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Conceptions of Music in the Medieval Mind

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The goal of this thesis is to examine varying conceptions of music in the medieval mind, focusing on the writings of three Jewish philosophers: Saadia Gaon, Yehuda Halevi, and Moses Maimonides. This thesis also describes the changing role of music throughout Jewish history in order to establish the foundation from which these philosophers derived their understanding of the place of music in Jewish secular and religious life.

Following a brief preface and an introduction, this thesis contains ten chapters. The first two chapters examine the role of music in ancient Israel through the period of the Second Temple, focusing on writings in the Tanakh and extra-biblical sources. Chapters three and four look at the changing role of music after the *Hurban*, seen through various texts from the Mishnah and the Talmud. The fifth chapter describes the role of music in the medieval Diaspora, setting the stage for a detailed analysis of the medieval philosophers. Chapter six looks at the musical writings of Saadia Gaon, the first Jewish philosopher, and the following chapter analyzes the work of the poet-philosopher Yehuda Halevi. In chapter eight, I offer a brief insight into the role of music and Jewish mysticism, focusing on Abraham Abulafia's prophetic kabbalah. Chapter nine details the musical writings of Moses Maimonides, and the final chapter is a conclusion of my findings.

Table of Contents

Preface

This is a project that has been over ten years in the making. When I began my academic studies as an undergraduate student, I was forced to wrestle for the first time with the tension of wanting to be both a musician and a scholar. Each university to which I applied seemed to offer me the same answer-there was no way to fully devote one's self to both worlds. Finally, at the University of Michigan, I met my teacher and mentor, Ms. Jane Heirich, who taught me that if one truly loves music, there is always a way to fit it into the rest of one's life path, wherever it may lead. I followed her advice and spent the following four years studying the integration of music and Judaic studies, writing my undergraduate thesis on the role of folk music in the recent spiritual "revolution" in Reform Judaism.

Upon entering graduate school at Hebrew Union College, I was once again faced with the decision of having to prioritize either music or intensive academic study. I chose to enter into the rabbinical program, but after being told (kindly) by the head of the cantorial program in Jerusalem that I had made a mistake and chosen the wrong profession, I began to reconsider. Was it really possible to combine a deep love of music with an intellectual pursuit of the rabbinate? In my five years at HUC, I have struggled to make this a reality. I have attempted to bring music into my rabbinic courses and my career, seeking out opportunities to study those texts in which Jewish scholars before me have wrestled with the same issues.

In a music history class in my fourth year at HUC, Dr. Mark Kligman presented a text from Saadia Gaon's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* in which the philosopher explained his theories about the ways in which music can affect the body both physically

and spiritually. I was amazed to learn that Saadia, the first great Jewish philosopher, had attempted to intellectually reconcile some of the same musical questions that I had been asking. I began to wonder if any of the other medieval Jewish philosophers had broached the subject of music, and was surprised to learn that indeed, Saadia was not alone.

For my work on this thesis, I chose to primarily study the writings of two other extremely significant medieval Jewish philosophers, Yehuda Halevi and Moses Maimonides. I focused on these three men in part because of my own intellectual resonance with their writings, but also because I felt that they represented three different types of Jewish scholars. All had somewhat similar intellectual approaches, but besides their roles as philosophers, each man had a unique background that impacted his thoughts on the role of music in Jewish life. Saadia was a liturgist, Halevi a poet, and Maimonides a doctor; these roles helped define their particular approaches to questions about music.

First and foremost, however, these three men were devout Jews, deeply entrenched in Jewish law and thought. Therefore, before I could undertake a study of their writings on music, I had to research the history of music and the changing Jewish attitudes towards it. I learned that the Jewish understanding of music underwent a tremendous shift over time, moving from an essentially positive view of music in ancient Israel to the stringent, cautionary prohibitions of the Rabbis in the Talmud. In order to create a critical foundation from which to study the medieval philosophers' views on music, in this thesis I have presented a brief history of Jewish music, primarily shown through biblical and rabbinic texts.

A brief note to the reader-unless otherwise noted, all of the translations of Hebrew and Aramaic texts are mine. I have also included the original texts whenever possible.

Introduction

It is a widely recognized scholarly assertion that there are very few extant writings on the subject of Jewish attitudes towards music in the medieval period,[1] and even "the sparse crop which has been gathered from this field can be shown to contain a little that is dubious, even spurious, whilst some of it consists of material that has been borrowed, directly or indirectly, from Arabic works."[2] Additionally, it is commonly acknowledged that the subjects of music theory and the philosophy of music were also neglected by medieval Jews,[3] and due to their lack of a fully developed musical notation system, there is scant hope of discovering archeological proof of musical creativity from this period.

Based on these overwhelmingly negative claims and "the historical vacuum resulting from the absence of musical documents,"[4] one would assume that there is little to say about varying conceptions of music in the Jewish medieval mind, and indeed, this subject has been generally overlooked or ignored by most academics. However, I hope to show in this thesis that in fact, medieval Jews were discussing and thinking deeply about the role of music in their religious and secular lives.

Rather than attempt to gather a complete corpus of medieval Jewish writings on music (a task which Henry George Farmer, the leading scholar on the subject, once

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[1] Moritz Steinschneider, "Jewish Literature of the Middle Ages" *Jewish QuarterlyReview* (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrmann, 1905, xvii), 559-61.

[2] Henry George Farmer, *Sa'adyah Gaon on the Influence of Music* (London: Arthur Probsthain, 1943), 1.

[3] Isaiah Sonne and Eric Werner, "The Philosophy and Theory of Music in Judaeo-Arabic Literature" *Three Ages of Musical Thought: Essays on Ethics and Aesthetics* (New York: Di Capo Press, 1981), 137.

[4] Amnon Shiloah, *Jewish Musical Traditions* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 38.

claimed would require "years of toil"[5]) I have chosen to look at perspectives on music through the lens of medieval philosophy, focusing primarily on Jews in the Diaspora in the tenth through the twelfth centuries. I was inspired, in part, by the words of the great twentieth-century philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel who claimed, "I am neither a musician nor an expert on music. But the shattering experience of music has been a challenge to my thinking on ultimate issues."[6] My hope was that the medieval philosophers, whose profound insights into society, religion, and the universe seem to have spanned nearly every imaginable topic, would also have been intellectually challenged by their experience of music. Similarly to Heschel, none of the three medieval philosophers on whom I have chosen to focus were musicians, yet in analyzing their work it becomes abundantly clear that indeed, they too held very strong opinions on the function, purpose, and power of music.

This is not to say that these philosophers wrote extensively on the subject of music; in fact, their comments are relatively limited and are frequently unclear or contradictory. Generally, this has been interpreted as signifying that these men, for a variety of reasons, simply weren't interested in music. Yet I believe their often vague and terse comments are in and of themselves a profound statement about these men as individuals and as representatives of the wider Jewish population. There is a common tension in these texts that I think helps to express the relative dearth of additional material on music in the Jewish medieval world.

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[5] Farmer, *Sa'adyah*, 1.

[6] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Vocation of the Cantor" *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), 246.

Each philosopher seems torn between following the stringent, albeit frequently disregarded prohibitions against music in the Jewish tradition and acknowledging the wisdom of outside scholarship that had proven that music could have an extremely positive impact on one's spiritual and physical being. This struggle is about more than music; it represents a wider, ongoing dialectic in the Jewish tradition that exists even into the modern day. These men were both beholden to tradition and influenced by the outside world, and as a result, in the words of Dr. Leonard Kravitz, they were forced to constantly wrestle for some sort of *shidduch*,[7] attempting to live Jewishly in a religiously and culturally diverse environment that was constantly advancing beyond the established scientific and philosophical boundaries. Regarding the subject of music in particular, as leaders and models for the Jewish community they could not disregard the rabbinic animosity towards music, but neither could they ignore the valuable place of music as a science, a liturgical tool, and an instinctive human experience.

It is also clear that each philosopher's writings on the subject of music embodies his own personal perspective and reflects different nuances of the medieval period. Saadia, the first Jewish philosopher, is known as the Gaon, yet his writings on music seem to be based more on his love for and understanding of Jewish worship than on halacha. Halevi, the poet, was also the creator of a unique philosophy about the superiority of the Jewish people, and this is clearly evident in his writings about music, though in practice he rarely followed his own rules. Maimonides, who is famous in both the Jewish and Arab worlds for his work in philosophy and law, offers many approving

[7] A match, שידוך

comments on the stringent musical prohibitions of the Rabbis, yet he displays his greatest understanding of music in the writings from his "day job" as a doctor.

By analyzing the works of these three philosophers, my primary goal in this thesis is to show that not only were medieval Jews contemplating the subject of music in innovative and fascinating ways, but that despite their varied writings and different reactions to the outside world, they were grappling with the same underlying issues that have defined much of Jewish creativity in culture and thought throughout history. In addition, these medieval philosophers were also forced to reconcile the varying aspects of their personalities and roles in the Jewish world, and their struggles can be seen in their writings on the virtually taboo subject of music.

I will begin by describing the highly positive role of music in ancient Israel, shown historically by examining the Hebrew Bible and other texts dating through the period of the Second Temple. The Jewish perspective on music changed tremendously following the *Hurban*, so by looking at the role of music in the early rabbinic period and through the writings of the Talmud, the reader will be able to see its changing place in the Jewish mindset. By the time of the medieval period, most Jews were living in the Diaspora in Arab lands, and Jewish conceptions of music changed once again due to the influence of their highly advanced neighbors. This sets the backdrop for examining the perspectives of different Jewish medieval philosophers and their writings on music. An analysis of the brief musical writings of Saadia Gaon, the first Jewish philosopher, will be followed by one of Yehuda Halevi, whose philosophical treatise was in many ways a rejection of that written by Saadia. Halevi was also influenced a great deal by mysticism, so a short chapter on music and mysticism, specifically looking at Abraham Abulafia's

prophetic kabbalah, will follow. The last chapter of this thesis focuses on Maimonides, whose writings on music are the most diverse and perhaps the most profound in this thesis.

By examining varying conceptions of music in the medieval mind, one can learn not only of the role of music in Jewish life, but also find profound insights into the ways in which Jews throughout history have tried to make a *shidduch* between maintaining the traditions of Jewish life and evolving with the ever changing outside world. Judaism's vast musical history and the great wisdom of these innovative philosophers can provide key insights into the role and understanding of music in Jewish thought and practice even into the modern day.

Chapter One-Music in the Tanakh

To understand the changing roles of and varying perspectives on music throughout Jewish history, it is important to first look at Judaism's earliest and most sacred text: the Hebrew Bible. While some of the current knowledge regarding the musical life of ancient Israel has been discovered through external sources such as archaeological relics of musical instruments and material from neighboring cultures in the Near East, most of the information known about the role of music in ancient Israelite culture has been derived from biblical scholarship.

The Hebrew word for 'music' does not actually appear in the Torah, and the text itself offers approximately 500 references to music contained in only 25 *psukim*. However, this is not to say that "music played a subordinate and inconspicuous part in the life of ancient Israel; on the contrary [the Israelites] must have been a people of an unusually musical temperament whose daily nourishment was song and sound."[8] Indeed, the idea of music is contextually woven throughout the text of the entire Bible, playing an intermittent yet key role in the biblical text. In order to trace music's significance in the Bible, and thus create a base from which to understand the importance of music in ancient Israelite history and beyond, one must examine the various textual references to musicians, instruments, and songs.

Music in the Torah

Lamech, a direct descendant of Cain, is the first musician depicted in the Torah. He entreats his wives in Genesis 4:23-24 to hear his voice, שְׁמַעַן קוֹלִי; this unusual

[8] Carl Heinrich Cornell, *Music in the Old Testament* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1909), 3.

phrase and the poetic verses that follow it help indicate that Lamech's words were, indeed, an improvisatory vocalized song. In this, the first biblical song, Lamech sings to his wives about the protection that he believes God will offer him after he accidentally committed an act of murder. A potentially ominous beginning for the birth of music, it is Lamech's son, Yuval, who is credited in the Jewish tradition as being the patriarch of all musicians. Yuval's birth is noted in Genesis 4:21 where the text claims that he was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the pipe-יוּבַל הוּא הָיָה אֲבִי כָּל־תֹּפֵשׂ כִּנּוֹר וְעוּגָב. The mere inclusion of this description of Yuval in the beginning of Genesis expresses the fact that the biblical author must have perceived music as being one of the earliest and perhaps most important gifts created by mankind, its invention occurring in only the seventh generation after humans were created.

As the text progresses, music appears in a multitude of forms, many of which include the mention of various instruments. There are almost two-dozen different musical instruments referred to in the Bible as a whole, and some superscriptions have lead biblical scholars to assume that there were many more instruments that archaeologists and scholars have yet to uncover.[9] These fall into the categories of percussion, string, and wind instruments, with the shofar as the most frequently mentioned instrument, referred to 69 times in the biblical text.

A great deal of scholarly research has gone into the description and analysis of these instruments and their various uses, and one could certainly go through the Bible and determine the specific significance of each instrument. For our purposes, however, it is simply important to note that musical instruments are included in biblical narratives,

[9] Ronald H Isaacs, *Jewish Music: Its History, People, and Song* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc, 1997), 43.

descriptions of ritual acts, liturgy, legal texts, and many of the other significant events that will be detailed in the following pages. There is, it appears, no aspect of the life of the ancient Israelites as detailed in the Bible that does not incorporate some sort of musical experience. The presence of musical instruments in spiritual and secular acts is quite widespread in the text; it is abundantly clear that instrumental music was a given for the biblical author, an aspect of all facets of human life that was both organic and normative.

Within the context of many of these stories in which instruments are mentioned, there are also references to music or song. In Genesis 31:27, Laban confronts Jacob and chastises him for fleeing, claiming that had Jacob stayed, he would have sent him off with festive songs, with timbrel and lyre-וַאֲשַׁלְּחֲךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשִׁרִים בְּתֹף וּבְכִנּוֹר. These שִׁרִים are the Torah's first mention of songs. The verbal form of the word for song is used in Exodus 15:1-18 during the Song of the Sea when Moses and the people sing to God, and again in verse 21 when Miriam and the women play on their timbrels. A portion of Moses' song, found in verse 15:11, is considered so significant that it has been incorporated into the daily Jewish prayer service as the liturgical song "Mi Chamocha." The people of Israel again sing as a community during the Song of the Well in Numbers 21:17, singing to the well itself in the hopes that it will spring.[10] Additionally, there is a cluster of references to song at the end of Deuteronomy. In verse 31:19 of Deuteronomy, God tells Moses, "Write this song and teach it to the Israelites; put it in their mouths, in order that this song may be a witness for me against them." This text indicates the powerful, almost anthropomorphic role that song has, for when the Israelites turn away

[10] אָז יָשִׁיר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת עָלִי בְאֵר עֲנוּ־לָהּ

from God, the song will confront them as God's witness. These are just a few examples of the many pivotal roles music plays in the Torah text. Sung and played by our greatest leaders and the masses alike, music is present in some of the most sacred and mundane moments in the Torah.

Music in the Prophets and Writings

The majority of references to music in the Hebrew Bible fall outside of the Torah in the works of the Prophets and in the Writings. Due to their relative historicity, these additional references are perhaps of more worth to us here than those in the Torah in terms of helping one to understand the significance of music in ancient Israelite culture. That is to say, since archaeological and scholarly research have proven some historical aspects of what has been preserved in the Prophets and Writings, a number of these texts are able to give us a more accurate picture of what life in ancient Israel may really have been like. The Writings also include books such as Song of Songs and the Psalms that can be viewed as entirely musical works.

The works of the Prophets and the Writings also help to show the incredible power and variety of roles attributed to music in ancient Israel. In these texts, music can be seen as directly connected to prophecy, healing therapy, military victory, and life cycle and religious events.

Music and Religion

Just as music plays a crucial role in life cycle and religious ceremonies in modern Jewish practice, it did so in ancient times as well and is recorded throughout the Bible in

such instances. Music was utilized in social gatherings and often helped people to express joy. Celebrations of royalty, many of which are detailed in the book of Samuel, included coronations and parades and frequently used music to enhance the enjoyment of the merrymakers. Royal courts regularly amassed musicians and musical instruments to display their wealth, such as is referred to in Ecclesiastes 2:8. This overabundance of wealth which was displayed by the presence of such musicians was also a source of reproach in several instances, such as in II Samuel 19:36.[11]

As a religious tool, music was used in the Bible in a number of manners. It was sung and played on pilgrimages to religious sites, and music was also used to announce many of the festivals. In Numbers 10:10, the Israelites are commanded to make silver trumpets to play on festivals, days of gladness, and at *rosh chodesh* celebrations. Music was also believed to offer some sort of religious protection, and thus the priestly robes were designed with bells on the hems to ensure Aaron's survival in his encounter with God in the Sanctuary.[12] Song was utilized as a means of mourning, which can be understood implicitly in David's laments for Jonathan, Saul, and Abner, and explicitly in the description of the mourners who sang specially composed dirges in II Chronicles 35:25.

Music, Work and Battle

There are a number of instances in the Bible in which people use music while engaged in work, serving as a sort of "occupational therapy" to alleviate the boredom of

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[11] אִם־יִטְעָם עַבְדְּךָ אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֹכַל וְאֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֶשְׁתֶּה אִם־אֶשְׁמַע עוֹד בְּקוֹל שָׁרִים וְשָׁרוֹת?

[12] Exodus 28:33, 35: וְעָשִׂיתָ עַל־שׁוּלָיו...פַּעֲמֹנֵי זָהָב ...וְנִשְׁמַע קוֹלוֹ בְּבֹאוֹ אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וּבְצֵאתוֹ וְלֹא יָמוּת

monotonous tasks and make manual labor easier. The prophets include several examples of folk-songs and musical chants that may have originally been used during the chore of treading grapes, such as one found in Jeremiah 48:33. In Numbers 21:17, as mentioned previously, there is a similar example of chanting that may have accompanied the digging of a well.

A number of the songs included in the biblical text are those of military victory, and these songs are among the oldest in Scripture. The first lengthy song in the Torah is the Song of the Sea found in Exodus 15:1-19, and it celebrates the escape of the Israelites from Egypt after they crossed the Reed Sea. In Numbers 21:27-30, a shorter ballad of the Israelites gloats over the defeat of the Amorites and Sichon. Another lengthy ancient song and poem is the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 which is Moses' farewell song and his final praise to God.

In the works of the Writings and the Prophets there are also a number of ancient military songs. The Song of Deborah celebrates the victory of the prophetess over the Canaanites in Judges 5. In I Samuel 18:7, King Saul and David are greeted by song and rhythmic dancing, as this was the popular custom greeting men as they returned home from battle. King David himself utters a song of thanks to God after he is delivered from the hands of his enemies in II Samuel 22.[13]

The military also used music as a means of rallying or signaling troops, as can be seen with the shofar call to battle in Judges 3:27, and also with the special silver horns described in Numbers 10 (mentioned previously) which were used both for marking celebrations and sounding an alarm. In the battle of Jericho, recorded in Joshua 6:3-16,

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[13] וַיְדַבֵּר דָּוִד לַיהוָה אֶת־דִּבְרֵי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת...

shofarot were used by Israelite priests to send the walls tumbling down. This story is one of the most well known tales of the power of music; as commanded by God, the priests blew their shofarot continuously as the Ark of the Covenant was carried into Jericho, and the sound was so powerful that the city's walls "came tumblin' down."

Music, Magic, Prophecy and Healing

Music's connection to magic, prophecy and healing is quite significant in the biblical text and has been drawn upon repeatedly throughout the course of Jewish history and scholarship. In I Samuel 10:5, Samuel tells Saul that before he is anointed king, he will encounter a group of prophets playing instruments and speaking in ecstasy. In II Kings 3:15, Elisha requests a musician to improve his mood and bring on the prophetic state.

The idea that particular modes and methods of making of music can create certain dispositions in people, even going so far as to improve one's physical or mental health, was an ancient idea in the Semitic East that has stayed with the Jewish people since antiquity.[14] Perhaps the most famous biblical musician and healer is David, who first enters the regal court because of his musical abilities. When an evil spirit from God possesses King Saul in I Samuel 16:16, Saul's courtiers seek a lyre player who will be able to make Saul feel better when he gets in his moods.[15] David, the "sweet singer of Israel,"[16] is called to the task because of his skill with the lyre. He is repeatedly

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[14] Farmer, *Sa'adyah*, 3.

