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JOSHUA R. JACOBSON

Although I have been actively involved in Jewish music for some time, I am a new subscriber to the *Journal of Synagogue Music*. I must say that I am delighted with the caliber and scholarship of the articles in the magazine. However, I was distressed to find in some *Journal* articles an attitude that troubled me for several years when I was a synagogue choir director: inverted priorities. Many cantors and choir directors seem to feel that the synagogue should serve the highest ideals of music rather than music should serve the highest ideals of the synagogue.

In order to be able to ask the question, "What sort of music would best serve the ideals of Jewish worship?" I feel that we must keep in mind one special characteristic of Jewish worship.

Tefillah has traditionally meant man relating directly and intimately with God. Abraham argues with God about the fate of his nephew, Lot's town, Sodom. Isaac wanders out to the fields in the late afternoon to meditate, or as the Hebrew Bible expresses it, *la-su-ach*, "to have a conversation". Jacob's dealings with God include wrestling with an angel (a very physical metaphor for the same one-to-one relationship), after which he is called "Israel", meaning "he who struggles with God." Moses speaks with God *panim al panim*, face to face.

And yet the Bible shows us over and over again that, *as a people*, the Jews are not mature enough to become strugglers with God on a one-to-one basis. They demand an intermediary. They say to Moses at Mount Sinai, "Let not God speak with us directly or we would die." They then force Moses' brother Aaron into the role of mediator between man and God. Even after Moses, the idealist, destroys the golden calf, Aaron the priest, provides as a compromise the contemporary form of mediation, animal sacrifice. But sacrificial ritual is surely not the meaning of this new religion. Even in the desert, the Jewish people are reminded that they are *all* to be *am kohanim*, an entire *nation* of priests.

The author is director of the Zamir Chorale of Boston, a foundation dedicated to the perpetuation and performance of Hebrew choral music of the highest standards. He is also assistant professor of music at Northeastern University and conductor of the Northeastern University choruses.

Several hundred years later, when sacrifice has been ritually established in Jerusalem, we still hear the voices of individual psalmists, doing their own singing directly to God. We sense the idealism of the Prophets, as when Isaiah preaches, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? Saith the Lord, 'I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts. Bring no more vain oblations; it is an offering of abominations unto me.' "

When the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C.E., and the sacrificial ritual was halted, the Jewish people was once again given the chance to express its religious fervor in direct communication with God; either as individuals, or as a *minyan, a community of individuals* in the newly founded institution of the synagogue. Eventually, 600 years later, the synagogue was to take the place of animal sacrifice altogether.

Throughout the next millenia, Jews who worshipped approached God directly, through poetry, prayer, and song. An extreme example of this intimate (even *chutspadik*) man-God relationship is that of Reb Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev who spoke to God as a prosecutor to a criminal!

Under the influence of the Enlightenment, towards the end of the eighteenth century, a number of Jews in central Europe cast off certain elements of their Judaic burden. They adopted into the synagogue service many superficial elements of Christian ritual, including a superfluous decorum which encouraged passivity in prayer; they let the rabbi and cantor and choir do their praying for them. The role of the hazzan changed. For centuries a *Shaliach Tsibur* (a representative *of* the community), he now became a cantor who performed *for* the congregation; the congregation rarely opened their mouths (except to sing hymns which were stolen from the Lutheran service).

In recent years, some of Jewry's finest composers (Bloch, Milhaud, Ben-Haim to name but a few) have written inspiring music for performance in the synagogue. And one can unquestionably sit back, and, listening to this music, truly be inspired with "religious feeling". But *inspiration* should supplement, not supplant *participation*. I am deeply inspired sitting in the concert hall or listening to recordings. And Bach's, "B - Minor Mass" and Beethoven's late string quartets can take me into the depths of my soul, just as Bloch's, "Sacred Service" can. But not in the same way that *davening* can.

My point is this: *tefilah* is a personal act, an individual voice reaching out with the rest of the Jewish community to God. Art

music can inspire, but only through the medium of other individuals who recreate this music for us. Therefore the *mitpalel* must turn to spontaneous music, to folk music, for his worship vehicle. The "folk music" I refer to is not tunes by Peter, Paul and Mary or Bob Dylan, or even Naomi Shemer, but traditional *nusach*. Furthermore, those Jews who have a sensitivity to tradition, will reject any, but Jewish modes and folk melodies. They will avoid singing *Sh'ma Yisrael* to the tune of the German tavern song, with which it has been coupled for a few hundred years; and they will reject the singing of *Alenu* to the tune of a European hymn, of *Ve-ne'emar* to "Three Blind Mice" and of *Bayom hahu* to "The Farmer in the Dell." (The insipidness of the last two should even outweigh chauvanistic considerations.)

But do not think that I am rejecting the idea of Jewish composers composing art music to Jewish themes and setting liturgical texts to music. Far from it. As conductor of the Zamir Chorale, I am constantly performing this music. But I perform it where it belongs: in the concert hall. For the totality of Jewish experience does not end outside of the synagogue.

Obviously my views will be unpopular among most readers of this journal. Cantors, choir directors and organists make their living providing art music for the synagogue. I am sure that most are not motivated by money alone, but by a devotion to Jewish ideals and culture, and by an overwhelming need to express themselves through the performance of music of the highest quality.

But if the synagogue is to maintain its integrity, its uniqueness, the cantor must remain a *shaliach tsibur*, the organist and choir must not expect to be listened to, but must lead the congregation in Jewish song. Don't neglect *tefilah* in the worship service. Don't neglect the performance of Jewish music in concert. But please, don't merge the two into one.