I come to the crux of my whole subject: whatever music is used in the shul must, in accordance with our tradition, be based on the correct Nusach for the service during which the text is used. We must not take a familiar secular or even popular Israeli melody, and adapt it to the synagogue service just because it fits. It's wrong.

Synagogue music is not secular, and even though both forms must have, and to some extent, will continue to, influence each other, they should be kept apart. I cannot bear to hear "Adon Olam" sung to "Yankee Doodle" or "Scarborough Fair". Have you ever stopped to think of the meaning of the words "Adon Olam": "Master of the Universe, who ruled the universe before anything else had been created" - to the tune of Yankee Doodle or some other cheap ditty. Or think about the holy "K'dushah" on Shabbat, when we sanctify G-d's name in public worship: "Hu Elokeinu" He is our G-d, our Father-sung in some synagogues to the romantic tune of "Erev Shel Shoshanim" - "An Evening of Roses" (Illustrate). And why? Because "it fits" and the people are familiar with the melody. No! Let the people learn the correct way of singing our prayers.

Let me give you a couple of examples of melodies used for the Shabbat morning service which are based on the correct nusach:

1) "Yism'chu"—(a new one for us) by J. Weisser (Illustrate)

2) "Sim Shalom" - by L. Glantz, shortly to be introduced - (Illustrate)

The music of our synagogue service is sung by the Chazzen, the Choir and the Congregation. Incidentally the three Hebrew letters of the word "Chazzen" have

Chazzan Paul Kowarsky

March 15th, 1981

Lecture for Jewish Music Month

been interpreted as formulating the basic prerequisites of a Chazzen. Besides his vocal expertise, “Chet” (“chacham” – a wise man versed in Torah); “Zayin” (“zaken” - an elder - over 30 years of age) and “Nun” “nasui” - married. Also, the ever-present Jewish humour, the three letters also stand for: “chazonim zainen naro-im”, which means “chazonim are fools.

The Chazzen sings a Cantorial recitative. Recitative is a term applied to the Cantor's free chant of the prayers, emphasizing in song the meaning of the prayers, based on the correct Nusach and the natural inflections of speech. A Cantorial piece, as it were, should not be viewed as a concert performance, but rather as an artistic vocal and musical interpretation of the prayer concerned, chanted by one trained to use his voice to beautify our prayers by the embellishment of our traditional musical patterns (“Nuschaot”.) Thereby we strengthen our communication with G-d, and so glorify His Name. The Cantorial recitative has always been, and must continue to be an integral part of our service. Classes should be held during Adult Education Programmes where the Chazzen illustrates just how the “Cantorial acrobatics” used in the recitative, enhances and emphasizes the meaning of the prayers.

Congregational participation is essential at service, but the melodies must be carefully selected. However, congregational singing should not take the place of a well-trained choir of professional singers. The huge choruses that participated in the services during the existence of the First and Second temples in Jerusalem, and about which we read in the Bible and in the Talmud, as well as the revival of large synagogue choirs at the beginning of the 19th century, reveal the importance of choral singing at services both in the past and in our own day.

In Temple Worship the Levite Choir consisted of a minimum of twelve adult male singers, who were admitted to the Choir at the age of 30 after having trained for 5 years. After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.C.E. the Levite Choir ceased to function, and the Rabbis decreed that both vocal and instrumental music be banned as a sign of national mourning. Subsequently this regulation was modified when Maimonides permitted the choir to sing at synagogue services. Instrumental music has continued to be forbidden in traditional synagogues, and choirs sing *a cappella* - without accompaniment.

In the 17th Century Solomon Rossi (1570-1630) organized a choir that sang arrangements of Psalms in three to eight voices. However, it was really Solomon Sulzer (1840-1890) of Vienna whose choral musical services met with real success, and have given us a lasting legacy of exquisite choral music for the synagogue. For examples the Torah Service which we sing, and is probably sung in most traditional synagogues the world over, is the musical setting of Sulzer. (Illustrate “Adoshem Melech” and “Ki Mitsiyon”). Examples of those who followed Sulzer were Louis

Chazzan Paul Kowarsky

March 15th, 1981

Lecture for Jewish Music Month

Lewandowsky in Berlin, Samuel Naumberg in Paris, Hirsch Weintraub in Koningsberg, Israel Lazarus Mombach in London and David Novakovsky in Odessa.

In the U.S.A. four - part choral singing was introduced to the synagogue by Jacob Samuel Maragowsky (known as Zeidel Rovner) and Abraham Frachtenberg.

As I said when dealing with the Cantorial recitative, the choral compositions used must be of good taste, based on traditional Nusach, and must enhance the meaning of the prayers and thereby strengthen the communication between the congregation and G-d. Congregational singing is an indispensable ingredient of the synagogue service. There are those who are of the opinion that congregational singing is a relatively recent innovation. In fact, it is as old as synagogue worship itself. In the ancient temple in Jerusalem, we are told, as the Levites sang the major portions of the service, the congregation responded by singing "Amen", "Halleluya" and "Ki Le-olam Chasdo."

Unfortunately, in some synagogues the melodies that have become known as "traditional" are in many instances, based on popular secular songs, marches and dances, something which I alluded to earlier in my talk. I am sorry to say that cantors have themselves in many instances perpetuated this problem. It is not unusual for a cantor to adapt sacred prayers to operatic areas. For example: "Ki Lekach Tov" (when the Torah is returned to the Ark)- to music from "The Perlfisher". (Illustrate). To be influenced by operatic music is one thing, but to use the precise melody of the aria is another. Lewandowsky in his famous "Halleluya" must have been influenced by operatics. (Illustrate with "Kol Han'shama"). Also Naumberg, in his "Seu Shearim" must likewise have been influenced (Illustrate).