[15] יְבַקְשׁוּ אֲדֹנֵינוּ יֹאמַר לְעֲבָדָיו הַנִּצָּבִים לְפָנָיו יְבַקְשׁוּ אִישׁ יֹדֵעַ מְנַגֵּן בַּכִּנּוֹר וְהָיָה בִּהְיוֹת עָלֶיךָ רוּחַ־אֱלֹהִים רָעָה וְנִגֵּן בְּיָדוֹ וְטוֹב לָךְ

[16] II Samuel 23:1: נְעִים זְמִרוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל Alternately, "the favorite of the songs of Israel."

mentioned in connection with music throughout the biblical text, though not always in the capacity of a musical healer.

The ancient Israelites also believed that music played a key role in warding off evil, not only in a healing capacity but also as a way to communicate with God and other spirits. "One of the most powerful functions of music in its earliest stages was its magical force; the belief in the magic effectiveness of musical sounds pervades all cultures."[17] Though the use of magic seems antithetical to many Jewish writings, such as in Isaiah's condemnation of Babylonian magicians in Isaiah 47:9-15, "the Jews themselves were firm believers in magic. Indeed, in Christian times, the Greeks looked upon the Jews as magicians, and we are told that the Jews actually believed that Jesus was addicted to it."[18] The Talmudic source for this argument can be found in B. T. Sotah 47a, which does not name Jesus but may be referring to him. The text explains, "This student practiced magic, and incited and led astray and caused Israel to sin-

"דאמר מר כישף והסית והדיח והחטיא את ישראל

The connections between music and magic persisted in ancient Israelite culture, particularly parallels between music and black magic or Satanism. In Midrash Hagadol, Yuval is said to have "invented all musical instruments found in the world and first introduced the art of singing."[19] The instruments that Yuval created are similar to all other human inventions, such as the iron tools invented by Yuval's half-brother.[20] This leads to a possible connection between music and weaponry, denoting the potential

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[17] Eric Werner, From Generation to Generation: Studies on Jewish Musical Tradition. (New York: America Conference of Cantors, 1967), 131.

[18] Farmer, *Sa'adyah*, 2.

[19] הוא הוה אבוהון דכל ארדיבלין וכרדיבלין והוא תיקן כל כלי שיר שבעולם והוא נכנס במלאכת השיר תחילה.

[20] Gen. 4:22: גַּם־הִוא יָלְדָה אֶת־תּוּבַל קַיִן לֹטֵשׁ כָּל־חֹרֵשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת וּבַרְזֶל

interference of the devil. Various cultures were known to identify sounds made by iron with those either emitted by Satan or used to keep Satan at bay.[21] It is, in fact, a common motif in ancient near Eastern literature to describe Satan as the inventor or promoter of music, endowing it with dangerous charms and black magic. In Pirkei d' R. Eliezer, music is listed as one of the forms of depravity that brought about the flood:

> The sons of Cain indulged in amusements and their behavior was reported to the inhabitants of the mountains, the descendants of Seth. Some of these later went down to the plain attempting to extract from them the sons of Cain in their depravity, but alas, they themselves fell into the traps of beautiful women, music, and intoxicating liquors.[22]

As a human creation, music was thought to embody the hubris of humankind, a remnant of Satan's magical control that denied God's sovereignty over the earth.

The principle of sympathetic magic was practiced to influence God, and thus music, a tool used by those who wanted to speak with God, had great magical powers. This can be shown linguistically by the word נְאֻם, which is used both for the voice of God and also used for the utterance of soothsayers in Numbers 24:3, as well as in prophetic oracles such as in Proverbs 30:1. Music was also used to appeal to other gods, as in the dancing around the Golden Calf in Exodus 32:19 and by the prophets of Baal in I Kings 18:26.

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[21] J.G. Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1919) Vol. III, 446.

[22] Gerald Friedlander, trans. *Pirkei d'Rebbi Eliezer* (London: Sepher Hermon Press, 1916), 158.

Music in the First Temple

"The step from the intoning of the soothsayer to the chanting of the precentor in the Temple is but a short one."[23] Thus, the many uses of music described in the Bible were easily transformed into the highly musical rituals of the Temple cult. King David appointed Levitical singers who were to perform in the Temple, and I Chronicles 25 records that 288 musicians led the parade as David brought the Ark to Jerusalem. The chapter also details the specific instruments to which certain priestly families were assigned to play in the Temple rites. After David's death, when Solomon became the king and the Temple was finally built, he fulfilled his father's instructions and the Levites praised God with instruments to celebrate the dedication of the Temple. The detailed descriptions of the musical proceedings in Chronicles has led many scholars to believe that the book may have been written by a priest or Levite, perhaps even a member of a Temple musical choir or orchestra who would have been able to offer such vivid images of Temple worship.[24]

In II Chronicles 29:25-28, the text explains that the Levites musical performances were connected to sacrificial worship in the Temple.[25] "Unique in the history of music is the firm belief in the purifying and sin-atoning power of the Temple's music, ascribed both to chant and instruments."[26] The function of both sacrifice and the music that

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[23] Farmer, *Sa'adyah*. 4.

[24] Marsha Bryan Edelman, *Discovering Jewish Music* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 2.

[25] II Chron. 29:28: וְכָל־הַקָּהָל מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים וְהַשִּׁיר מְשׁוֹרֵר וְהֶחֱצֹצְרוֹת מַחְצְצְרִים

[26] Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc, 1984), 8.

accompanied it was the atonement of sin. As an integral part of the offering, the music could not be faulty in any way.

As mentioned previously, a key feature in the religious service of the Temple was the singing of hymns by the Levitical priests, and these hymns can be found in the book of Psalms. The book of Psalms, which Jewish tradition asserts was composed by King David, contains 150 such hymns or songs. This biblical poetry was clearly intended for singing, for in the headings of these psalms, various Hebrew words are incorporated that designate them as different kinds of liturgical music. 57 of these psalms are specifically labeled as festival songs by the word מִזְמוֹר, and 30 use the Hebrew שִׁיר, often in proximity with מִזְמוֹר. Psalms 120-134 are specifically referred to as שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת, songs of ascent. The title לַמְנַצֵּחַ is used over 50 times, which indicates the use of a choirmaster or musical leader of some sort. In six psalms, this phrase is followed by the term נְגִינוֹת, referring to a certain stringed instrument that accompanied the song. 13 psalms use the word מַשְׂכִּיל, which probably indicates some sort of special, particularly skillful musical rendering. Some psalm titles allude to a hymn of a certain person or group, such as Psalm 87 of the Korachites and Psalm 77 of Asaph. Other psalms used in the Temple utilize directions to help the performers. Songs of ascent were recited by the Levites from the height of 15 steps, and there are also a number of psalms used for specific days of the week.

There are many other musical terms used in the psalms whose exact meanings are still unknown. They may refer to either the specific purposes of the songs (such as עַל־הַגִּתִּית, which may indicate songs used while pressing grapes) or to the use of certain

unknown instruments or vocal styles.[27] Yet even without a complete knowledge of the meanings or manners in which these psalms were sung, the complexity of these psalms and their musical terminology reflects the multi-faceted understanding of music in ancient Israelite culture. The biblical author or authors so carefully recorded the precise manner in which music should be sung or played at different times, by particular people, using certain instruments; this alone should make it clear how crucial music was to the lives of the ancient Israelites.

[27] Isaacs, 32.

Chapter 2-Music in the Second Temple Period

By the time period in which the Second Temple stood, Jewish musical life was not restricted to the Temple service or to religious performance. This is expressed beautifully in a passage from Ecclesiasticus 32:3-6 which shows the author's appreciation of and respect for secular music:

> To you, the older man, it becomes to speak with consummate knowledge-but do not impede the music! Where one listens (to music) do not pour out talk, do not annoy the listeners with lectures. As a ring of rubies shines in a golden setting, so is the musician's ensemble as a banquet of wine; as in golden framework a precious emerald, so adorn melodies of musicians a feast of wine. Listen in silence! And for your modesty people will thank you.

Extra-biblical sources such as this and others in the Apocrypha also offer a great deal of information about music in ancient Israel, and the final part of this time period is documented in the writings of Philo, Josephus, and the sectarians of Qumran. Still, the most information we have regarding music in ancient Jewish life comes from biblical texts describing the Temple cult. In the Bible, the lists of returned exiles from Babylon found in the second chapter of the Book of Ezra and chapter seven of the Book of Nehemiah include families of Temple singers. Ezra 3:11 records the performance of musicians, suggesting that music survived the Babylonian exile and songs were transmitted to the second Temple. In chapter twelve of Nehemiah's writings, he describes the daily duties of singers in the Second Temple.

When the ceremony dedicating the laying of the Temple's foundation occurred, the Levitical priests offered a grand musical performance. Singing by the Levites was an essential part of the sacrificial system at all times. There were always at least twelve Levites on the raised platform while the music was taking place, corresponding with nine

lyres, two harps and a cymbal.[28] There are many descriptions of the various musical activities of the Temple in the Talmud, detailing various festivals, the making of different instruments, and the nature of the Temple song.

In the Talmud, one can also find record of larger Israelite participation in the musical festivities of the Temple, particularly at the mysterious feast of drawing water. This festival was, among other things, a musical extravaganza. "With the exception of the priestly trumpet-blowing and the Levitical chant, everything else was improvised, noisy, and exuberant. No wonder most ancient authors believed-judging from hearsay-that this was a Bacchic wine-orgy."[29] In the Babylonian Talmud, Succah 50b discusses the feast of drawing water, a confusing and seemingly irrelevant *sugya* that in fact comes to be of great importance to later Jewish discussions regarding music. Two generations following the destruction of the Sanctuary's fall, the question arose regarding the relative importance of the vocal and instrumental constituents in the Temple ritual. The Rabbis, not being priests, were unable to find an answer, but it remains worth discussing here. Following the Aramaic text is my original outline, translation, and analysis of this *sugya* (note that the italics in the translation and the format of the Aramaic text are also mine).

Talmud Bavli-Succah 50b

תנו רבנן החליל דוחה את השבת דברי רבי יוסי בר יהודה

וחכמים אומרים אף יום טוב אינו דוחה

אמר רב יושף מחלוקת בשיר של קרבן

דרבי יוסי סבר עיקר שירה בכלי ועבודה היא ודוחה את השבת

ורבנן סברי עיקר שירה בפה ולאו עבודה היא ואינה דוחה את השבת

[28] T.B. Arachin 13b

[29] Werner, *Sacred Bridge*, 7.

אבל שיר של שואבה דברי הכל שמחה היא ואינה דוחה את השבת

אמר רב יוסף מנא אמינא דבהא פליגי

דתניא כלי שרת שעשאן של עץ רבי פוסל ורבי יוסי בר יהודה מכשיר

מאי לאו בהא קמיפלגי

מאן דמכשיר סבר עיקר שירה בכלי וילפינן מאבובה דמשה

ומאן דפסיל סבר עיקר שירה בפה ולא ילפינן מאבובה

לא דכולי עלמא עיקר שירה בכלי וחבא בנין אפשר משאי אפשר קמיפלגי

מאן דמכשיר סבר דנין אפשר משאי אפשר

ומאן דפסיל סבר לא דנין אפשר משאי אפשר

ואיבעית אימא דכולי עלמא דעיקר שירה בפה ואין דנין אפשר משאי אפשר

והכא במילף מנורה בכללי ופרטי או ברבויי ומיעוטי קא מיפלגי

רבי דריש כללי ופרטי רבי יוסי בר יהודה דריש רבויי ומיעוטי

רבי דריש כללי ופרטי ועשיתה מנרת כלל זהב טהור פרט מקשה יעשה המנורה

חזר וכלל כלל ופרט

וכלל אי אתה דן אלא כעין הפרט מה הפרט מפורש של מתכת

רבי יוסי בר יהודה דריש רבויי ומיעוטי ועשיתה מנרת ריבה זהב טהור מיעט

מקשה תיעשה המנורה חזר וריבה

ריבה ומיעט וריבה ריבה הכל

מאי רבי רבי כל מילי מאי מיעט מיעט של חרס

Baraita 1: The Rabbis taught, The flute overrides Shabbat.

These are the words of Rabbi Yose bar Yehuda.

Disagreement 1: The Sages hold, Even a festival it doesn't override.

Clarification 1: Rav Yosef said, The dispute was about the song of the sacrifice.

Rav Yose bar Yehuda's Side 1: For Rav Yose holds that the essential song *must be* with instruments, and it is *part of* the Temple worship service, and *thus* overrides Shabbat.

Rabbis' Side 1: And the Rabbis hold that the essential song is vocal, and *the instruments* are not a *part of* the Temple worship service, and so do not override Shabbat.

Resolution 1: But as for the song of the Water-Drawing Celebration *on Succot*, all hold that it is just for rejoicing, and so it does not override Shabbat.

Question 1: Rav Yosef said, From where do I say they disagree on this?

Baraita 2: It was taught about vessels used for Temple service that were made of wood: Rebbi invalidates them, but R. Yose bar Yehuda validates them.

Question 2: Is it not that they disagree about this?

R. Yose bar Yehuda's Side 2: The one who validates holds that the essential song is with instruments, and derives *his perspective* from Moses' flute *which was wooden and used in the Temple*

Rebbi's Side 2: The one who invalidates holds that the essential song is vocal, and nothing is derived from Moses' flute.

Disagreement 3: No! For all, the essential song is with instruments. And they dispute if it is possible to derive a possibility from an impossibility, *when the impossibility is that Moses' flute couldn't have been made of anything but wood.*

R. Yose bar Yehuda's Side 3: The one who validates holds that a possibility can be derived from an impossibility.

Rebbi's Side 3: The one who invalidates holds that a possibility cannot be derived from an impossibility.

Answer 3: If you want, say that for all, the essential song is vocal, and a possibility cannot be derived from an impossibility.

Question 4: And here, they disagree: should the *components of the* Menorah be defined according to generalization and specification or according to amplification and limitation?

[*Explanation: Sometimes, the Torah states a law first with a general statement, next with a specific statement, and lastly returns to the general statement. The former technique is R. Yishmael's system of biblical interpretation, in which a specific statement following a general statement defines the general one. In the latter technique, the specific statement just limits the general one.*]

Answer 4: Rebbi says generalization and specification, while R. Yose bar Yehuda says amplification and limitation.

Rebbi's Side 4: Rebbi says generalization and specification.
"You shall make a menorah (Ex.25:31)" is a generalization.
Next, "pure gold" is a specification. *Lastly*, "the menorah shall be made" returns to a generalization.
When there is a generalization, a specification, and a generalization, you can infer only that which is similar to the specification. Just as the specification concerned metal, so too the generalization is about metal.

R. Yose bar Yehuda's Side 4: R. Yose bar Yehuda says amplification and limitation.
"You shall make a menorah" amplifies. *Next*, "pure gold" limits. *Lastly*, "the menorah shall be made" again amplifies. It has amplified and limited and amplified, and thus has included everything.

Question 5: What has it included and what has it excluded?

Answer 5: It has excluded earthenware.

Statement 6: Rav Pappa said, as the Tannaim taught,
They *(the musicians)* were the slaves of the Kohanim.
These are the words of R. Meir.

Disagreement 6: R. Yosi says, They were from the families of the house of Hapegarim and the house of Tziparyah., and they were from Emma'um, who marry the Kehunah *and were thus pureblooded Israelites*.

Disagreement 7: R. Chanina ben Antignos says, They were Levites.
Question 8: Do they not argue about this same issue?

R. Meir's Side 8:The one who says they were slaves holds that the essential song is vocal.

R. Chanina ben Antignos' Side 8: The one who says they were Levites holds that the essential song is with instruments.

Question 9: So what does R. Yosi hold?

Possible Answer 9: If he holds that the essential song is vocal, slaves could also do it, but if he holds that the essential song is with instruments, Levites could do it, but not Israelites.

Resolution 9: No! Rather, all agree that the essential song is vocal, and they differ in that one master holds that this is how it happened, and one master holds that this is how it happened.

Question 10: What is the difference?

Answer 10: The difference is in if they are raised from the platform to getting family status and ma'aser.

R. Meir's Side 10: The one who says they were slaves holds that we do not raise a person from the platform to getting family status or to ma'aser.

R. Yose's Side 10: The one who says that they were Israelites holds that we raise one from the platform to getting family status but not ma'aser.

R. Chanina ben Antignos' Side 10: And the one who says that they were Levites holds that we raise a person from the platform both to getting family status and to ma'aser.

This *sugya* deals with a number of issues pertaining to worship in the Temple, particularly regarding music and various vessels used for Temple service. The arguments within the text often seem to be only tangentially related, and a number of questions arise that are never answered. Therefore, for the sake of simplification, one might divide the *sugya* into two primary topics: the nature of the principle Temple song and the composition of vessels used for Temple service. The former question is asked, explored, and partially answered in several places within the text. One might think, therefore, that the issue of music, the song itself, would be the overarching halachic concept. However, on deeper examination, it seems that the significant halachic issue is actually that regarding vessels used for Temple service, while the issue of music is an ethical and theological matter.

The *sugya* begins with a dispute regarding the song of sacrifice. If this essential song were instrumental and part of the Temple worship service, the playing of instruments would override Shabbat. This perspective was derived from the example of Moses' flute, which was a service vessel used in the Temple and made of wood. Already, the direction of the argument seems to have swayed from its original intent, but it is only this point that brings us to the important question at hand.

Moses' flute is clearly unique in its status, a relic from biblical times or perhaps even from the hands of Moses himself. Yet it is the material of the flute that holds the interest of the redactor. A halachic issue arises from the example of Moses' flute: can any vessel used for Temple service be made from wood? Moses' flute may not be a reliable enough proof to answer this question, for not only is it unique, but perhaps the flute could not have been made of anything but wood. This could be due to the delicate nature of the instrument, or even to the limited materials available to artisans in biblical times. Also, Moses' flute is a historical remnant, not originally intended for Temple use, so it is of a different nature than instruments specifically made as service vessels.

The argument then turns towards another example of a service vessel used in the Temple, the Menorah. The methods of generalization and specification as well as amplification and limitation are utilized in order to define the components of the Menorah. Exodus 25:31 declares that the Menorah shall be made of pure gold, and the two aforementioned methods elaborate on this statement, inferring that other metals might also be satisfactory when creating service vessels. Yet here, the question is limited to the use of metals, and there is still no answer regarding the specific question about wood as a composing material.

There is one conclusive decision to this argument: service vessels used in the Temple cannot be made of earthenware. Earthenware was less expensive of a material to work with, and required far less skill to manipulate. Such pedestrian products would not be deemed fit for use in the Temple. Wood and metal, however, were more precious and valuable materials, and carvers and metallurgists were granted a far higher degree of skill. Their products required more talent, energy, and wealth to create, and thus were more suitable for Temple use. While there is no final answer to the halachic question of whether vessels used for Temple service could be made of wood, an important point has been made that adds to our understanding of the significance of music. The vessels and instruments used in the Temple were of great value, and their composition should display their importance.

The *sugya* places great value on the nature of instruments used in the Temple, yet halachically, little value is given to the musicians who played them. A person chosen to play one of these sacred instruments would vicariously obtain value through them, yet there is no historical data to prove with certainty who the Temple musicians were. The Rabbis debate this issue, R. Meir stating that even slaves might have had the chance to play in the Temple. Another disputes that neither slaves nor Israelites would have been given access to such an honor, and only a Levite, one already in an existing position of honor due to his birth status, could use the precious instruments.

While the debate is left unsettled, it raises theological and ethical questions in the *sugya*. The pressing ethical issue is neither about how vessels used in prayer are composed nor about who is chosen to use them. Instead, the question is about the nature of the Temple song itself: was it vocal or instrumental? This question, when answered,

goes beyond the Temple and into real religious practice, for after the destruction of the Temple, Jews still needed to know the correct way to pray. When the עבודה that constituted Temple worship was transformed into עבודה שבלב, "service of the heart," music maintained its status as a standard and accepted part of worship, yet people were no longer able to rely on the musical abilities of the Levites to offer prayers for them. Thus, the way in which liturgical music was produced still carried great implications, perhaps even greater now that the responsibility of creating that music did not singularly belong to one chosen group. To determine the way in which music would play a role in worship after the destruction of the Temple, even into modern times, it was crucial to have an understanding of exactly what the original nature of the music in the Temple was, vocal or instrumental.

Practically, it seems that instrumental music would be the most effective way to create a musical worship experience. Instruments, be they made of metal, wood, or even earthenware, have the ability to make a range of musical sounds that human voices cannot. Such implements are created for speed and ease, to do things that the body alone is unable to accomplish. The ability of musical instruments to make sounds beyond the capacity of the human voice is, in that way, a great advantage. Voices crack and strain, they reach limitations due to the state of physical bodies. Yet instruments can be tuned and restrung repeatedly until they reach the desired sound, and when they wear out, a new one can be easily obtained with relative ease.

Additionally, instruments produce only tonal music, while singing typically requires words. Each word of the psalms and of modern Jewish liturgy may have been carefully composed, but it is often difficult to express oneself fully and accurately within

the confines of language. It is easy to lose focus and drift from a prayer when the words lose their meaning or don't resonate. It is for this reason that the issue of intention during prayer was such an important one in the Talmud; intention was as problematic in worship then as it is today.

Instruments, though, particularly when played by trained and talented instrumentalists, can take people beyond words and their inherent boundaries, and thus can express emotions to God through prayer in a limitless fashion. Just as only the finest caliber service vessels could be used in the Temple, only the most trained, talented instrumentalists would be called on to offer praise and prayer to God.

Yet despite all of these logical arguments in support of instrumental prayer, the *sugya* repeatedly asserts that the song of the Temple service was, in fact, vocal. How can this be, when vocal music by its very nature is more limited than instrumental? Most people cannot sing as wide of a range or with as many varying sounds as an instrument, so if the Temple song was vocal, it would seem that God (as understood by the Rabbis and their predecessors) did not care about the range or capabilities of the instrument used for prayer. The music itself, the creativity and beauty of the musical score, would not appear to be God's primary interest. Also, while a person untrained in a particular instrument would rarely be tempted to pick one up and play one, each human is given a voice and can, therefore, sing. This, then, would suggest that God is not interested in only the talented worshippers, those able to pray with the most beauty and style, but wants to listen to us despite the limitations of our musical abilities.

Vocal music is equalizing, for though trained singing requires tremendous skill and talent, any voice can be moving and inspirational. Singing requires neither

intermediaries nor tools; it does not even require words. This then solves the potential problem of intention, for words need not get in the way of a heartfelt, prayerful song. The very nature of worship rests on the presumption that God wants prayer to be powerful, heartfelt, and to have meaning. Therefore, while beautiful music can be produced from instruments, whatever they may be made of, God is most interested in the music that comes directly from our bodies. People, created in the very image of God, need look no further than our own voices to offer praises back to the Creator.

Regardless of the relative merits of vocal and instrumental song, once the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, the Temple-centered music of the Jewish people came to an end. The chasm it created would soon be filled by a new kind of Jewish music centered on the synagogue, yet the destruction itself changed Jewish life and the role of music in it permanently.

Chapter 3-Music in the Early Rabbinic Period

The devastation of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. prompted a complete revolution in Judaism as Jewish leaders were forced to literally re-design their religion in a world without the Temple. Music, which had been such a significant part of the Temple cult, now found a new role in the life of the exiled Jews. "Psalmody, melodic reading of biblical texts, and prayer chant were made to fulfill a function in collective Jewish worship; they grew organically from a popular treasure of forms, under the guidance of basic religious ideas."[30]

One of the most popular and significant forms of musical expression during this time was cantillation, which generally refers to biblical chant. The practice and understanding of this term changed in differing parts of the Bible and in varying Jewish communities, though even into the Middle Ages, almost all halachic authorities believed that cantillation was of mosaic or biblical origin. Though understandings of the definition of cantillation varied, the use of biblical chant can be found in Jewish sources as early as the second century CE, at which point it had been in use for a long time and was a well established custom. Much of this evidence has been preserved in the Mishnah.

Akiva, as is written in Sanhedrin 99a, suggested that one must study daily using chant: "Sing it every day, sing it every day- זמר בכל יום זמר בכל יום." In Megilla 3a, we find that in the 3rd century, Rav interpreted the following verse from Nehemiah 8:8, "And they shall read in the book, in the Law of God...and caused them to understand the reading" as referring to the *piskei ta'amim*. The head of the Tiberias Academy,

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[30] Hanoch Avenary, "Music" *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), 563.

Yochanan, expressed the centrality of chant in Megilla 32a. He said, "Whoever reads [the Torah] without melody and studies without song, to him may be applied the verse: Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and ordinances whereby they should not live (Ezek. 20:25)."

Cantillation was not considered music in the strictest sense of the word, but it was understood as strengthening the validity of the law and increasing one's enjoyment of its beauty, as in the previous text from Megilla 32a and in Shir haShirim Rabbah 4:11, in which R. Levi states that "Even if one only reads Scripture with proper modulation and intonation, it may be said of him, honey and milk are under thy tongue."

Negative Attitudes Towards Music

While cantillation and liturgical music were for the most part accepted by the Rabbis, in general, they did not appreciate music unless it had an edifying objective, and often not even then. Even when music accompanied prayer, there was still a danger that singers or the congregation might lose themselves in the sensual pleasure of the music. Thus, the majority rabbinic attitude towards music was overwhelmingly negative, and when the Temple was destroyed, a widely known ban was placed on secular music. Interestingly, though texts connect this ban with the fall of Jerusalem, inklings of such a ban can actually be traced much earlier. A prophetic passages from Isaiah 5:12 accuses those "whose feasts consist of lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine, but who do not regard the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of His hands!" Amos also shows a highly negative attitude towards music, claiming in verse 6:5, "Alas for those...who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on instruments of

music...They shall be the first now to go into exile, and the revelry of the loungers shall pass away." These instances may have been a protest against the practices of neighboring nations, such as the Babylonian and Assyrian Ishtar worshippers as well as Romans and Greeks who played reed pipes.[31] Yet regardless of their basis, when these disapproving ideas, already present in Jewish thought and Scripture, were combined with the national state of mourning for the Temple, they served to produce an overall negative response to music among the Jewish leadership, ideas which would in later generations be strengthened by the advent of Islam.

Though the rabbinic authority mourned the loss of Temple music, once the Temple was destroyed, they took the opportunity to ensure that the future of Jewish music would be limited to the whims of their legislation. They "defamed, prohibited, or suppressed all instrumental music, sometimes by tyrannical methods."[32] They sought to create a new prohibition of instrumental music based on the premise of mourning over the loss of the Temple and Jerusalem.

The texts containing these prohibitions vary and will be examined individually, but it is critically important to state that while the Rabbis knew of the essentially historical origin of the ban, they surreptitiously sought to prohibit it for other reasons. They firmly believed that music led to unseemly, frivolous behavior, particularly that connected with inebriation and sexual promiscuity. The puritanical Rabbis were dismayed by the abuses of certain strata of society in which revelries included dancing girls, jesters, and all varieties of singing and instrumental music. The prohibition may

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[31] Henry George Farmer, "Maimonides on Listening to Music." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* London, October 1933) Ser. 3, Vol. XLV, 5.

[32] Eric Werner, "Prologemnon." *Contributions to a Historical Study of Jewish Music* (New York: KTAV, 1976), 3.

also have been a defense "against the musical and orgiastic cults in which Syrian and Mesopotamian Jews not infrequently participated."[33]

Despite the rabbinic ban, by the Amoraic period (third to fifth centuries C.E.) the prohibition of musical activities found little favor among the broader Jewish population. In Babylonia especially, the rabbinical edicts were essentially ignored. The Jews in Babylon had distanced themselves from their national tragedy both physically and emotionally, and thus the extended mourning period and all that came with it, including the restrictions on music, were not integral to their Jewish identity. The Palestinian community, on the other hand, bore the immediate impact of the catastrophe and were still surrounded by daily reminders of the *Hurban*. Therefore, the long-term result for these Jews was a greater connection to the rabbinic edicts marking their city's destruction.[34]

In the majority of the Jewish communities at this time, even in Palestine, there was a great discrepancy between normative religious expectations and the actual experiences of the people, including the role of music in their daily lives. One can, in fact, learn a great deal of information about the prevalence of folk music from different sources in the Mishnah, including its use by workmen, at social gatherings, in taverns, and at fairs. The special conditions of Diaspora life as well as the lack of a central authority made it impossible to conceive and impose authoritative answers regarding the principles and practice of music. For example, by the fourth century in Rome, it is interesting to note that one can find records of professional Jewish singers and poets, and

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[33] Werner, *From Generation to Generation*, 76.

[34] Alfred Sendry, *The Music of the Jews in the Diaspora: A Contribution to the Social and Cultural History of the Jews* (Cranbury, NJ: Thomas Yoseloff/A.S. Ba, 1970), 73.

instruments were still permitted at weddings and at the celebration of Purim, despite the various prohibitions.[35]

Mishnaic Sources of the Ban

The earliest sources of the ban on music can be found in the Mishnah. Mishnah Sotah 9:11 states, "At the time that the Sanhedrin ceased to function, there ceased to be music in the *beit haMishtaoth*-משבטלה סנהדרין בטל השיר מבית המשתאות" This seemingly straightforward statement raises a number of key questions that must be answered if one is to understand it as a source of the musical ban. First, a question of history: when did the Sanhedrin cease to function? One potential answer is in 30 CE, when the Sanhedrin was exiled from the Temple area and moved to Hanuth. However, it wasn't until 57 CE that the Sanhedrin Gedolah lost its authority at the hand of the Roman general Gabinius.[36] Thus, both of these dates serve as possibilities for the cessation of the Sanhedrin referred to in the Mishnah. Yet in either of these scenarios based on historical fact, the Sanhedrin still officially ceased to exist before the actual destruction of Jerusalem on the year 70 CE! This conflicts directly with the idea that the musical ban was instated after or as a result of the *Hurban*. Thus, this appears to be a mishnah in which the Rabbis were attempting to give the ban on music a historical backing, connecting it with the national tragedy, but in fact, the interdict on music must have preceded the destruction of the Temple.

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[35] Farmer, *Maimonides on Listening to Music*, 7.

[36] Aron Kahn, "Music in Halakhic Perspective" *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy* (New York: Cantorial Council of America, 1986-87), Vol. 9, 56.

A possible answer to this confusion is that the Mishnah is referring not to the specific event of the cessation of the Sanhedrin, but rather to the general time period of the *Hurban*, an idea with which Maimonides would concur centuries later in the *Mishneh Torah*.[37] Other later commentators, such as the Shiltei haGibborim to the Rif in Berachot 5:1, state that the ban was decreed when the Roman legions arrived in Israel. The weakening of the Sanhedrin's authority was an initial stage in the destruction, so the Mishnah quote could be read either directly or as indicative of a gradual cessation in music that paralleled the slow loss of the Jewish community's power. Perhaps the communal depression that must have naturally followed the Sanhedrin's ceasing to function led to a natural abhorrence of joyful music, and it was only after the Temple was destroyed that the rabbinic ban was instated, simply writing into law the innate reaction of the people. In fact, post-destruction enactments were later often divided into two categories: those made as formal expressions of mourning and those made *zekher le-Hurban*, to remember that life can no longer be the same.[38]

A second question begged by Mishnah Sotah 9:11 is a definition of בית המשתאות-the *beit haMishtaoth*. What were these places and why are they specifically referred to here? The Meiri (1249-1310) interprets this as referring specifically to wedding feasts, an approach he bases on the Yerushalmi Sotah 9:12 (24B).[39] The Yerushalmi text explains that when the Sanhedrin was in power, the people would never sing vulgarities, but without the fear of the Sanhedrin to keep them in line, such lewdness became a problem. This kind of impropriety could only be brought on by

[37] Hilchot Ta'anit 5:14.
[38] Kahn, 58.
[39] Ibid. 57.

a wedding, during which time men and women were inspired to sing, dance, and rejoice with the bride and groom.

If, in fact, the *beit haMishtaoth* were wedding feasts, does the word "cease" in the Mishnah text imply a passive phenomenon or did a rabbinic decree ban musical expression? Perhaps without the Sanhedrin in control, and with the desire to keep weddings from turning into lewd affairs, an impulsive, grass roots ban on music solved the problem of vulgarity at weddings. However, the Sanhedrin did have the authority to control social behavior, as is supported by a story in the Talmud Yerushalmi in Ketuboth 1:1. At the feast described in the text, Boaz invites ten sages to a wedding in order to supervise his guests in case they become overly rowdy. This seems to imply that rabbinic "chaperones" may have regularly policed Jewish events to ensure that appropriate behavior was taking place. It is also possible that the Mishnah is explaining the manner in which religious songs of praise to God ceased but vulgar songs increased. This potential scenario does not disregard the idea that the Sanhedrin acted as chaperones; rather, it seems to say that even if the Sanhedrin were not at the festivities, their overbearing presence was always felt.

Chapter 4-Music in the Talmud

Talmud Yerushalmi

The writings on music in the Talmud Yerushalmi are far more limited than those in the Talmud Bavli. This could, as explained previously, be a result of the proximity of the Jewish community in Palestine to the scene of the *Hurban*. The Palestinian Jews were still too aware of the destruction and deep in a state of national mourning to be concerned with rabbinic limitations on such frivolous, joyful things as music. Those living in Palestine may have still been so connected to the *Hurban* that legislation regarding festivities and music would not have been a necessity; they were already mourning and would not have needed a rabbinic edict to guide them.

For those in the Palestinian community whose focus strayed from the *Hurban*, the rabbinic ban against music would have attempted to keep them closely in check. Yet from Jewish beginnings in ancient Israel and in the Temple, music was understood as having incredible power, and thus even firm rabbinic legislation in a community deep in mourning could not keep music from playing a central role in religious and secular activities.

This idea is reflected in an interesting passage from the Talmud Yerushalmi about the Pesach Afikomen. In Mishnah Pesachim 10:8, it is written that one is prohibited from the Afikomen after eating the Korban Pesach. This is typically understood as the idea that one should not eat dessert (the Afikomen) after eating of the Paschal sacrifice so that its taste should remain in one's mouth as long as possible. However, in the Yerushalmi Gemara on Pesachim 10:6, the Afikomen is understood as a musical interlude: מגזו לו כוסשלישי מברך על מזונו רביעית גומר עליו את ההלל ואומר עליו ברכת השיר בין הכוסות הללו אם רצה לשתות ישתה בין שלישי לרביעי לא ישתה אין מפטירין אחר הפסח אפיקומן.

This could mean that after every meal, there was a song session, and this session was now prohibited because it would take one's mind away from the Pesach sacrifice.

In the Talmud Yerushalmi, not all music was forbidden. Wedding music was still acceptable, as can be found in a number of Mishnaic sources[40] and was confirmed in the Talmud Yerushalmi in Peah 1:1 and 15d. Also, in the Yerushalmi as well as the Bavli, there are positive aggadic sections about music, such as those connecting music with beautiful nature imagery.[41] Still, the overall number of passages pertaining to music in the Yerushalmi are far fewer than those in the Bavli, which seems to indicate that the Palestinian community was simply not as concerned about the importance of music in their daily lives.

Talmud Bavli

In Babylonia, as opposed to Palestine, edicts regarding music were widely ignored as the community had distanced themselves geographically and emotionally from the despair of the catastrophe. Thus, it is expected that there would be a greater dearth of rabbinic decrees and responses regarding this Diaspora community-a wealth of legislature on any subject is typically an indication that the community has been acting in such a way to prompt stricter laws and regulations.

The writings regarding music in the Talmud Bavli are numerous, yet they differ greatly in content and relative importance. Like the Talmud Yerushalmi, the aggadic parts of the Bavli are quite appreciative of music. One example of lovely images of nature and music can be found in Rosh Hashanah 8a: "The sheep of the flock become

[40] Berachot 6b, 31a.
[41] Hagigah 2:1, 77a.

clad; the valleys are also covered with grain; they shout for joy, they also sing!" (Ps. 65:13) ...When do the sheep become clad? At the time when they shout joyfully, they even sing. And when do stalks of grain sing? In Nissan." Other talmudic passages connect music with the angels,[42] the rewards of the righteous,[43] and the presence of God.[44]

The Bavli also relates a number of instances in which it is good to sing, particularly those times when one is involved with study and worship. In Sanhedrin 91b, R. Joshua ben Levi says, "One who utters songs in this world shall be privileged to do so in the next world too, as it is written, 'Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they shall sing thy praises for ever.'" The process of studying Torah is even referred to as an experience of song.[45] Singing was utilized as a learning tool through cantillation, and

[42] Hagigah 12b: (Regarding the enumeration of the heavens) "The abode, in which there are bands on ministering angels who utter song at night and are silent in the day because of respect for Israel, as it says, "In the day God will command his lovingkindness and in the night His song is with me (Ps. 42:9)."""
Hagigah 14a: "Each and every day, the ministering angels are created from a stream of fire, and they utter songs and cease to exist."

[43] Eruvin 21a: "Then He spread it out before me, and there was writing on the inside and the outside, and written on it were lamentations, rejoicing, and woe (Ezekiel 2:10)."...And rejoicing, this refers to the reward of the righteous in the world to come. And it says, "with singing, accompanied by the kinnor (Psalms 92:4)."

[44] Sotah 9b: "The spirit of God began to resound in him...(Judges 15:19) Rav Yitzchak of the house of Rav Ami said, "It teaches that the Shechinah resounded within him like a bell."

[45] Avodah Zarah 3b: "Reish Lakish said, "Whoever busies himself with Torah at night, the Kadosh Baruch Hu endows kindness on him during the day," as it says, "In the day God commands His kindness, and in the night his song was with Me." What is the meaning of this, "in the day God commands his kindness?" Because in the night his song (of studying Torah) was with Me."

there are a number of passages that speak specifically about the importance of this method, two of which were alluded to earlier.[46]

There are many aspects of musical performance that the Rabbis deemed unsuitable, including certain performance times and venues, the gender and profession of the singers, and the nature and content of the songs. While much more time in this thesis will be devoted to analyzing the most significant and long-lasting of these bans, that which prohibits music because of the destruction of the Temple, it is worth noting a few of the other things the Rabbis found inappropriate. These additional sources provide an insight into the prim rabbinic mindset as well as giving credence to the great power that music wielded.

In Berachot 24a, Rav claims that the "voice of a woman is indecency," a seemingly misogynistic yet relatively innocuous line that has produced a tremendous amount of literature and legislation on the idea of קול אישה. In Megillah 10b, regarding the Israelites crossing of the Reed Sea, it is said that "the ministering angels wanted to chant their hymns, but the Kadosh Baruch Hu said, "'The work of My hands is being drowned in the sea, and you want to chant hymns?'" God's reasoning in this passage is clearly understandable, but it is interesting to note that even liturgical song is not always appropriate.

Not only the musical venue but also the nature of the song itself is of great importance. In Chagiga 15b, regarding the reason that Acher (Elisha ben Abuyah, 90-135) was punished, it is said that "Greek song did not cease from his mouth." Elisha ben

[46] Additionally, Sanhedrin 101a: "He who recites a verse of Song of Songs and treats is as air (without cantillation), and one who recites a verse at the banquet table out of season, brings evil upon the world."

Abuyah is infamous in Jewish history for his attraction to Greek thought and study, so a basic reading of this text might suggest that "song" here is a metaphor for various writings or poetry, or even that he was singing the praises of the Greeks metaphorically. Rashi (1040-1105), however, interpreted this text as meaning that he transgressed the prohibition against music after the destruction of the Temple.

Music was very important in marriage celebrations, and as such, there are a number of talmudic passages that deal with weddings, some of which include favorable references to music. In Berachot 6b, Rav Chelbo said in the name of Rav Huna, "He who partakes of the wedding meal of a groom and does not cheer him does violence to the five voices of the verse, "The voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that say, give thanks to the Lord of Hosts." It is said that even Pharaoh's daughter knew of the important role of music in Israelite culture and brought Solomon a thousand musical instruments at their wedding.[47]

Not all musical connections with weddings in the Talmud were positive, however. Anything that stimulated excessive joy, including the sound of music, was forbidden, even at weddings. Thus, in Gittin 7a, wedding crowns are prohibited along with the sound of the tambourine. In Berachot 31a,

> Rav Ashi made a wedding celebration for his son. He saw that the rabbis were exceedingly cheerful, so he brought a white glass cup and broke it before them, and they became sad.
> The rabbis said to Rav Hamnuna Zuti at the wedding feast of Mar, son of Ravina, "The master should sing for us!" He said to them, "Woe to us that we will die, woe to us that we will die!" They said to him, "What should we say after you?" He said to them, "Where is the Torah and where are the mitzvoth that will protect us?"