The deterioration of congregational melodies was caused largely by the thoughtless introduction of "hit" tunes from the Yiddish Theatres. Many of these tunes became traditional. I must stress that it is the responsibility of the Chazzen and Choir Director of each synagogue to discourage the use of these borrowed secular and inept musical elements during religious services, no matter whose tastes they happen to satisfy.

I am pleased to inform you that today the musical tastes of congregants are constantly improving, and they expect to hear and to sing good music in the synagogue; music that creates a mood conducive to prayer, that arouses religious fervor, music that will stimulate the congregation to worship G-d with reverence and innermost devotion.

What type of melodies then should be used for congregational participation? Before answering this question, let us define the terms "traditional", "good" and "bad". In

Chazzan Paul Kowarsky

March 15th, 1981

Lecture for Jewish Music Month

Judaism, the word "traditional" has a connotation of being part of an unwritten code said to have been revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai, and then handed down to us

through the generations. If we accept this definition, then it becomes apparent that many of the melodies that we, our parents and possibly our grandparents have been singing, are most assuredly not traditional. For example, the "traditional. The "Traditional" "Ma-oz Tzur" for Chanukah is a Lutheran Church Hymn. Also the traditional "Ein Keloheinu" is adapted from a German Street March (Illustrate).

By the word "good" I mean pleasant, agreeable, befitting. And the reverse would apply to defining "bad" here. Therefore, good traditional congregational melodies must contain certain basic, acceptable elements. Our congregational melodies must be based on our traditionally accepted nuschaot, or musical patterns. These melodies must have a singable melodic line, preferably within the voice range of the average congregant (which I'm sorry to say is more Baritone than Tenor - and I'm a Tenor). Also the melodies must correctly accent and phrase the Hebrew texts and interpret them musically to conform to the various moods of each particular service. For example, the generally accepted congregational melody on Shabbat morning for the "R'tzei Vim'nuchateinu" absolutely distorts the correct pronunciation of the text. (Sing to illustrate: "Kad'sheinu B'mitsvotcha".)

Conferences and Conventions were held about this problem of inferior congregational melodies, and the Cantors Assembly of America has published several volumes of congregational melodies for the various services. I try to make use of these publications to the extent possible. Congregational melodies are often based on Chassidic melodies, and this is quite in order, again subject to the proviso that the melody selected must be appropriate for the text, the mood and the Nusach of the services. From its inception, Chassidism, founded by the Ba-al Shem Tov in the 18th Century ascribed primary importance to music, and considered song an active force in attaining inspiration, devotion, piety and joy. Musical activity developed side by side in the two main divisions of the Chassidim: 1) The system of the "Besht" (Ba-al Shem Tov" and 2) The "Chabad". Chassidic tunes ("nigunim") are generally wordless, and were adapted to texts of the prayers later. Although Chassidism did not nurture chazzanut as such, the power of its philosophy and music is recognizable in works and creations of some of the leading Chazzanim and synagogue composers of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

A trend has developed over the last several years in trying to fuse the Cantorial recitative with the congregational melody by using what is termed the "refrain" method. Chazzen Max Wohlberg, Professor of Nusach at the Cantors Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, has lectured and written extensively on

Chazzan Paul Kowarsky

March 15th, 1981

Lecture for Jewish Music Month

this trend. He published a book of music called "Yachad B'kol" which contains Cantorial recitatives for the Shabbat, with congregational refrains. The refrain consists usually of a few words of the text of the prayer, sung to a simple, tuneful melody, and the refrain is repeated at various intervals during the Chazen's rendition of the recitative. In this way, Chazzen and Congregation join in the same recitative. I have used and continue to use this method with some success. For example, in the "Rosh Chodesh Benshen"- when we sing the refrain "Shet'chadesh Aleinu". Also in the - "Sim Shalom".

However, one should not attempt to revolutionize a service. New melodies should be introduced gradually over a period of several months. A harmonious blend of the old and the new is desirable. I believe that there should always be the familiar and traditional in the music of the service, but there should also be the new and the unfamiliar, for if there is no innovation, the service can easily become mechanical. There must be variety, change and yes, even the unexpected. The musical portion of each service should allow sufficient time for the Chazzen to express his Chazzanic artistry, for the choir to sing its prepared musical compositions, and for the congregation to participate throughout the service.

It is an accepted fact that that which is new is sometimes disliked and rejected. We must however, not lose sight of the fact that what has become familiar was at one time new and unfamiliar. We must be amenable to change, to variety and to innovation. After all, prayers are not songs *per se*, but rather a vocal communication with our Maker. In the same way that our feelings, moods and purpose of speech dictate the inflections of our spoken voice, so should the music of our prayers be governed by what we are trying to say to G-d. And because our feelings constantly change, the melodies and music of our prayers must, of necessity, vary too. As Chazzen of this great congregation of Beth Tzedec, I shall constantly strive to enlarge the repertoire of each essential musical element of our services so that we may continue to sing to G-d, and to feel and enjoy what we all are doing.

Judaism is beginning to stir again and we can expect a period of revival for the synagogue and its grand musical heritage. As Leib Glantz, one of the greatest Chazanim of all times, a man with whom I was privileged to study at the Tel Aviv Cantorial Academy in Israel, put it:

"If one day, there should emerge a Jewish symphony of a standard comparable with Beethoven and Bach, outside the synagogue, it will surely be rooted in Cantorial music. That symphony will be based on the ancient musical patterns, the Nuschaot created by our people."