[47] T.B. Shabbat 56b.

In the second scene described in the *sugya*, Rav Hamnuna Zuti dampened their spirits with a mournful song rather than break a glass. This is a particularly interesting example, for music is not actually described as a joyful part of wedding celebrations, many of which had the tendency to be excessive and thus raised the ire of the Rabbis. Rather, song is acceptable in this instance because it reminded people of their sadness and the destruction of the Temple in the same way that breaking the glass at the end of a wedding does. Perhaps unintentionally, this passage once again shows the incredible affective power of music, such that within identical joyous occasions, it can serve to enhance joy or diminish it to such an extreme as to make the guests aware of their own mortality.

Talmud Bavli-Sotah 48a

Wedding celebrations are particularly important in regard to the previous discussion about the Mishnah in Sotah 48a. In the Mishnah, there was a debate regarding both the timing of the Sanhedrin's ceasing and the definition of the *beit haMishtaoth*, which are believed by a number of commentators to have been wedding feasts. In the Gemara on this Mishnah, the Rabbis analyze the text thoroughly, as can be seen from the outline and translation following the text.

מתני'- משבטלה סנהדרין בטל השיר מבית המשתאות שנאמר "בשיר לא ישתו יין וגו'"...
גמ'- וממאי דמשבטלה סנהדרין? כתיב אמר רב הונא בריא דרב יהושוע דאמר קרא "זקנים משער שבתו בחורים מנגינתם." אמר רב אודנא דשמעא זמרא תעקר אמר רבא זמרא בביתא חורבא בסיפה שנאמר "קול ישורר בהלון חרב בסף כי ארזה ערה"... אמר רב הונא זמרא דנגדי ודבקרי שרי דגרדאי אסיר. רב הונא בטיל זמרא קם מאה אווזי בזוזא ומאה סאה חיטי בזוזא ולא איבעי אתא. רב חסדא זלזיל ביה איבעאי אווזא בזוזא ולא משתכה. אמר רב יוסף זמרי גברי ועני נשי פריצותא, זמרי נשי ועני גברי כאש בנעורת. למאי נפקא

מינה? לבטולי הא מקמי הא. אמר ר' יוחנן כל השותה בארבעה מיני זמר מביא חמש פורעניות לעולם שנאמר "הוי משכימי בבקר שכר ירדפו מאחרי בנשף יין ודליקם והיה כנור ונבל תוף וחליל יין משתיהם ואת פועל ה' לא יביטו.

Mishnah: When the Sanhedrin ceased, song ceased from the places of feasting, as it is said, "They shall not drink wine with song (Isaiah 24:9)"...

Question 1: How do we know that the text applies to the time when the Sanhedrin ceased?

Answer 1: R. Huna, son of R. Joshua, said: Because Scripture states, "The elders Have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music (Lam. 5:14)."

Statement 1: Rav said: The ear which listens to song should be torn off.

Statement 2: Rava said: When there is song in a house there is destruction on its threshold, as it is said, "Their voice shall sing in the windows, desolation shall be in the thresholds, for He has laid bare the cedar work (Zeph. 2:14).

Question 2 [unasked]: Is any kind of song permissible?

Answer 2: R. Huna said: The singing of sailors and ploughmen is permitted, but The weavers is prohibited.

Aggadah 3: R. Huna abolished singing, and a hundred geese were priced at a zuz and a hundred se'ahs of wheat were priced at a zuz, and there was no demand for them. R. Chisda came and disregarded *the edict*, and a goose was required at a zuz but was not to be found.

Clarification 4: R. Joseph said: When men and women join in it is licentiousness, When women sing and men join in it is like fire in tow.

Question 4: For what practical purpose is this noted?

Answer 4: To abolish the latter before the former.

Statement 5: R. Yochanan said: Whoever drinks to the accompaniment of the four musical instruments brings five punishments to the world, as it is stated, "Woe unto them who rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that tarry late into the night, till wine inflames them. And the harp, and the lute, the tabret and the pipe, and wine, are in their feasts, but they regard not the work of the Lord.

As we learned previously, the Mishnah on which this *sugya* is based does not refer to the ban on music due to the mourning for the loss of the Temple. Rather, it deals exclusively with the problems of singing in the *beit hamishtaoth,* which was previously determined as referring to wedding feasts. The subsequent *sugya* that develops out of the Mishnah in Sotah 48a also deals with moral behavior, though with a more general approach, not even mentioning any suggested interpretation of *beit hamishtaoth.* It is possible that the aggadic section containing the story about the geese was referring to a wedding; when music was forbidden, no one wanted to celebrate, even when the special food served on such occasions was made extremely inexpensive.

Perhaps most surprisingly in this *sugya*, it is apparent that for the most part the Gemara does not deal with music in the context of mourning the Hurban either! R. Huna offers an intertextual reference to Lamentations, the biblical book that responded to the first destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, though clearly the original intent of Lamentations could not have been to comment on events (the destruction of the second Temple in 70 AD) that had yet to occur. The Rabbis read Lamentations as the basis for understanding all catastrophes, so it is logical that R. Huna would choose this as a proof text. However, in attempting to understand the true meaning and historical basis of the given Mishnah, the Lamentations quote only serves to confuse the matter-the elders it describes sitting at the gates were clearly not the Sanhedrin.

After R. Huna's initial comment in which he implicitly refers to the *Hurban*, no further discussion of the destruction is found in the *sugya*. Instead, each Rabbi offers his personal take on the many moral problems that arise from the danger of music. Rav and Rava's comments seem to be general threats and prophecies of doom, and their

surprisingly strong statements show again just how powerful and dangerous they perceived music as being.

R. Huna's second statement and the story that follows make the argument a bit more complex. In his ruling, he answers the unasked question: what kind of music is permissible? He chooses to deal exclusively with vocal music. After the previous analysis in this thesis of Sotah 48a, it has been determined that the Temple song was also vocal, and vocal music carries with it a power unparalleled by instruments-therefore, his limitation, focusing on vocal music, is in line with Jewish understandings of music.

R. Huna does not initially deal with the question of wedding music, but rather he talks about the singing of three different types of workers. Sailors, ploughmen and weavers all used rhythmic music to aid their work, as it helped to alleviate boredom, maintain one's concentration, and provide a rhythm to improve teamwork. In such circumstances, utilizing music to help with work was acceptable to the Rabbis. However, apparently the songs of the weavers were known to contain lewd words, and for this reason their song was forbidden, as it was not the music itself that was found offensive but the lewd words. Another interpretation is that the ploughman's music helped with their work while for the weavers, the music was simply self-indulgent.

The Gemara continues with a discussion of R. Huna's ban on singing and the resulting problems that ensued. This is a question of weddings and celebrations, for when singing was abolished, there was no desire to have a celebration, even when geese were incredibly cheap. R. Joseph's comment also deals with weddings, which was one of the only times when men and women could gather together and even have the possibility of joining in lewd behavior. His intent, as he explains, is first and foremost to stop

women from singing. This may be linked to Rav's statement in Berachot 24a (mentioned previously) that the voice of a woman is indecency, but R. Joseph's comment appears to be less misogynistic. He seems to imply that the trouble really begins when men and women get together, and that the singing of women creates an imminent potential for such lewd behavior. Whether this is a credit to women's singing or a discredit to men's powers of restraint, it is less about music than the sexual dangers that arise from men and women mingling. Unsaid but implicit in this idea is the understanding that alcohol would be present at such an event, which leads men even more astray than women and music alone. R. Yochanan's final comment raises this important point of the dangers of alcohol. Alcohol, licentiousness, and music were understood as going hand in hand, both by the Rabbis and throughout history. It is also interesting to note that only R. Yochanan raises the question of instrumental song, though the key message of his statement is clearly about the perilous proximity of music and people who are inebriated.

Talmud Bavli-Gittin 7a

A portion of a key sugya in Gittin 7a helps to give an additional insight into the prohibition of music. While both texts deal with the same issue, they offer profoundly different answers.

שלחו ליה למר עוקבא זמרא מנא לן דאסירי? שרטט וכתב להו אל תשמח ישראל אל גיל כעמים. ולישלח להו מהבא בשיר לא ישתו יין ימר שכר לשתיו.

אי מההוא הוה אמינא הני מילי זמרא דמנא אבל דפומא שרי קא משמע לן.

Question 1: They sent to Mar Ukva *asking*, "How do we know that music is prohibited?"

Answer 1: He etched lines and wrote to them, "Rejoice not, Israel, in joy like the Nations (Hosea 9:1)."

Clarification 1: But he should have sent them from here: "With music, they shall Not drink wine; old wine shall be better to those that drink it (Isaiah 24:9)."

Explanation 1: If *his answer* were from that *verse from Isaiah*, I would have said that this ruling is about instrumental music, but vocal is permitted.

The *sugya* in Gittin 7a is based on the idea of mourning and contains an actual decree against musical expression. It deals with both vocal and instrumental music, though in this case, instrumental music was more problematic in its connection with mourning. The *sugya* is answering three questions: how do we know that music is prohibited, what is the connection between music and song, and is there a difference between vocal and instrumental music? Two *psukim* are used as proof texts to help answer all of the questions. In this *sugya*, the Hosea verse, which is set in the context of the time of the exile, prohibits us from celebrating in times of happiness like other nations, meaning with song. It is supported by the previously noted post-*Hurban* ban against wearing crowns at weddings; any signs of celebration and joy were forbidden.

The clarification offered by the Isaiah verse relates more specifically to drinking parties. Interestingly, though the unknown redactor of the Talmud says that Mar Ukva "should have sent them" to the Isaiah text, both texts are clearly necessary to answer the various questions. The Isaiah text does not answer the original question; rather it answers the unasked question about music connected to the drinking of alcohol. His explanation offers a number of insights into the culture of music at the time. If, as the redactor says, the proof text from Isaiah would have led him to believe that the ruling was about instrumental music, it must mean that drinking parties often were accompanied with instruments. The Gemara in Sotah previously taught that men and women also sang in

such places, so it can now be said that drinking parties involved instrumental and vocal music. It is also interesting to note that the Hosea text is clearly not enough to prohibit vocal music, for even after the quote is offered, the *sugya* concludes that vocal music is still permitted!

Analysis

After examining these two key Talmudic passages, it is still unclear whether or not the rabbinic ban on music was actually on account of the *Hurban*. The variety of responses seem to imply that in fact, the Rabbis had a multitude of reasons for wanting music banned, most of them based on issues of potential moral dilemmas that can arise from listening to or making music. The *Hurban* may have been an underlying factor in their decisions, but it seems more likely that the premise of unending mourning provided a solid basis for a prohibition that was terribly hard to enforce. Mourning traditions and laws would have been difficult to refute, while moral laws based on a slippery slope theory were probably much more challenging for the Jewish leadership to enforce.

Both texts show that one must examine the content and context of the musical expressions before determining its permissibility. Though the *sugya* from Gittin concludes by saying that only instrumental music is forbidden, the overall decision is that in general, if music is not intended for the sake of praising God or doing mitzvoth, it is forbidden in any form. The only clear exception to this rule is in the case of work songs, when a song can create a sense of rhythm that improves ones ability to work. Songs of praise are also permissible, even at weddings, as long as they don't lead to debauchery.

Later commentators had a great deal to say about these passages. In Netzah Yisrael chapter 23, Rabbi Judah Loew, the Maharal of Prague (1525-1609), states that the ban against music was a deliberate attempt to create an oppressive void in people's lives. Mourning for the destruction was simultaneously a reaction to and a recognition of the loss of the Temple, and thus it didn't matter whether or not drinking alcohol was involved in the music-the reference to the *beit haMishtaoth* was to imply that even at such events, music was absent.

In the medieval period, much of Maimonides understanding of music was based on his response to these passages. Despite the lack of clarity in the texts, Maimonides says that the ban was indeed on account of the *Hurban*. He notes that the Ge'onim permitted singing religious songs over wine, a position that he accepts, as do the Tur (Jacob ben Asher, 1270-1340) and the Rif (Isaac Alfasi, 1013-1103). Maimonides personally disapproves of this behavior, though he acknowledges that it happens often. In the Mishneh Torah at the end of Hilchot Ta'anith 5:14 he says, "It has already become customary for all of Israel to sing songs of thanksgiving to God, and similar songs, over wine." Maimonides ruling in the Mishneh Torah is based almost entirely on the *sugya* from Gittin, not from Sotah. In the end of a responsum by Maimonides on the subject, it is worthy to note, he raises the question of how one could be involved in a drinking party of any kind and mention God's name in song. Maimonides views on music will be delved into in much greater detail in a later chapter.

We have now seen that the general rabbinic attitude towards music as demonstrated in the Talmud was highly negative. As in the Bible, music was clearly believed to have great power over people's interactions with each other and with God,

but the Rabbis stressed the idea that music was powerfully dangerous. Except in rare liturgical moments, music was seen as inextricably linked with sexuality and intoxication. In the rabbinic mindset, if strict laws were not put in place to control the manner in which Jews were exposed to music, the results could be disastrous.

As a scholar, one could certainly look at these various bans against music and suggest that they were simply the handiwork of the prim, passé Rabbis who had a particular agenda they wanted to express. However, the Talmud is part of the Oral Torah, so from a traditional Jewish perspective, these laws are to be followed without question, as if they were handed directly from God to Moses on Sinai. From an orthodox viewpoint, in fact, the Oral Torah "preceded" the written Torah, so it is equally if not more valid than the Torah text. This is not a question of chronology; rather, one cannot understand Torah without looking at it through the lens of the Oral Torah, thus the Oral Torah is equally as necessary and important as the written Torah.

With this framework, it becomes clear that despite the importance of music in the biblical text and its place in the Temple cult, the anti-music legislation in the Talmud essentially supersedes those positive perspectives on music. While in the Bible, one can read of the powerful, transcendent music of the Temple cult, the rabbinic viewpoint states that such music was limited to that particular place and time, only to recur when the Temple is rebuilt. One may not read into these musical descriptions of the past and interpret them as an encouragement to recreate such music without the Temple. It is the writings of the Rabbis that influence further generations of Jews and their attitudes towards music, such that even centuries later, by the time of the medieval period, these ideas remain central in the Jewish understanding of music.

Chapter 5-Music in the Medieval Diaspora

The medieval period in Jewish history began in approximately the middle of the tenth century. During this time, Jews were distributed geographically around the world, primarily residing in Palestine and Babylonia but with no dominant center. It was an era in which Islam was the dominant faith in most lands inhabited by Jews, and the unification of the Near East under Islam brought great changes and developments for the lives of local Jews.

Until the Jews were eventually driven out of the Iberian Peninsula in 1492, they were an important and even necessary sector of society. Muslims rulers considered Jews as *dhimmi*, protected subjects of the state who were allowed to practice their religion and live in relative peace in return for accepting multiple legal disabilities and lowered social status. Jews were given the status of *dhimmi* because they, like the Muslims, were "people of the Book," but they were additionally welcomed for economic reasons and their role in business and trade.

The medieval period saw great advancements in the studies and developments of religion, philosophy, literature, and music. Music became a subject of philosophical reasoning, and the art of sung poetry developed further with the introduction of meter and an increased understanding of its aesthetic values. Music theory came to be considered an important aspect of higher education, even amongst the Jews.

Yet in spite of the fact that Jews in the Middle Ages made music theory one of the courses of study in higher education, there are very remaining few writings on the subject.[48] If there were endeavors of the medieval Jews to attach themselves to

[48] Farmer, *Sa'adya*, 1.

contemporary musical notions, they have been lost under historical circumstances. Additionally, the Talmudic ban on secular music was still in existence, and the rabbinic concerns underlying it kept music from openly attaining a significant role in Jewish thought and practice.

Interestingly, it has been noted that "while the majority of the rabbis were not themselves proficient in the musical art, the *bachurim*, or Talmud students of the Middle Ages, were often accomplished musicians."[49] Regardless of this assertion, "practical" music was at worst prohibited and at best deemed highly disreputable by the Jewish community, so musicians and the study of music were held in disregard. This can be seen in the attitude towards chazzanim, who were not even considered musicians and whose role in the synagogue was often unappreciated.

The creation of Jewish music and the understanding of music theory were also lacking in advancement to such a degree that principles of musical notation were unknown to the Jewish world until the sixteenth century in Europe and the early twentieth century in the Near East. This disregard for music and musicians reached such an extreme that "during the period between Saadia Gaon and Maimonides...Jewish involvement in the science of music remained, in general, purely receptive, rather than creative."[50]

Yet despite allegations such as this by many scholars, writings from the medieval period show another side to this story of Jewish involvement in music in the medieval world. Perhaps Jews were not actively, prolifically creating music, but music remained a central part of the Jewish experience, both religiously and secularly. The Jews were

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[49] Sendry, *Music of the Jews of the Diaspora*, 45.
[50] Avenary, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 568.

highly influenced by Greek and Arabic studies of music, and this led to great advancements in liturgical and secular music, in musical healing and therapy. One can also see that in fact, not only was the period between Saadia and Maimonides was rife with musical thought, but both philosophers, as well as thinkers such as Yehuda Halevi, incorporated musical notions into their halachic, philosophical, and other works.

Despite the rabbinic prohibitions against music still in effect, Jews gained a great deal of insight into musical fields by borrowing from the surrounding culture. The practice of observing and adapting the cultural and intellectual traditions of others has always been a central part of Jewish historical development, in part so that "the devil shouldn't have the best tunes" and also because our neighbors often have the ability to provide us with information and ideas that the insular Jewish worldview may have limited. This was not, it should be noted, a practice of the Jews alone; in fact, much of the historical evolution of music and other disciplines can be traced to one group's alterations and adaptations of the customs of neighboring cultures. Yet,

> ...such borrowings were particularly widespread among Jews, since their proclivity to compose new and original tunes for other than liturgical poems was seriously hampered by a persistent tradition opposed to secular songs altogether. Almost all the influential molders of Jewish public opinion reiterate the old talmudic objections to rejoicing with wine and song on any but the few religiously hallowed festivities.[51]

In the medieval world, Jews throughout the Diaspora were introduced into a world of relative liberty and progressiveness in which the development of spiritual and artistic fields flourished naturally. The results of this progress can be seen in records from Jewish communities around the world.

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[51] Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), Vol XI, 203.

In Spain, the rise of Jewish culture from 800-1400 C.E. provided a symbiosis with Arab culture; due to its influence and the idea that music was considered a mathematical science, Spanish Jews taught children to excel in music. From Iraq, there are medieval records of Jewish youths who recited psalms with musical accompaniment. In the Cairo Geniza, fragments of several books of music from the 11-13th centuries were discovered that were written in Arabic using Hebrew letters. Contemporary book lists indicate a great wealth of other musical resources that could have been found in private libraries and in bookstalls in medieval Arabic cities such as Baghdad, Damascus, and Kordova, though unfortunately, most of these are lost. These are just a few examples we have to show the ways in which music became a significant part of Jewish culture in the medieval world.

Liturgical Music of the Diaspora Jews

The greatest traditional liturgical Jewish music was created in the centuries labeled as the medieval period. Some fragments of these majestic synagogue melodies dating from the 12th century were found in the Cairo Geniza. During this time, "the synagogue was not only the geographical, social, and religious center of the community, but also the place where the Jews could partake in the only entertainment available to them, singing and dancing."[52] The music created for the synagogue during this period was neither ornate nor refined. There was a greater focus on dynamics than on delicacy or talent, and there were no compunctions against introducing popular tunes into

[52] Sendry, *Music of Diaspora*, 46.

synagogue worship.[53] The chazzan was not yet a permanent fixture of the synagogue, and many people were still opposed to the very idea of having a chazzan as the שליח ציבור, the *shaliach tzibbur* who led the congregation in worship.

In medieval Jewish worship, weekday services were brief. On Shabbat and holidays, however, synagogues would fill to hear the chazzan, who served as both poet and singer, entertaining the congregation. The congregation would remain silent for prayers and join in when the poetry and music began. As a result, poetry and music slowly became more important features of worship to the congregation that the prayers themselves. Opposition to this reversal increased, and some scholars, such as A. Z. Idelsohn, insist that it was this opposition that eventually made Maimonides so antagonistic towards music.[54]

The function of Jewish liturgical music was not simply to entertain the listeners. Its primary purpose, as had been the practice of the Jewish community since its inception, was to bring about a transformative experience for people and for God. As in the time when the Temple stood, it was understood that there were two kinds of listeners of worship music, human and divine. Music's magical powers meant that it could be used to influence and speak with God, and as such, musical worship, whether by the congregation or through the talents of the chazzan, was extremely important. The magic of music could also be experienced in relation to the Pythagorean doctrine of ethos, which held that that music possessed moral qualities and could affect character and behavior. Since music has the ability of expressing any emotion, it also evokes the same emotions in the listener. Thus, music can take worship to a much higher level, moving

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[53] Israel Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1896), 45.

[54] Abraham Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in its Historical Development*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929), 125-126.

people with a sense of כוונה, intention, to truly connect to the experience of prayer beyond the required, fixed קבע of the liturgy.

Popular Music of the Jews

Liturgical music was of great importance to the Diaspora communities, and there exists a fair amount of information about it in rabbinical responsa, archeological findings, and in philosophical treatises. Yet there is little information regarding secular, folk, and popular music in the everyday life of the Jews.

> But a people cannot, over a period of time, exist without having a sufficient stock of its own folk music. It can be assumed, therefore, that the Jews might have taken over popular tunes and dances from the peoples among whom they lived, such as the Babylonians, Syrians, and Arabians. It thus stands to reason that the Jews had to rely extensively on these newly introduced melodies because their own music had only a few Jewish features; it contained mostly borrowed elements.[55]

It is probable that rather than simply "borrowing" or taking over tunes from other peoples, the process was a great deal more interactive. Most types of Jewish music still used today, including hazzanut, klezmer, and middle Eastern forms of music have elements of music from the surrounding cultures in which they were created, yet they have adapted and changed to become part of a larger Jewish context. Additionally, even in the medieval period, daily existence could not be entirely regimented by rabbinic law, and there must have existed many Jews who indulged in sociable activities accompanied by merry songs. "The populace, too, then as in later generations, must have created all sorts of folksongs, or at least adapted some tunes and ideas current among its non-Jewish neighbors....However, neither the leaders nor the masses consciously encouraged

[55] Sendry, *The Music of the Jews in the Diaspora,* 114.

musical creativity."[56] Reports from the Middle Ages do tell of Jewish minstrels and jugglers roaming the countries and performing for Jews and gentiles alike. Still, most Jewish communities could not offer a livelihood for all who wanted to practice an artistic gift, including musicians.

Wedding Music and Sumptuary Laws

As in the time of the Rabbis, music played perhaps its most important role in the Jewish world during wedding celebrations. Such marriage music was even connected to the same kind of magic that one found in synagogue music. This resulted in the loud and often discordant music that was played during wedding processions, a custom observed in other middle-Eastern communities that served to scare off demons and evil spirits.[57]

Odes, songs, and jests were all common features at Jewish weddings in the medieval world. "The seven-days wedding feast was marked by incessant musical performances, which not even the Sabbath day itself interrupted."[58] On Shabbat, Christian musicians were often employed to play during the *simcha*, and celebrations became quite elaborate. Conversely, Jewish ghetto musicians were very popular with Christian communities and were often hired for banquets and Christian celebrations.

These elaborate wedding affairs, particularly those that included hiring Christian musicians to play on Shabbat, caused a great deal of concern within the Jewish community. Many sumptuary laws were created to restrict extravagant expenditures at these celebrations. Jewish communities in the medieval world often enacted various laws

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[56] Baron, 204.

[57] Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York: A Temple Book, 1987) 172.

[58] Abrahams, 212.

to control matters of moral conduct. Such laws served a variety of different purposes. They kept impoverished Jews from feeling obligated to live beyond their means, particularly in regards to celebrations. These laws were also motivated by a fear of gentile envy, and they created a barrier between the Jewish communities and their neighbors, preventing assimilation to a great degree.

Some specific examples of sumptuary laws in the late medieval period are as follows: In Cracow, Poland in 1595, a law was created in which "it is forbidden to go through the streets at night playing on musical instruments, nor shall anyone, whether householders, young men or boys, shout or yell in the streets." In Lithuania on September 4, 1637, it was decreed that:

> with respect to banquets: Inasmuch as people are spending too much money unnecessarily on festive meals [at marriages, circumcisions, etc.], every Jewish community and settlement which has a rabbi is expected to assemble its officers and rabbi and to consider the number of guests which it is suitable for every individual, in view of his wealth and the occasion, to invite to a festive meal.[59]

The Science of Music-The Influence of the Greeks

The influence of the ancient Greeks on Jewish thought and philosophy is vast and can plainly be seen in the writings of each of the medieval Jewish philosophers that will be examined in this thesis. While their overall influence is too great to be explained in depth here, it is worth nothing that the Greeks, just as other ancient Semitic peoples, linked the modal musical system with the celestial spheres, colors, numbers, and the elements. Pythagoras, a mystical mathematician from the sixth century BCE, was fascinated with whole number ratio in musical harmonies that led him to believe that we

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[59] Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Jews in the Medieval World: A Source Book* (Cincinnati: The Sinai Press, 1938), 195.

live in a well-ordered, harmonious universe in which music can influence both the gods and humanity.[60] "He devised a modal system by which a particular melodic mode would banish depression, another would assuage grief, whilst a third would check passion, and so on. Rhythmic modes were also classified by him in his scheme of the ethos."[61] The Pythagorean School systemized these ideas in the "doctrine of ethos." This doctrine postulated that every tune, whether sung or played, expressed a clearly definable human emotion. Therefore, each melody could evoke the same emotion in listeners if it were played or sung at the appropriate time or place. Both Saadia and Maimonides later picked up Pythagoras' idea that musical modes connect to human mental and physical health. Other Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle, believed that music imitates states of the soul (passions) and that listening to the wrong kind of music could warp a person's character (theory of imitation). Both Plato and Aristotle both thought that education should include the proper kinds of modes, or styles of melody, to create desirable qualities in citizens. This too resonated with medieval Jewish philosophers, particularly Saadia Gaon.

The Science of Music-The Influence of Islam

Just as Greek scholarship and philosophy resonated deeply with Jewish thought, Islam and those in the Arab world had an equally powerful influence on Jewish thinkers. One way in which this impact manifested itself was through new Jewish ideas about music, even though a deep conflict exists in Islamic thought and practice concerning music. Mohammed, the founder of Islam, was opposed to idolatry and its customs,

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[60] Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Wing Books, 1980), 138.
[61] Farmer, *Sa'adya,* 5.

including its accompanying music, but pagan tunes were still incorporated into ritual pilgrimages. The Koran, in fact, is read in a kind of *Sprechgesang* or in spontaneous, improvisational melody, though no accents are permitted in the texts. "Aesthetics, the science of the beautiful, did not exist in Islamic conceptions. The chief reason for this was that the Orient...put great trust in the doctrine of ta'thir (influence) in music, a dogma called by the Greeks the ethos. This belief reigned supreme."[62]

Yet music worked its way deeply into Arabic philosophy. Abu Yusuf Ya'qub al-Kindi was one of the greatest early Arabic philosophers. Around the year 874 C.E., he was the first person to systematize the entire system of the doctrine of the ethos for the Arab world. Al-Kindi was a prolific writer, and seven or eight of his books were on the subject of music theory. One of these works, the *Risala fi ajza khabariyat al-musiqi*, is thought to have been the work on which Saadia Gaon based his ideas of the rhythmic modes.[63] In it, amongst other subjects, he discusses the eight rhythmic modes and the place of rhythm in the doctrine of the ethos; his work will be examined in the following chapter.

The idea of rhythm was important not only to philosophers like Saadia but for those in the artistic fields as well, such as the poet philosopher, Halevi. "According to the Arabs, rhythm had the same function in music as prosody had in poetry (*shir*), and the Jews of Babylonia appear to have derived rhythm from the Arabs at the same time as they borrowed metrical poetry (*piyyut*) from them, which took place in the 8th century."[64]

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[62] Leonard Kravitz and Eric Werner, "The Silence of Maimonides" (Jerusalem, 1986), 196.

[63] Farmer, *Sa'adya*. 18.

[64] Ibid. 16.

Regardless of the many intellectual ideas about music that Jews borrowed from their Arab neighbors, it was not considered appropriate to actually utilize their particular melodies. This disregard for using the actual tunes composed by those of other nationalities limited the Jewish ability to use the creativity of others as a basis for their own musical compositions. This neglect was widespread, caused

> by the growing nationalist aversion to imitation of foreign melodies...German pietists specifically prohibited the singing of Gentile lullabies to Jewish children, as well as the teaching of Jewish tunes to Gentile priests, lest they adapt these melodies to Church use. Whatever interrelations had existed between the music of the ancient Church and that of the Temple in Jerusalem or the ancient synagogue was now completely forgotten, and the emphasis was laid exclusively on the unseemliness of Jewish borrowings from the worship of the hostile religion.[65]

The Scope of Musical Education for Jews

The influence of Greek and Arabic prioritization of music not only in thought but also in the structure of education reached the Jewish community as well. Though Arabs and Europeans were delving deeply into the subjects of music history and methodology, these were not widely taught or studied seriously by the Jews. For Diaspora Jews, the centrality of music in education was represented by the use of cantillation. Just as in ancient Israel and in Babylonia, Jewish students in the medieval Diaspora studied by means of verbal repetition and chanting. Students learned Talmud in the *Beth ha-Midrash* located in every synagogue. This was done with such intensity that "sometimes the resulting chorus was so noisy that neighbors were given the right to prevent the

[65] Baron, 205.

creation of a Jewish school in their neighborhood, as they might similarly have prevented the introduction of a trade that created a nuisance."[66]

Music also worked its way into the scope of Jewish education even beyond the world of cantillation. The Jewish community "respected the study of musical theory (*scientia musicae)* as one of the disciplines of the *quadrivium educationis* (Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, Astronomy), while holding in intellectual contempt the *musica practica* and its adherents."[67] In the 12th century, educational records of Hispano Jewish study included music. By the 13th century, music was commonly regarded throughout the Diaspora as an essential part of a mathematics curriculum for Jewish students.

> The greatest medieval Jewish mathematician, Abraham bar Hiyya, toying with the categories enumerated in Jeremiah (9:22-23), graded the sciences from the lowest to the highest in the following order: (1) "The science of the propedeutics and the kalam," which he considered the equivalent of biblical "wisdom" and included in it the five disciplines of arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy, and logic...[68]

The Muslims followed the ancient Greek idea of analyzing music as an abstract science, and the Jews picked up this idea as well, though not until as late as the 10th century. The word *musica* did not even exist in Hebrew until that time, when it was derived from the Arabic *musiki* and used to express the concept of the science of music: *hochmat musikah*: חכמת מוסיקה.[69] The study of music was a wide field and posed a number of questions regarding such issues as music theory, aesthetics, and physiology.

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[66] Sendry, *The Music of the Jews in the Diaspora*, 47.
[67] Werner, *Prologemnon*, 4.
[68] Baron, 172.
[69] Nehemia Allony, "The Term Musiqah in Mediaeval Jewish Literature" *Yuval: Studies of the Jewish Music Research Center* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1968), Vol. 1, 251.

Music Theory

For unknown reasons, in the Middle Ages music theory and philosophy in Jewish culture were highly neglected. There was no fully developed notation system, which could have accounted for this absence, yet the Arabs, who also lacked a notation system, achieved a great deal in the realm of music theory. The medieval Jewish understanding of music theory, as a result, is rather limited, and what exists is based almost entirely on ideas from Greek, Arabic, and Christian thinkers.

The idea that music was a science rather than a practical art is typically traced to Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, a sixth century Christian philosopher from Rome. Boethius made this classification common, dividing music into three categories. *Music mundanae* represented the movements of the heavenly spheres and the order of the elements of the seasons. *Musica humana* linked the body and soul in mathematical harmony, connecting them with the order of the universe. Finally, *Musica instrumentalis* was music that could be heard and felt. This finally category was the lowest form of music, intended to unify movements of the soul, and was only an *imitatio Musica mundanae.*[70] Greek sages and Arabic theorists shared the notion that practical musical performance had a lower status than the theoretical viewpoint of music. Some Jews, as well, accepted this scholarship, placing music among the sciences. In the words of the medieval Jewish philosopher Ibn 'Aknin,

> The practice of this science (music) precedes the theory. The former must come chronologically first, because its healing power cannot show itself except by its

[70] Isaiah Sonne and Eric Werner, "The Philosophy and Theory of Music in Judeo-Arabic Literature" *Three Ages of Musical Thought: Essays on Ethics and Aesthetics* (New York: Di Capo Press, 1981), 140.

actual performance. Thus theoretical speculation is in place only after practical accomplishment. The priority of practice is imposed by law and nature.[71]

Jewish scholars eventually formed their own understanding of music, primarily based on ideas borrowed from the ancient Greeks as well as from the Arab world. Scholars Isaiah Sonne and Eric Werner describe three specific groups of Greek philosophers that provided new scholarly conceptions of music for the Jews.[72] From the Neo-Platonists and the Pythagoreans, they learned that the constant motion of the soul could be defined by numerical proportions. These proportions attend the harmonic relations of tones, and as a result, evoke corresponding motions in the listener's soul. The connection between the body and the soul is harmonized by carefully selected tunes, and the celestial bodies parallel the soul in a sort of musical astrology. Jewish thinkers also gained knowledge from the viewpoint of the Aristoxenians, who took a practical, acoustic point of view, relying on the ability of the ear to hear rather than on the science of mathematics. Other musical insights were gained the Peripatetic school of Aristotle, which mediated between the preceding two conceptions.

Aesthetics, Physiology and Music Therapy

Both Greek and Arabic scholars delved into queries regarding the aesthetics of music. They raised questions about music's ability to express and evoke emotions and the different ways in which this could be done. In the Pythagorean doctrine of ethos, music was understood as expressing the same ethos which it evokes in the listener, and

[71] Sonne and Werner, 142.
[72] Ibid. 147.

thus had the power to create a balance in the soul. Therefore, different styles of music were understood as having different affective capabilities on its listeners.

The Greeks defined what they understood as three distinct styles of music.[73] The first, systolic, was though to paralyze human energies, and included everything from long songs to funeral dirges. The diastaltic style was strong and heroic, a virile style best used in tragedies. The third style mixes the other two, stimulating a balance of the mind and emotions, and is known as the hesychastic style. There are little to no records of Jewish ideas on music and aesthetics, yet it is probable that their ideas would probably have been very close to their Arab and Greek counterparts.

The idea of music affecting the humors of the body is Greek in conception, but Arabic and Jewish thinkers took it a step further. The Greeks linked medicine and music, believing that music, medicine, and math employed the same fundamental ideas. Whereas music can be understood in terms of rhythms, intervals, and proportions, mathematics is the science of numbers and proportions. Medicine combines these ideas, utilizing proportions of the humors and medications and in the mysterious ratios of human pulsation.

Music served as a homeopathic cure in the Greek world as well. Aristotle prescribed the playing of frantic melodies to cure the insane, while the Pythagoreans favored somber, calming melodies to impress on 'disorganized' souls the magically numeric order of the cosmos.[74] This idea, also known as the allopathic treatment, was discussed in Jewish sources to extremes, as in the case of Saadia Gaon and in Maimonides medical treatises.

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[73] Sonne and Werner, 160.
[74] Ibid. 151.

The medico-musical system of the Jews also classified particular strings (based on the Arabic instrument known as the ud) with elements, humors, qualities, and seasons. The treble, or zir, was connected with fire, yellow bile, heat, and summer. The second string, known as Mathna, was aligned with air, blood, humor, and spring. The Mathlath or third string was associated with water, phlegm, cold, and winter. Finally, the bass or bam string was connected with earth, black bile, dryness, and autumn.[75]

"Music (which, according to Maimonides' Platonic conceptions, is located in the brain) clears the mind of all its passions and converts it into a clean vessel for receiving the spirit of holiness; therefore performed music is also one of the most powerful remedies for the suffering of the soul."[76] Music is a multidimensional tool containing palliative qualities, and as such it has the ability to impact on the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual realms.

As a powerful tool for healing, music was often used in the medieval world for therapeutic purposes. Music therapy is defined as "the planned and controlled use of music to achieve therapeutic aims,"[77] and medieval Jews used music as a way of curing people who were suffering from mental and emotional disorders. Nightmares, for instance, were thought to be particularly susceptible to the magical charms of music, and music could thus be used to rid a body of demons. Whether or not Jewish religious leaders believed that magical cures and musical incantations truly cured disease is unclear. However, on occasion rabbis would permit these cures in order to placate

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[75] Sonne and Werner, 145.

[76] Avenary, *Encylopedia Judaica,* 573.

[77] Fred Rosner, "Moses Maimonides on Music Therapy and His Responsum on Music." *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy* (New York: Cantorial Council of America) Vol. 16, 1.

superstitious minds.[78] Music was also understood as real medicine, and its validity was proven by many Greek and Arabic thinkers.

There are numerous Arabic sources regarding the doctrine of music therapy from the 9th-16th centuries, though the medical theory is indebted to Aristotle's doctrine of mixture. This doctrine described the four humors of the human body (blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm) as being analogous to the four cosmic elements (earth, air, fire, and water) and to the four qualities of matter (heat, dryness, moisture, and cold).[79] All material existence was ascribed to mixtures of the various elements and these qualities. In the 9th and 10th centuries, Greek treatises containing these ideas and more were translated into Arabic. The Arab world began to delve into the studies not only of the sciences but also math, particularly the mathematics of melody and rhythm. They also latched on to the idea of harmony as order, linking music with cosmology. Music therapy, from the Arabic philosopher's viewpoint, was understood as a component of universal harmony.

There are a number of Arabic sources that can help explain these ideas in greater depth. The initial Arabic achievements in the field of music theory were made in the 9th century treatises of al-Kindi, the Greek inspired theorist mentioned previously to whom numerous short, eclectic treatises on music are attributed. For al-Kindi, the basic scale was the Pythagorean diatonic. He used instruments such as the ud to help him set up series of associations, wherein the four strings of the ud connect with the elements,

[78] Trachtenberg, 196.
[79] Sonne and Werner, 180.

humors, seasons, and point on the compass.[80] In Treatise One of al-Kindi's *Book of Sounding Stringed Instruments*, he writes,

> The instruments help in creating harmony between the soul and the universe. Each people has instruments that reflect their nature and each instrument is said to express the specific beliefs and characteristics of the group to which it belongs. Therefore the skilled musician should make acquaintance in advance with all possible cases, so that he is able to adapt his music to any given situation, like the physician who diagnoses his patients before prescribing suitable treatment.[81]

Al-Kindi also believed that a musician should develop diagnostic skills parallel to those of a physician. His ideas would influence Jewish philosophers tremendously, particularly Saadia Gaon.

Another excellent Arabic source on music is the tenth century *Epistle on Music*, composed by the unidentified group known as the Brethren of Purity. In the lengthy *Epistle*, music is used as a model to explain the wonders of creation, and it is also described as a key factor in maintaining one's spiritual and philosophical equilibrium. Just as the humors were supposed to be common to all people, so, too, the basic principles of music were believed to be common to all people. Yet the philosophers also recognized differences between races and nations of the earth. According to the theory of racial differences, as treated by al-Kindi and by the Brethren of Purity, the particular characteristics that distinguish nations and races do not result from inheritance but from geographical location and climate. Hence, people differed in their sense of taste and small, their clothes and their music.[82]

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[80] E.J. Brill, "Music" *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Leiden, 1993), 682.

[81] Amnon Shiloah, "The Attitude Towards Music of Jewish Religious Authorities" *The Dimension of Music in Islamic and Jewish Culture* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1993), 149.

[82] Ibid. 150.

Various Arabic physicians have also been recorded as having utilized and written of music in their treatments. Ibn Hindu, an early Arab authority on medicine, wrote book entitled *The Key to Medicine.* In his work, he says that physicians during his time knew that certain kinds of music affect the passions, and they were known to treat cholerics using musical modes.[83] In these cases, however, the physician was instructed to use the services of an expert musician. Another Arabic philosopher and physician from the early 11th century was Ibn Sina, who looked into the idea of the pulse and musical proportions in his *Canon on Medicine.* He refuted links that other philosophers had drawn between music and astrology, but he combined rhythm, consonances, and pulse as indicators of good health and illness.[84]

Summary

From this brief survey, one can see that indeed, there was a great deal of musical thought and activity throughout the medieval world, even in Jewish communities. The rabbinic prohibitions against music were still firmly in place, yet music had been shown as an inherent, inescapable part of the human experience. Additionally, the influence of ancient Greek philosophy had worked its way indelibly into Jewish thought, as had the innovations of thinkers in the Muslim world. Though Jewish creativity in musical fields appears to have been somewhat limited, it is clear that music did play a role in the lives of everyday Jews, including its use in popular culture, liturgy, and as a valued educational subject and tool.

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[83] Shiloah, "The Attitude Towards Music of Jewish Religious Authorities," 151.
[84] Ibid. 152.

While elements of Jewish life flourished and blossomed with the help of these outside influences, their presence also made it increasingly challenging to retain a sense of Jewish legitimacy and to maintain adherence to the Law. Scientific and philosophical advancements could not always be integrated with Jewish beliefs, and I believe it is for this reason that one can find so few written documents regarding medieval Jewish ideas about music. However, this struggle between striving to live halachically and participating fully in the intellectual and artistic progress of the non-Jewish world was not a silent one. The medieval philosophers Saadia Gaon, Yehuda Levi, and Moses Maimonides, as well as the kabbalist Abraham Abulafia, all dealt with the subject of music in their writings. By examining these works and showing different strains of Jewish beliefs about music, one can see the important role that music played for Jews in the medieval world and the difficulty that these philosophers had in reconciling their ideas about music with their own unique insights into Jewish philosophy.

Chapter 6-Saadia Gaon

Biography

The man widely recognized as the first great Jewish philosopher was Saadia ben Yoseph ha-Pitomi, known in Arabic as Sa'id ibn Yusuf al-Fayyumi but most commonly referred to as Saadia Gaon. Saadia was the preeminent scholar, exegete, and author of the Geonic period (589-1038), as well as a key leader of the Babylonian Jewish community. He was born in Pithom, in the Fayyum district of Egypt in 892 C.E. and died in Mesopotamia in 942. Little is known about his heritage, but most scholars believe that his father was a manual laborer, not a scholar like his son would rise to be. It has also been suggested that his father was a convert from Islam who had been a *mu'adhdhin* (the person who calls for prayer), which might explain his interest in the theory of music.[85] In his work entitled *Sefer ha-Galui,* which is now known only from a few remaining fragments, Saadia claims to belong to the family of Shelah, son of Judah, who are referred to in I Chronicles 4:21.[86]

Regardless of his parent's status or erudition, Saadia was given a broad education in Jewish and secular studies. By the age of twenty he composed his first production, a dictionary called *Agron* which was the first of its kind and won Saadia great fame. When he was 23, Saadia wrote a polemic against the followers of the Karaite leader Anan ben David. After this time he began to travel extensively throughout the Middle East, and during his travels he interacted with different cultures and peoples that influenced him profoundly. These travels would have a great effect on his understanding of the world

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[85] Farmer, *Sa'adyah,* 10.

[86] "The sons of Shelach, son of Judah: Er the father of Lekah, Ladah the father of Mareshah, and the families of the house of Ashbea that wrought fine linen."

and were reflected in his subsequent writings. One such example can be seen in his wider appreciation and understanding of music, as he began to write of musical concepts which were common to many peoples of the Middle East but which were revolutionary for the Jewish world.

Saadia composed a number of additional books during these years, several of them based on his dispute with the Gaon of the academy at Pumbedita, Aaron Ben Meir. The dispute with Ben Meir was over the fixing of the Hebrew calendar, which was certainly a significant issue, but even greater matters were at stake. The question of Jewish unity and who would be the supreme leaders of the Jewish community, those in Palestine or in Babylonia, was of utmost importance for the wider Jewish world.

Saadia was called to be the Gaon of the Sura academy in 928, and though many of his colleagues did not wish to see a foreigner as head of the school, the ancient learning institution entered a new period of brilliancy under his supervision. Due to the increasingly complicated politics and conflicts with the academy at Pumbedita, Saadia was deposed four years later and retired in Baghdad. It was while living in Baghdad that he wrote his great philosophical treatise, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. In 936, he was reinstated as the Gaon in Sura, but he died just a few years later at the age of fifty.

Saadia Gaon was a pioneer in rabbinic literature and the first to write halachic works in Arabic. He was the first person to translate the Bible into Arabic and to write a commentary on it, and he also compiled a siddur that included poetry he had written in his youth. While his poetry is rarely considered one of the more notable aspects of his siddur, for our purposes here it is worth noting. Historian Salo Baron comments about Saadia,

> ...though generally far from fearful in breaking new ground, (he) never extended his poetic experimentation, both theoretical and practical, into the domain of Arabic meters. Possibly he and his confreres, writing almost exclusively sacred poetry, did not dare to inject such an obviously foreign growth into the synagogue ritual.[87]

Even though Saadia may not have allowed Arabic meter to influence his poetry, he was deeply influenced by Arabic ideas of rhythm, as will be seen in chapter ten of *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions.* This, Saadia's major philosophic work, was the earliest Jewish philosophic work from medieval times to have survived intact.[88]

Saadia was a student of Greek philosophy, particularly that of Aristotle, Plato, and Stoicism, but he belonged to the Kalam school of the Mu'Tazilites. Kalam is a religious science of Islam from the eighth century that sought out theological principles through dialectic. Kalam was a philosophical, theoretical system that sought to protect religion while viewing it through the lens of science; it was the originators of Kalam who first stated that God created the world (as written in the Koran) yet God cannot have a corporeal body.[89] The originators of Kalam were the first known group who sought to create a *shidduch* between religion and the conceptual sciences, and it is in their footsteps that Saadia and the other medieval philosophers followed, trying to make their own *shidduch* from the Jewish perspective rather than the Muslim. Kalam books were all based on a combination of religious and philosophy, and Saadia followed suit with his own version of a Kalam text: *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions.*

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[87] Baron, *A Social and Religious History,* 195.

[88] Steven T Katz, *Jewish Philosophers* (New York: Block Publishing Co, 1975), 32.

[89] As sung by my wise teacher Dr. Leonard Kravitz, "God...ain't got no-body."

The Book of Beliefs and Opinions

The Book of Beliefs and Opinions, originally entitled *The Book of the Articles of Faith and Doctrines of Dogma*, was the first systematic presentation and philosophic analysis of Jewish law. The book was written by Saadia in 933 in Baghdad, and in its ten chapters the author proceeds to defend rabbinic Judaism (presumably against the Karaites) by discussing subjects such as creation, revelation, and messianic redemption. While the book is almost entirely built around these broad, rather esoteric philosophical subjects, the tenth chapter contains an entire paragraph devoted to the subject of music.

This short paragraph was the earliest contribution to the Jewish study of music, and as such, it marked a clear stage in Jewish religious and musical history. It also paved the way for other medieval musical treatises on the theory and philosophy of music. Saadia's comments about music had wide repercussions in the Jewish world, "especially at a time when the admissibility of music in secular life, and even in the sacred service, was hotly debated."[90]

In this chapter, Saadia discusses the influence of music upon the human mind, evaluating the psychological influence exerted by archetypes of musical rhythm. He doesn't delve into the subject of musical theory or music as a science, but rather deals with musical terms and expressions, simply examining the way in which music affects the listener. Yet even his brief, non-scientific foray into the philosophy of music had a profound impact on the Jewish understanding of music. "The historical significance of Saadia's short chapter far exceeds that of its musical content. It demonstrates the

[90] Sendry, *The Music of the Jews in the Diaspora*, 53.

integration of musical theory into Jewish learning. It had now become a challenge for erudite Jews in the Islamic countries to comprehend this art intellectually."[91]

Saadia's chapter on music shows the weighty influence of Arabic thought on Jewish ideas, for he was the first to introduce traits of Arabic theory into the field of Jewish music. Arabic philosophers were interested in acoustics, which exerted an influence on both philosophy and music theory, and they also treated rhythm as being of primary importance in musical studies. Saadia, in turn, focuses on the rhythmic modes, borrowing modes from the metrical theory of the Arabs, just as the Greeks did before him.

It is clear that not only did Saadia base his musical ideas in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* off of those of earlier Arabic thinkers, but also his treatment of the subject agrees almost verbatim with writings by al-Kindi, the great Arabic philosopher, scientist, mathematician, and musical theorist discussed in the previous chapters. He follows al-Kindi's teachings in describing the eight types of rhythm and how they should be mixed in order to lead men to the Golden Mean. Notably, it must have been Saadia who borrowed from al-Kindi, not the reverse, as al-Kindi died before Saadia had even been born. It is also unlikely that there was a common source or Urtext from which both men drew, for in al-Kindi's writings on music, he states that he ignored what other older theorists and musical scholars said about rhythm, preferring to base his treatment on the system of musicians of his day.[92]

Before examining Saadia's paragraph on music from *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, one must have a sense of just how closely related his ideas are to those of al-

[91] Avenary, *Encyclopedia Judaica,* 568.
[92] Farmer, *Sa'adyah,* 90.

Kindi. Henry George Farmer suggests that of al-Kindi's seven or eight books on music theory, it was the *Risala fi ajza khabariyat al-musiqi* that probably supplied the ideas utilized by Saadia in his own work.[93] This passage was previously unpublished before Farmer's analysis of al-Kindi's work, and the translations in the following pages are his.

A few ideas and musical terms used by both al-Kindi and Saadia must first be defined before the translations are presented. First, tablature written by Arab theorists was based on the lute as their primary instrument. Rhythmic sounds were produced on the lute by stroking the plectrum on one of the strings, wherein the vibration that followed was dependent on how hard it had been struck. Thus, one would define a beat as a stroke made by the instrumentalist, and "downward and upward strokes" refer to the motions of the plectrum on a string of the lute.[94] When the authors refer to solitary beats, these are beats that stand alone. Consecutive beats are defined as a group of two or more beats of the same time value. These can be followed be either a rest or a different kind of beat. The term quiescent refers to the audible part of "the onomatopoeic tan." These are not beats but rests, the time value of which is determined by the tempo of the mode being used. Movent beats are the silent part of "the onomatopoeic tan", the time value of which is determined by the tempo of the mode being used. This beat cannot be followed by a rest.[95] The remaining terminology should be clear.

Al-Kindi: ***Section 1 of the Discourse 1: Concerning the Rhythms***

> As for the rhythms which are genres to the rest of the rhythms, then they are divided into eight rhythms, and they are: *Al-Thaqil al-awwal, Al-Thaqil al-thani,*

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[93] Farmer, *Sa'adyah,* 18.
[94] Ibid. 74-75.
[95] Ibid. 77-78.

Al-Makhuri, Khafif al-thaqil, Al-Ramal, Khafif al-ramal, Khafif al-khafif, [and] *Al-Hazaj*...

(1) As for *Al-Thaqil al-awwal*, it is three consecutive beats, then a quiescent beat, then the rhythm returns as it began.

(2) And *Al-Thaqil al-thani* is three consecutive beats, then a quiescent beat, then a movent beat, then the rhythm returns as it began.

(3) And *Al-Makhuri* is two consecutive beats—there should not be between them the time of a beat—and a solitary beat, and between its putting down and raising up, and its raising up and its putting down is the time of a beat.

(4) And *Khafif al-thaqil* is three consecutive beats—there should not be between one (pair) of them the time of a beat—and between every three beats and three beats is the time of a beat.

(5) And *Al-Ramal* is a solitary beat and two consecutive beats—there should not be between them the time of a beat—and between its raising up and its putting down, and its putting down and its raising up is the time of a beat.

(6) And *Khafif al-ramal* is three movent beats, then the rhythm returns as it began.

(7) And *Khafif al-khafif* is two consecutive beats—there should not be between them the time of a beat—and between every two beats and two beats is the time of a beat.

(8) And *Al-Hazaj* is two consecutive beats—there should not be between them the time of a beat—and between every two beats and two beats is the time of two beats.[96]

Al-Kindi: ***Section 1 of Discourse 2: Concerning the Resemblance of the Strings (of the Lute)...and the Humors,...And the Activities (of the Soul), and the Rhythms***

(1) So what results from the sounds of the *zir* string (c) in the activities of the soul, are the joyful, and glorious, and victorious actions, and hardness of heart, and courage, and such like. And it (i.e. the *zir* string) corresponds to the nature of (the rhythm) *Al-Makhuri*, and what is like it. And there obtains from the potency of the string and this rhythm that they both strengthen (the humor of) the yellow bile, stirring it, quietening (the humor of) the phlegm, checking it.

(2) And of what is inseparable from the *mathna* string (G) of this, are the gladsome, and delightful, and generous, and noble actions, and sympathy, and tender heartedness, and such like. And it corresponds to (the natures of the rhythms) *Al-Thaqil al-awwa* and *Al-Thaqil al-thani*. And there obtains from the potency of this string and these two rhythms that they strengthen (the humor of) the blood, stirring it, quietening (the humor of) the black bile, checking it.

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[96] Farmer, *Sa'adyah*, 21.

(3) And of what is inseparable from the *mathlath* string (D) of this, are unmanly actions, and bewailings, and grief of the various kinds of weeping and types of entreaty, and such like. And it corresponds to (the nature of the rhythm) *Al-Thaqil al-mumtadd.* And there obtains from (the potency of) this string and this rhythm that they both strengthen (the humor of) the phlegm, stirring it, quietening (the humor of) the yellow bile, checking it.

(4) And of what is inseparable from the *bam* string (A) of this, are gladsome actions at one time and joyful actions at another time, and graciousness, and love, and such like. And it corresponds to (the nature of the rhythms) *Al-Ahzaj*, and *Al-Armal*,[97] and *Al-Khafif*, and such like. And there obtains from (the potency of) this string and these rhythms that they strengthen (the humor of) the black bile, stirring it, quietening (the humor of) the blood, checking it.[98]

As will be apparent shortly, these descriptions of the rhythmic modes clearly appear to be the text on which Saadia based his own treatment of the modes and their effects on the human body and psyche. Whether Saadia's paragraph on music was an act of blatant plagiarism or simply the attempt of one scholar to synthesize another's ideas with his own is unclear. For our purposes, however, the most important issue at hand seems to be that ideas such as al-Kindi's were acceptable and even widespread within the Arab world, as can be seen even in the fact that al-Kindi, one of the greatest Muslim philosophers prior to al-Farabi,[99] was openly discussing them and writing numerous books on musical subjects. The Jewish world, conversely, was far behind in their understandings of the science of music, and thus Saadia' brief paragraph, insignificant by Arabic standards, radically changed the Jewish understanding of music.

Unfortunately, despite the importance of Saadia's passage on music, there are multiple conflicting versions of the work, each of which is recognized by scholars as having numerous significant errors. The most well known of these versions are Saadia's

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[97] These words are the plurals of *Al-Hazaj* and *Al-Ramal.*
[98] Farmer, *Sa'adyah*, 22.
[99] Ibid. 17.

original Arabic text written in Hebrew letters from 933, a summary in Hebrew from 1180 made in the Major Compendium of Berakyah ha-Naqdan, and three Hebrew translations: a "paraphrase" from 1095 called *Piteron sefer ha-emunot*, a version by Abraham bar Hiyya (d. 1136), and a version by Yehuda ibn Tibbon in 1186 known as *Sefer ha-emunot*.[100]

There are two remaining original manuscripts of Saadia's original Arabic text, one at the Bodleian Library in Oxford and the other at the State Library in Leningrad. These are both written in Hebrew script, though they were probably originally written in Arabic letters and later changed under the pressure of "conservative Judaism."[101] While one might assume that Saadia's original would be the most accurate version of the chapter, there are issues with Saadia's own confusing terminology that have resulted in various misconceptions by scholars about his text, not the least of which was the fact that most scholars were clearly unaware of the parallels between Saadia's and al-Kindi's works.

There are many problems with Saadia's word choices. As was explained previously, Saadia describes the rhythmic modes in his chapter of *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. However, Saadia uses such Arabic words as *alhan* (melodies), *tanghim* (intoning), and *naghamat* (notes), all of which would naturally lead one to believe that Saadia was referring to melodic modes rather than rhythmic ones. While there is certainly nothing philosophically or musically incorrect about speaking of melodic modes, this is probably not what Saadia intended to say, since it is almost definite that Saadia based his writings on those of al-Kindi, who was much clearer with his

[100] Farmer, *Sa'adyah*, 27.
[101] Ibid. 28.

terminology and is plainly speaking about rhythmic modes. In addition, Henry George Farmer explains,

> It was the accepted thesis that, in measured music, the rhythm was of greater import than the melody, hence the term *usul* (roots, causes) was applied to rhythmic modes, a practice which obtains to this day. Secondly, he found the argument already used before him and he did but copy the procedure. Thirdly, the diverse measures of rhythmic modes were capable of being so described as to be roughly understood by the uninitiated, whereas a description of the structure of the melodic modes could scarcely be appreciated, except by the practitioners of music, without the use of tablature or notation.[102]

It is possible that in Saadia's time, the Arabic musical terms found in his passage on music had double or wider meanings, or perhaps his original Arabic text was copied incorrectly by later scribes, leaving us with the current difficulties. Regardless, as a result the later translators either sensed that Saadia intended to discuss rhythmic modes and changed their translations accordingly, or they kept the melodic terminology and altered the remainder of their translations to discuss melodic modes.

The first Hebrew version of Saadia's text was the *Piteron sefer ha-Emunot,* a paraphrase of the text from 1095 whose author is unknown. This payyetanic Hebrew interpretation uses varying, indiscriminately chosen technical terms that alternate between melodic and rhythmic interpretations of the original text. Abraham bar Hiyya, who died around 1136 C.E., translated Saadia's entire book including our passage, and it is apparent that he also consulted the *Piteron*. His work is not a literal translation, as he changes both the length of each of Saadia's descriptions of the modes and also the definition of their influences (except for the last mode). He exclusively uses rhythmic terminology, yet he is clearly unfamiliar with technical musical nomenclature. It is possible that he was working with an original text of Saadia's that has been lost, which

[102] Farmer, *Sa'adyah,* 14.

would explain some of his omissions and inconsistencies, yet his text is still far from accurate.

Another summary of Saadia's passage was written by Berkyah ben Natronai ha-Naqdam in the early 13th century. It has been suggested that he also wrote the *Piteron*, yet he did not speak Arabic, so this is impossible. In fact, his text diverges a great deal from the earlier summary, and probably owes a great deal to the bar Hiyya translation. Regardless of his inspiration, "Berakyah has altered and mutilated the text. Indeed, it has been so changed that it would scarcely be possible to appreciate the actual argument of Saadia without reference to previous versions."[103] A more commonly utilized version of the text is that of Ibn Tibbon, whose translation of Saadia's *Book of Belief and Opinions* is one of his best known works. His translation is more complete than the others, yet Ibn Tibbon was not a musician and thus it is doubtful that he understood Saadia's purpose; something is clearly amiss in his translation as well.

The translation that I will offer here is a compilation and interpretation of these sources, though I have chosen to include Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew text for the sake of comparison rather than the original Arabic. My translation is primarily based an understanding of Saadia's original text, but I have changed the melodic terms to the rhythmic ones that I believe, based on the connections between his text and al-Kindi's, he must have intended. It is my belief that despite Saadia's brilliance in a wide range of subjects, he simply wasn't musically minded enough to understand the important difference between key vocabulary words. While this seems an anomaly for a man who was so careful with his use of language, it is important to remember that this paragraph is

[103] Farmer, *Sa'adyah*, 59.

an almost literal repetition of al-Kindi's words. Had Saadia intended to refute al-Kindi's work and suggest that it was melodic, not rhythmic modes that affect the humors, he certainly would have made that clear. Also, in Saadia's description of the modes, one can see that they align with those used by Jews in Mesopotamia in the 10th century. There has been no discovery of melodic modes used by the Jews in the medieval period, so there is no way to check if his descriptions would correspond.[104]

Before Saadia discusses music, he offers an exposition on the effect of blending the five senses in the same way that one blends a person's impulses. He does not include taste or touch as "blendable" senses, explaining that touch only gives pleasure through touching soft things and that different taste combinations are commonly understood (and thus not worth going into). Henry George Farmer notes, "In ignoring taste and touch, he seems to be following al-Kindi, although there may have been, quite apart from the reasons which he gives, religious motives for this selection, as we see in the emphasis made by Maimonides on these three senses."[105] It appears that Farmer was referring to chapter 1:46 in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, where Maimonides discusses the ways in which God must be described to the majority of people by means of similes taken from the physical body. In this chapter, Maimonides says that the perception of the senses, particularly hearing and sight, are the ones that are the best understood by most people (who are not as intelligent as the author himself and other like-minded philosophers.) For this reason, people figuratively ascribe to God the organs of hearing, seeing, and smelling. Maimonides "religious motives," as described by Farmer, may be based on the anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Bible which the philosopher understands to

[104] Farmer, *Sa'adyah*, 92.
[105] Ibid. 12.

be false, though I would hardly classify such motives as religious. Rather, hearing, seeing, and smelling do not require physical contact in the way that tasting and touching do, thus these senses are more easily attributed to God. As Saadia was not discussing ways in which music affects God, this seems to me to be an unlikely line of reasoning, and it is more likely that Saadia was simply following al-Kindi's text in his exclusion of these two senses.

As in many of al-Kindi's writings (though not among those translated in this thesis), colors are linked with music in the scheme of the ethos. For this reason, I have included the brief paragraph that proceeds Saadia's exposition on music in an attempt to give additional clarity to Saadia's reasoning.

The Conclusion of Chapter 10 from *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*

ואכיון בדברי אל שלושת המוחשים האחרים, ואומר כי המראה הנפרד מלובן או אודם או ירוק או שחור, מנהגו להחליש החוש כשיביט אליו, כאשר יכהה הראות מן ההבטא אל השלג, וכאשר יזיק האודם לעין, ויחלש כח הראות מן השחרות, והדומה לזה. והוא עם זה אינם מביאים לידי ערבות ושמחה רבה; אבל כשימזגו קצתם עם קצתם, יתחדש מהם אפני הערבות ותנועה רבה לכחות הנפש. ואומר כי האודם המתערב עם הירוק, יניע המרה האדומה ומדותיה, ויראה מהנפש חוזק העוז. והירוק המתערב עם השחור, יניע כח הלחה הלבנה, ותראה הנפש כח השפלות. אך אם יתקבץ השחרות והלובן והירוק והאודם, יניעו כח הדם, ויראה מן הנפש כח המלכות והממשלה. וכאשר יתחבר הירוק עם הירקרק, יניעו כח המרה השחורה, ויראה מן הנפש כח המורך והאבל. וכן אם יוסיף או יחסר בה מזג המראים, יתחדש לנפש מכחותם כפיהם. וכן הקול הנפרד נהנעימה הנפרדת והנגינה, לא יניעו ממדות הנפש כי אם

דבר אחד בלבד, ופעמים יזיקוה, אבל המזגם ישוה מה שיראה ממדותיה וכחותיה, וראוי לך לרעת מעשיהם נפרדים עד שיהיה כפיהם.

ונאמר, כי הנגינות שמונה, לכל אחת מהם שיעור מהנעימות הראשונה מהם שעורה שלש נעימות סמוכות, ואחת נחה.

והשניה שלש נעימות סמוכות ואחת נחה ואחת נעה, ואלה השתי נגינות מניעים כח הדם וכח המלכות והממשלה. והשלישית שעורה שתי נעימות סמוכות אין ביניהם זמן נעימה, ואחת נחה, ובין כל השפל והגבה והשפל זמן נעימה, וזאת לבדה מעירה המרה והאדומה והגבורה והחוזק הלב ומה שדומה להם.

והרביעית שעורה שלש נעימות סמוכות, לא יהיה ביניהם זמן נעימה, ובין כל שלש ושלש זמן נעימה. וזאת לבדה מניעה הלחה הלבנה, ותראה מהנפש כח השפלות והכניעה והמורך והדומה לזה.

והחמישית שעורה נעימה נפרדת, ושתים שונות זו מזו, אין ביניהם זמן נעימה, ובין הגבה והשפל זמן נעימה.

והששית שעורה שלש נעימות מתנועעות.

והשביעית שעורה שתי נעימות סמוכות, אין ביניהם זמן נעימה, ובין כל שתים ושתים זמן נעימה.

והשמינית שעורה שתי נעימות סמוכות, אין ביניהם זמן נעימה, בין כל שתים ושתים זמן שתי נעימות. ואלה הארבע כלם מניעים מרה השחורה, ומראות מן הנפש מדות נחלקות, פעם אל השמחה, פעם אל הדאגה. וממנהג המלכים, למזוג קצתם עם קצתם, עד שתשתוינה. ויהיה מה שתניענה ממדות בשמעה אותם, כפי מה שייטיב נפשותם להנהגת המלכות; ולא יוצאים אל הרבוי ברחמים או באכזריות, ולא בגבורה ולא במרך, ולא בתוספת ובחסרון בשמחה.

I now direct my discourse to the three other kinds of senses and say that a basic color, such as pure white or red or yellow or black, usually results in weakening the sense organ when one looks at it. So for instance, one's sight is blinded by

snow, and redness is dangerous to the eye, and blackness weakens one's ability to see and so forth. Furthermore, these colors alone have no happy effect and do not make for much of a pleasant sensation. When they are merged, however, they evoke all kinds of warm feelings and rouse many of the faculties of the soul to a state of action.

So, I could say that when red is mixed with yellow, it stimulates the yellow gall and the traits of the soul that originate there, causing strength to become manifest. Or, when yellow is mixed with black, it acts as a stimulant, causing one to produce phlegm so that the soul's faculty of humility becomes manifest. Mixing black, red, yellow, and white reacts on the black gall and makes manifest the soul's cowardice and sadness. In the same way, when the proportions in the mixture of these colors are increased or decreased, corresponding effects are produced in the stimulation of the faculties of the soul.

The same theory applies to a single sound, an isolated mode or rhythmic intonation. It moves one faculty of the soul, and through them the soul can be put in danger. But a mixture of these sounds produces a harmonious affect on the faculties of the soul and its powers. Thus, one must know the effects of the isolated modes in order to combine them in the proper manner.

So I say that there are eight distinct rhythmic modes, each one of them having a certain number of beats.

(1) For the first one, it is composed of three consecutive beats and one quiescent beat.

(2) The second also consists of three consecutive beats, in addition to one quiescent and one audible beat. These two modes stimulate the strength of the humor of the blood and arouse the passion for sovereignty and domination.

(3) And the third mode, it is composed of two consecutive beats which are not separated from each other by the time of a beat, followed by a quiescent beat. Between every downward and upward stroke is the time of a beat. Only this one mode stimulates the humor of the yellow bile, and thus arouses the virtues of courage, boldness and the like.

(4) And the fourth mode, it consists of three consecutive beats which are not separated from each other by the time of a beat, but there is time for a beat between every group of three beats. Only this one mode stimulates the white humor which produces phlegm, and thus arouses the soul's potentiality for vileness, submissiveness, cowardice, and the like.

(5) And the fifth mode, it is made up of a solitary beat followed by two consecutive beats which are not separated by the interval of a beat. But, between the downward and upward stroke, there is time for a beat.

(6) And the sixth mode, its measure is three movent notes.

(7) And the seventh mode, it is composed of two consecutive beats that are not separated by the interval of a beat. Between each two of these beats, however, is the time of a beat.

(8) And the eighth, its measure is composed of two consecutive beats that are not separated from each other by the time of a beat. But, between each

two beats is the time of two beats. The last four modes all stimulate the humor of the black bile, arousing various dispositions of the soul, sometimes to gladness and sometimes to sorrow.

Rulers have the practice of blending these different modes to produce a harmonious balance, so that the dispositions stimulated by hearing these modes may put their souls in the proper disposition to rule. They should keep rulers from using either excessive mercy or cruelty, courage or cowardice, neither too much or too little gaiety and yearning for pleasure.

An Analysis of Saadia's Treatise on Music

By comparing Saadia's treatise with al-Kindi's, one immediately notices the many parallels between the two texts. The eight rhythmic modes detailed by both authors are nearly exact in their descriptions. Additionally, the affect these modes are said to have on the humors is also incredibly similar in the two texts, though al-Kindi separates these ideas into another paragraph while Saadia incorporates them into his descriptions of the rhythmic modes. There are slight differences in the descriptions of the various dispositions caused by listening to the rhythmic modes, but this is most likely a result of the many various translations and scribal errors in the texts, not an intentional statement by Saadia disagreeing with al-Kindi's definitions.

There are, however, two striking differences in Saadia's passage compared to that of al-Kindi, and I believe these to be of great use in understanding Saadia's specifically Jewish perspective on these musical ideas. One will notice that in both texts, the description of the modes and their effects are highly theoretical; these are not practical

directions for how one should play music, for whom it should be played, or for what functional purposes these rhythms should be utilized. One learns, for example, that the third mode stimulates the humor of the yellow bile, arousing feelings such as courage and prompting one to do victorious acts, yet there is no prescription for the manner in which one should use the third mode to encourage such results. It is only at the end of Saadia's passage that he ventures to suggest one small sub-sect of people who should use these musical methods of controlling human emotions for their own purposes: rulers. Rulers, he says, already blend the rhythmic modes in order that they will be able to lead the people in an appropriate manner. Saadia does not provide a specific example of who these rulers are, so it is left to our speculation. One possibility is that Saadia, the consummate biblical scholar, was thinking of the most famous musician in the Hebrew Bible, David. When King Saul suffered from fits, David was brought in to soothe the king's spirits with his musical expertise. Though Saul's ability to rule well was still somewhat in question (at least in the eyes of the biblical author), music was certainly intended to help him serve in his capacity as king. Another option might be that Saadia was referring to leaders in his own time, though it is unclear of whom he might be thinking. *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* was written in Arabic, which had replaced Aramaic in his time as the principle language spoken by Jews in Babylonia,[106] so Saadia's work was not necessarily limited to a strictly Jewish audience. However, it seems unlikely that Saadia would have been in a position to give ruling advice to the leaders of the Arab world, and there were no such equivalents in the Diaspora Jewish community. If anything, as a Gaon, Saadia himself might have been considered such a

[106] Katz, 32.

leader who could utilize this advice for ruling, but his role was not one of such power that he would need to be restrained from such things as "using excessive mercy or cruelty." The only thing that can be said with certainty regarding Saadia's inclusion about the practice of rulers to use these musical techniques is that Saadia clearly saw music as something of great power that even, if not especially, those with the most authority and influence should be called upon to use it.

Another unique feature of Saadia's passage is that he tries to prove that the repetition of a single beat or rhythm is dangerous for the soul. Alternately, combinations of beats can have a powerful and positive effect on the listener, and his explanation of the eight rhythmic modes and their corresponding ethos proves the latter part of his argument. Again, one sees the tremendous power that Saadia attributes to music, most notably the fact that it can be dangerous! Just as looking at bright white snow can damage one's eyes, listening to rhythms that have been incorrectly blended, Saadia suggests, can be highly hazardous to one's health, or at least the health of one's soul.

When reading of these implicit dangers of which Saadia speaks, it is difficult to ascertain how he came to these conclusions. The modern medical field of music therapy, based on Platonic ideas, has certainly shown that music has the ability to produce positive effects on the human psyche, but there seems to be no scientific data to show that it can have the reverse affect. Of what dangers might Saadia have been speaking? Without even a single such dangerous incident provided as an example by Saadia or other philosophers or musicians, both in his time and in our own, the only "proven" dangers of music are those stated by the Rabbis: that various types of music (including but not limited to secular music, music sung by women, and music with inappropriate lyrics) can

lead people to act in inappropriate ways. The inherent danger, as suggested by the Rabbis in the Talmud, is that music can lead one to immoral sexual behavior and intoxication. If, indeed, Saadia was influenced by the Rabbis in these matters, two conclusions can be posited about his chapter on music from *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*. First, Saadia clearly believes that music wield a tremendous amount of power, such that it can move people's souls and even be used as a tool by the highest rulers in the land. Second, music's power gives it the potential to cause as much good as it does evil. If these assumptions are true, it could be said that Saadia was following closely in the footsteps of Jewish thinkers that came before him. His understanding of music as a science may have been more advanced, but his conclusions were the same as the Jews of generations before him.

Saadia's Psalm-Preface

While Saadia's most important contribution to the Jewish study of music is in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, he also discussed music in an exegesis of musical traits in the Psalms that he composed. Within his introductory comments on the Book of Psalms, one can see he manner in which he applied his knowledge (albeit limited) of music to the interpretation of musical references in the Psalms.

Saadia's original text was written in Arabic, preserved in one badly mutilated manuscript and an additional Geniza fragment that clarifies some of the missing material.[107] Since the Arabic text has been so poorly preserved, it would be impossible to

[107] Hanoch Avenary, "A Geniza Find of Saadya's Psalm-Preface and Its Musical Aspects" *Contributions of a Historical Study of Jewish Music* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1976), 37.

offer a full translation of it here. Additionally, only small portions of the text relate to this thesis. Therefore, I will attempt to describe the relevant statements, and all quotes will be from Hanoch Avenary's English translation. The sections in parentheses (with the exception of obvious proof-texts) are Avenary's scholarly speculations of what the text probably said originally.

Saadia explains that the psalms were intended to be sung in the Temple under five conditions. Only a few of these conditions have been recorded in the manuscript found in the Geniza fragment.

(1) Whenever a psalm is allotted by its title to a certain order of Levites, it was forbidden to be performed by any other group.

(2) The melodies quoted in the headings of many psalms were obligatory, too. Among the same, נְגִינַת (Ps. 61 only) has to be interpreted as one unchanging tune; בִּנְגִינֹת, however (Ps. 4; 6; 54; 55; 67; 76) indicates several different melodies. The title שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת (Ps. 120-134) designates a high (loud) or elevated melody; this meaning may be derived from other biblical texts where the root עלה is combined with "voice" (I Chron. 15:22, I Sam. 5:12, Jer. 14:2). Where עַל עַלְמוֹת or the like is prescribed (Ps. 9; 46) the psalms had to be sung in a thing (or: subdued) voice...It is proven therewith that the orders (of Levites) had (8 mo)des which they used in the sanctuary. Since this has become clear to us, (every group had to sing) the psalm written to one (of the said eight) mode(s; they were not allowed to sing it to) differing modes. Those (psalms) that were (called) "elevated" (were not sung with a low voice, and what is called "lo)wered" was not sung aloud. Likewise is the rule for the

rest of (the modes)—they must not be changed. Whoever changes them, commits a sin since it is said: "for it was by the Lord, the commandment by his prophets,"[108] (and this proves) that it is a misconception in this respect.

(3) The (third) condition—(The musical instruments) to which the Songs of Praise are performed, are *ud, tunbur, duff, tabl*...

(4) (The play of instruments also promotes prophecy by removing anger and grief) as did Elisha who, grieved by his separation from Elijah-may he rest in peace-asked for a musician versed well in one of the melodies or instruments, as it is said (II Kings 3:15): "But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, (that the hand of the Lord came upon him)."[109]

As can be seen from this limited section, much of Saadia's preface remains undecipherable, yet what remains offers some interesting additional insights into Saadia's understanding of music. Saadia believed that the Psalms were all composed by a divine being, revealed to King David by the voice of an angel. As divine utterings, the prescription to use particular singers or instruments for different Psalms had to be strictly followed.[110] Elsewhere in his commentary, he maintains that the Levites ceased singing because their musical role in the Temple depended on the fulfillment of three essential conditions: they required the correct site (the Temple), the appropriate function (assisting in Temple worship), and their appropriate status (that of their musical responsibility as Levites). When these conditions disappeared, the singing associated with them

[108] II Chronicles 29:25.
[109] Avenary, 151-154.
[110] Ibid. 158.

disappeared, and thus music from the Temple did not survive in the Diaspora. As a result, Saadia believed that all instrumental music must be prohibited until the Temple is rebuilt. He even goes so far as to claim that in ancient times, the use of instrumental music was restricted to the Temple.

> According to the "Five Conditions" proposed by Saadia, the praise of God to the accompaniment of musical instruments was and remains restricted to the temple. This principle is underlined several times and even allowed to interfere with the text of the translation itself: Whenever a psalm evokes the praise of God with lyre, harp, or drum, Saadia takes pains in adding the restriction "of the sanctuary" to the name of the particular instrument; he wants to avoid at any cost the impression that praise by means of instruments was admissible outside the temple.[111]

Such sanctions on the use of instrumental music for the Jewish community were not unusual for Saadia. In a Responsum, he was asked whether or not the prohibition applied only to the four instruments mentioned in Isaiah 5:12. The four instruments in question were the כִּנּוֹר וְנֵבֶל תֹּף וְחָלִיל. Saadia replied that all instruments are prohibited and the four most popular instruments were mentioned in the verse simply because they were the most well known.[112]

One of the most fascinating things about Saadia's preface is his use of Arabic words for musical instruments instead of their Hebrew counterparts. His meticulousness lapsed in his translations of the names of Hebrew instruments, and he translated even the Hebrew words נֵבֶל and כִּנּוֹר by the Arabic names of comparable stringed instruments. This is a particularly odd choice, for Saadia so plainly asserted that each Psalm must be sung in the exact way as it was described in the biblical text, so why would he be so careless and not use the correct Hebrew names of musical instruments? Avenary asks,

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[111] Avenary, 159.
[112] Kahn, 48.

> How could this instruction be obeyed in practice, when the characteristics of *nevel* and *kinnor* are mixed up and intermingle with concepts of the lute and harp? Possibly Saadia would leave the problematic identification of the instruments "to the Messianic era," since his principles could only be realized in the rebuilt temple where the Arabic nomenclature would be irrelevant in any case.[113]

Avenary's suggestion may have been tongue in cheek, but I think a more reasonable answer is apparent when comparing these discrepancies to those in Saadia's chapter on music in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions.* I suggested previously that the mistakes made by Saadia in that text, using Arabic words for "melody" and "notes" when he should have been using terms to describe rhythm, was simply the result of Saadia's not having a good grasp on musical terminology. Now, in his commentary on Psalms, we are faced with a similar problem; Saadia is again using incorrect Arabic musical terms to describe Hebrew instruments. I believe that this too is a result of Saadia's insufficient understanding of music. However, we can once again see that despite his limited musical vocabulary, Saadia was well aware of the potential power that music held over all individuals, and as a leader of the Jewish community, he was reticent to allow the people full access to an art form that had the ability to hold such sway over human actions and emotions.

Summary

By comparing these texts, one can see a strange discrepancy in Saadia's beliefs about music. In the psalm-preface discussion regarding music in the Temple service, Saadia makes it clear that such music was limited to the Temple alone, and that until the Temple could be rebuilt, it was inappropriate to play any sort of instrument. He does, in

[113] Avenary, "A Geniza Find," 150.

his description of Elijah, reiterate the therapeutic use of music, though in this instance, he seems to be quoting the biblical text rather than offering his own statement about the healing powers of music. In his responsum, he even goes so far as to say that all instruments, not just the four instruments mentioned by Isaiah, are forbidden.

Yet despite his warnings in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* regarding the possible misuse of music's powers, the overall tone of that passage, his longest commentary on music, is positive. One has to read fairly deeply into the text to see the puritanical influence of the Rabbis, and even then it seems like somewhat of an afterthought; far more time is spent developing the idea of the positive effect the various modes have on the humors. Whether he has experienced music's effects personally or simply believes the veracity of al-Kindi's words enough to claim them as his own, Saadia clearly believes that music can have a highly beneficial effect on an individual's mental and physical health. There is no discussion of the nature of the music; whether it is liturgical or secular, instrumental or vocal, the identity of the musicians, or any of the other questions raised about music in the Talmud. It would seem that in fact, these questions are irrelevant to Saadia in his discussion of music's power.

This is a striking inconsistency! Saadia, despite being the first Jewish philosopher, was a Gaon, a Talmudic sage and spiritual leader of the Jewish community. How could he have so plainly disregarded the Talmudic ban against music? The ban may not have been consistently practiced in Saadia's time, but Saadia was no layman; as a Gaon, he had an exceptionally prominent role in the transmission and teaching of Jewish law and would not have dared so flagrantly transgress the Law. Additionally, in his psalm-preface, he explained that no instruments were to be played until the rebuilding of

the Temple, yet the paragraph in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* makes no mention of waiting to test these theories; in fact, he offers specific instructions for the ways in which a ruler should utilize these musical techniques. Even if Saadia had been swayed by the positive descriptions of music in the Bible, this should not have caused him to disregard the prohibition in the Talmud. In Saadia's understanding of Judaism, he believed the Bible except when it was contradictory, illogical, or went against tradition;[114] in this case, even the depiction of music in the Bible could not have swayed him to overlook the writings of the Rabbis.

It is difficult to determine the potential reasons that Saadia "changed his tune." It is possible that he was writing these texts for different audiences, yet since both works were written in Arabic, either Jews or gentiles would have had the ability to read them. It could also be suggested that his chapter on the benefits of music was only intended to be theoretical, yet his descriptions of the eight rhythmic modes are in complete accordance with the actual modes being played at that time; one could hardly hope for better detailed musical instructions than he offers. One might note that Saadia wrote *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* during the time period after which he had been deposed from the academy at Sura, so perhaps during that time he might have been less inclined to adhere strictly to rabbinic tradition. That theory seems rather implausible, however, particularly because he was eventually reinstated as Gaon at that academy. A last option would be to plead for Saadia's musical ignorance, suggesting that in copying al-Kindi's treatise he was not fully aware of its implications. However, though Saadia may have had some difficulties understanding the difference between the names of various instruments and musical

[114] Leonard Kravitz, class notes, "Introduction to Medieval Philosophy" 9/9/02.

terms, it is highly improbable that he would have included an entire chapter in his philosophical masterpiece that he didn't truly grasp or believe in.

How, then, can one explain these discrepancies and Saadia's break not only with tradition but with his own other writings? I believe there are two explanations, one that places Saadia within the social context of his time period, and the other that is derived from Saadia's unique personal perspective.

Saadia, as we have noted, played many roles in the Jewish community, yet first and foremost he was the Gaon, a leader in rabbinic literature and thought. However, despite being the Gaon (a title he so embodied that it is typically used as if it were his surname), it is this very role that seems to create the biggest disconnect between Saadia's life and his commentary on music. His approach, particularly in his chapter from *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, is so tremendously non-halachic that it simply doesn't fit with his character.

So perhaps to truly understand what Saadia was saying, one must read his works thinking of Saadia not as Gaon but as one of his lesser-recognized roles, a liturgist. Saadia composed a magnificent *siddur* around the year 900, just fifty years after Rav Amram drew up what is recognized as the earliest existing codification of the prayer-book. Though it is Rav Amram's *siddur* that had the greater influence on the permanent structure of the prayer-book, the labor of love that is Saadia's *siddur* tells us a great deal about his personal perspective on Judaism. The compilation of a prayer-book may be based on halachic ideas, yet the underlying principle is purely spiritual. Saadia knew how vital music was to ancient Jewish worship; in his psalm preface, he speaks of music's divinity and its healing powers that are described even in the biblical text. These

ideas must have carried over into his understanding of Jewish liturgy and worship. While as a Gaon, he couldn't disregard the prohibitions of the Rabbis, he believed enough in music spiritual powers and the positive effect that it could have on the body and soul that he could not overlook it.

Though Saadia never speaks of prayer specifically in his chapter on music, he also fails to give the "appropriate," practical setting for which one should utilize his musical ideas. Yet one should remember that at this time in the medieval period, Jews often went to synagogue in part for the sake of entertainment, in order to hear the musical performance provided by the newly introduced chazzan and the many *piyyutim* that had become a standard part of the service. Perhaps, then, one might assume that Saadia's chapter on music could have been intended for the one Jewish activity that still incorporated music: liturgy. Saadia's insights into music could indeed have been intended for a practical purpose, one that he knew and cared about tremendously, namely, the prayer service. This could explain his liberal, philosophical personal approach to music as described in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* as well as his glowing description of the musical psalms recited in the Temple cult.

Additionally, like many of the medieval philosophers who would follow in Saadia's footsteps, Saadia was a man of two minds, straddling between what he believed as a Jew and what he knew as a philosopher. He had learned from the Arabs and the Greeks that music was an important tool for healing, ruling, and influencing people; as a philosopher, he could not ignore this new knowledge. Yet within a Jewish context, these musical potentials had been lost with the destruction of the Temple, and he could or would not go against the wisdom of the tradition he based his life around.

Perhaps it is for this reason that instead of incorporating his own ideas about music in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Saadia essentially plagiarized al-Kindi's text, claiming it as his own. He was unwilling to so openly go against the rabbinic ban and emphasize the positive potential of music, so he found a way to state it without actually using his own words. For that matter, while we in the modern era might not have recognized al-Kindi's words in Saadia's text, in Saadia's time, people might have been fully aware that those words were not his own. If that were the case, the mystery would be solved-Saadia managed to live between two worlds, to make his intellectual case for music while staying true to the laws of Jewish tradition. It is worth noting as well that like others in the school of Kalam, though Saadia sought to make a *shidduch* between his two worlds, he was not able to do so with complete success. The followers of Kalam knew, for instance, that God was the ultimate Creator from Scripture and philosophically couldn't have a body, but they couldn't reconcile God's non-changing nature with the act of Creation. It was up to later philosophers to take these philosophical ideas and others further, synthesizing their two worlds and continuing to search for answers. Yet not all of the medieval philosophers took this approach. Yehuda Halevi, in fact, who was chronologically the next great Jewish philosopher after Saadia, completely rejected Kalam and their rational understanding of the world, returning to the notion of individual experience and what he perceived as the original Jewish tradition.

Chapter 7-Yehuda Halevi

Biography

During the last quarter of the 11th century, the city of Toledo in Spain was under the rule of both a Mohammedan emir and the Christian King Alphonso VI. Due to this dual leadership, a sense of religious pluralism was extended to a variety of faith communities in the region, and the Jews were treated well at this time in the great city.[115]

Yehuda Halevi was born in Toledo in 1085, and he flourished in this pluralistic, creative environment. As a young man, he was sent to study Talmud with the famous scholar Isaac Alfasi, known as the Rif. He began writing poetry at an early age, though he was educated as a doctor and made his living practicing medicine. He lived in Spain for the majority of his life, leaving the country for the first time in his fifties. At this time, Halevi traveled east, landing at Alexandria and later journeying to Damietta, Tyre, and Damascus. Legend says that he left Egypt and finally arrived at Jerusalem, singing his famous ode to Zion at the city gates when he was trampled and killed by the spear of an Arab horseman. In reality, however, it is believed that Halevi never reached Eretz Yisrael. His departure from Egypt was delayed due to inclement weather, and from elegies written in Egypt and Genizah letters which mention his death in that country, it is known that he died only six months after reaching Egypt in 1141 and was buried there.[116]

Though he was a great philosopher, Halevi is best known for his prolific writings as a poet, and one could even say that, "in Judah Halevi the poet got the better of the

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[115] Isaac Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1930), 151.

[116] Katz, 63.

rationalist."[117] Indeed, Halevi believed that reason and philosophy alone were not adequate to solve all problems, and to label him as "just" a medieval philosopher would be to do an injustice to his artistic talents. Halevi was a tremendously prolific poet, and about 800 of his poems are known, including at least 350 religious piyyutim.[118] However, his great philosophical work, *The Kuzari*, was his life's supreme achievement. This, his one book of philosophy, took him twenty years to write, and he completed it in 1140 shortly before his fabled departure for Eretz Yisrael. It is a creative and intellectually captivating work that had a profound impact on Jewish thought in the medieval world and continues to do so today.

Halevi's philosophy, as shown in *The Kuzari*, represents a bold reaction to Kalam. In *The Kuzari*, both the Christian and the Muslim characters described at the beginning of the book present an idea of a Creator who is both changeless and also created the world out of nothing; Halevi indicates that these ideas (which were also held by Saadia) are highly problematic. In Halevi's theology, only direct experience conveys a notion of God, and Jews have a different experience of God because Jews are genetically a different kind of people, a separate species. Jews, Halevi asserts, are like the fifth element, and it is precisely that that is specific to the Jews (including things like Shabbat and מילה ברית) that maintains our connection to God.

The Kuzari

In *The Kuzari*, Halevi attempts to answer the questions that philosophers, unbelievers, and people of other religions might have about Judaism. 400 years before Halevi was born, there was a pagan kingdom of the Khazars who converted to Judaism.

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[117] Husik, 150.

[118] פיוטים, Jewish religious poems written since Mishnaic times that are typically sung, recited, or chanted during services.

He uses their example as a vehicle to give his subject a dramatic form, presenting his philosophy as a dialogue between a Jewish rabbi and the fictional foreign king of the Khazars whom he calls the Kuzari. The rabbi, known as חבר, the Friend, is Halevi's spokesman in defense of the Jewish faith. *The Kuzari* was, in fact, originally known as *The Book of Argument and Proof in Defense of the Despised Faith*. It acquired the former abbreviated name when it was translated from Arabic to Hebrew by Judah Ibn Tibbon in the 12th century. This translation is universally considered quite reliable by scholars, and it is from this text that I have based by English translations of Halevi's writings.

As both a poet and a philosopher, Halevi had a unique perspective from which to offer his views on music. He discusses music at several points throughout the Kuzari, and each piece will be analyzed in turn. I have only included the sections of each chapter that relate to our discussion of music in the medieval mind.

II:64

אמר החבר- ...אבל חכמת המוסיקה, חשוב באומה שהיא מכבדת הנגודים ומעמדת אותם על הגדולים שבעם, והם בני לוי, מתעסקים בנגונים בבית הנכבד בעתים הנכבדים, ולא הוצרכו להתעסק בצרכי הפרנסה במה שהיו לוקחים מהמעשרות ולא היה להם עסק זולתי המוסיקה. והמלאכה נכבדת אצל בני אדם, כאשר היא בעצמה אינה גרועה ולא פחותה, והעם מחשיבות השורש וזכות הטבע כעשר הם, ומראשיהם במלאכה-דוד ושמואל. ומה תחשוב במוסיקה, ההיו יודעים אותה ים לא?

(The Rabbi said...): But as for musical knowledge, see for yourself how this nation has venerated its melodies and entrusted them to the best of its people, and they are the Levites. They would be in charge of these melodies in the great

Temple at hallowed times. They were already released from economic requests, in that they were sustained by tithes, so they had no occupation except for music. This occupation was respected by all people, as it was in and of itself not a demeaning or lowly occupation, and those people were of venerable roots and their nature merited what was accorded to them, and the leaders of the profession were David and Samuel.[119] What do you think? Did they know music clearly or not?

II:65

אמר הכוזרי- שמה בלי ספק נגרמה ושמה היתה מעוררת הנפשות, כאשר יאמר עליה, שהיא מעתקת את הנפש ממידה אל הפכה, ולא יתכן שתהיה היום בערך ממה שהיתה, מפני ששבה פחותה בהתעסקות בה השפחות והמכוערים מבני אדם, אך ירדה עם חשיבותה כאשר ירדתם אתם עם חשיבותכם.

The Kuzari said: Undoubtedly, it was completely within them and it awakened their spirits, for as they say, it can transfer the spirit from one degree (or level of feeling) to the opposite. It is impossible today to have the same attitude towards it. Why should this be? Because now it is an inferior act, and those who busy themselves with it are servants and lowly workers, and accordingly it has lost honor just as you have lost your honor.

This is the first section of *The Kuzari* that Halevi devotes to music, and in it he refers both to the biblical origins of Jewish music and to the ancient Greek understanding of the subject. He begins by relating the tasks of the Levites in the Temple to the

[119] I Chronicles 9:22, 16:4.

fictional foreign king. As was shown earlier in this thesis, both the Tanakh and the Talmud devote significant time to explaining the important tasks of the Levites, and Halevi condenses these ideas while still clearly indicating the significance of music in ancient Israelite culture. His final statement-"what do you think-did they know music clearly or not?" seems to be rhetorical, as if it should already be apparent to the Kuzari just how important music is to the Jews. However, the character of the Rabbi is speaking only in the past tense. The Jewish nation did once venerate its melodies, and perhaps there is a natural assumption underlying his statement that one day, when the Temple is restored, the descendants of the Levites will return to their hallowed station and the occupation of musician will be respected once again. The Kuzari's response, however, is only a thinly veiled version of Halevi's true feelings about music in his own time. Now, the Kuzari asserts, music is a dishonorable act only undertaken by people of low social status. Implicit in this statement is the idea that not only the musicians but also the music in the Temple was unique, and the magical experience of the Levitical song cannot be produced in his modern world.

Within the Kuzari's response, however, are additional insights into Halevi's understanding of music. He asserts that music "can transfer the spirit from one degree (or level of feeling) to the opposite." While this could tenuously be tied to the magical, mystical powers of music in the Temple cult, this sounds far more like the philosophies of the ancient Greeks, specifically Plato's doctrine of ethos. It was the Greeks who first noted that music had the ability to change people's moods, and this was the idea built upon by later Arabic philosophers and eventually by Saadia Gaon. It is also worth noting that in the earlier part of chapter II:64, Halevi was discussing astronomy and the orbits of

the celestial spheres. While this section does not directly relate to the topic at hand, it is an important segue from other Greek ideas that further validates the fact that Halevi was, indeed, influenced by ancient Greek philosophy. The ancient Greek connection between astronomy and music will be touched upon again in Halevi's book.

However, while Halevi recognizes the inherent, affective power of music on humanity, he does not indicate that any musicians in his time have the ability to use it in such a way. Interestingly, this offers a potential parallel with Saadia's chapter on music in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions.* Saadia certainly went into greater detail about the ways in which music could affect individuals, but he only specified rulers as being the possible beneficiaries of learning the ways to manipulate music's power. Halevi does not go so far as to suggest that any person try to use music in the way that the Levites did, but he clearly believes that only people of a high, holy status are able to use music in the positive way that it was intended. This is particularly striking coming from Halevi, who believed that all Jews are inherently of an elevated status due to their genetic superiority that allows them to have a closer connection to God. Yet in the case of music, even Jews don't constitute a worthy enough group to use music to its greatest abilities; only the Levites were so specialized as to be awarded this right.

Though Halevi's view of music in his own time is highly negative, he clearly shows a great respect for the music of the Levites and the manner in which they used it to connect with God. Throughout *The Kuzari*, he never takes the opportunity to discuss liturgy, a surprising fact for a man who wrote so many *piyyutim.* Still, he had an artistic admiration of music that is apparent in both the Rabbi and the Kuzari's recognition of the power of Temple music.

This appreciation of the aesthetic dimension as an expression of the bond between God and man, in body and soul, is rooted in a recognition of the Divine source of beauty and is perfectly compatible with a recognition of the decisive influence of the senses and with the view that body and soul are inseparable-an individual's spiritual condition is reflected in his or her physical condition, and vice versa.[120]

II:69

אמר הכוזרי- תכליתך בזה ובזלתו שתשוה אותה עם זולתה מהלשונות ובשלמות, ואיה המעלה היתרה בה? אבל- יש יתרון לזולתה עליה בשירים המחוברים הנבנים על הנגונים.

The Kuzari said: Your purpose in this[121] and others like them has been merely to prove that your (language) is as complete as other languages. But what additional advantage does it have? To the contrary, others rise above it in their poems and their rhythmic symmetry in songs.

II:70

אמר החבר- כבר התבאר לי כי הנגונים אינם צריכים אל משקל הדבור, ושבריק והמלא יכולים לנגד 'הודו לה' כי טוב' בנגון 'לעושה נפלאות גדולות'. זה בנגונים בעלי המעשים, אבל בשירים הנקראים אנשאדים אשר בהם הוא נאה החבור, לא הרגישו עליהם, בעבור המעלה שהיא מועילה יותר.

The Rabbi said: Already it is clear to me that in songs, there is no need for balance with words that are spoken together. It is possible to sing "Praise God for He is good" with the same meter as "To He Who makes great wonders"[122] (even though there are a different number of syllables in each line). But this is only in songs in which the meter is evoked (by the speaker, who can change the rhythm

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[120] Yochanan Silman, *Philosopher and Prophet: Judah Halevi, The Kuzari, and the Evolution of His Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 251.

[121] A previous citation regarding the merits of the Hebrew language.

[122] Psalm 136.

as he chooses). But with poems (of public recital, mentioned earlier) in which the prosaic burden is on speaking and balance is attractive to the observer, this is not of concern (to the Jews), for there is a reason more exalted and beneficial.

II:71

אמר הכוזרי- ומה הוא?

The Kuzari said: And what is it?

II:72

אמר החבר- כי המכוון מן הלשון, הכנס מה שיש בנפש המדבר בנפש השומע, וזות הכונה לא תגמר על תומה אלא פנים אל פנים, מפני שלדבריהם הנאמרים מעלה על הדברים שבכתב, וכאשר אמרו- "מפי סופרים ולא מפי ספרום", מפני שנעזרים בדברים שבעל פה בעדימה במקום ההפסקה, ובהתמדה במקום הסמוך, ובחוזק הדבור ורפיונו, וברמיזות ובקריצות מתמיהה ושאלה והגדה ויחול והפחד ותחנה, ותנועות, שמקוצרת מהם המליצה הפשוטה. ואפשר שיעזר המדבר בתנועות עיניו וגבותיו ובכל ראשו ובידיו להבין הכעס והרצון והתחנון והגאוה על השעור שהוא רוצה. ובשארית הזאת אשר נשארה בשוננו הנוצרת הברואה ענינים דקים ועמוקים, נטבעו בה להבין הענינים ולהיותם במקום המעשים ההם שהם פנים בפנים, והם הטעמים אשר יקרא בהם המקרה, מציירין בהם מקום ההפסק והסמוך, ומפריד מקום השאלה מן התשובה, והתחלה מן ההגדה ,והחפזון מן המתון, והצווי מן הבקשה, ויחובר בהם חבורים. ומי שזה כונתו מבלי ספק שהוא דוחה המחובר, כי המחובר לא יתכן לאמרו אלא על דרך אתה, והוא סומך ברוב במקום הנפרד ועומד במקום הסמוך,ולא יתכן להזהר מזה אלא בטורח גדול.

The Rabbi said: The purpose of language is to allow what is in the soul of the speaker to enter into the soul of the listener...One can understand oral communication better, because the speaker will break at stopping point, speak

continuously when sentences need to connect, and use delicate or harsh intonation...

The remnant that we still have of our language which was created (by God) contains certain finely tuned features...these features are the cantillation that we use to read our holy text...

II:73

אמר הכוזרי- באמת נדחתה מעלה שמעית בעבור מעלה ענינית,
כי החבור מהנה הנשמע, והמסורת הזאת-הענינים. אבל אני רואה
אתכם קהל היהודים שאתם טורחים להגיע אל מעלת הסדור
ולחקות זולתכם מהאומות, והכניסו העברית במשקליהם.

The Kuzari said: You are correct! The benefit of acoustics must be sacrificed in order to gain understanding. Metered poetry offers pleasant sounds, but this tradition (cantillation) explains the meaning. Nevertheless, I see that your Jewish community works to compose metered poetry like that of other nations. You are using Hebrew according to their standards.

II:74

אמר החבר- וזה מתעותנו ומרינו. לא די לנו הנחתנו המעלה
הזאת, אלא שאנחנו מפסידים תוכן לשוננו, שהוא מושם
לחברה ונשיבהו למחלוקת.

The Rabbi said: This is because we have strayed and rebelled. We have given up our advantage and are denigrating the essence of our language...

Chapter II: 69-74 is the longest commentary Halevi offers regarding the subject of music in *The Kuzari*, though the word music is not found once within it. Rather, it is primarily based on a discussion of metrics and poetry. This is only logical, for as a

talented and prolific poet, this was certainly Halevi's area of expertise. The section was preceded by a discussion of the Hebrew language, which Halevi believed had a unique, elevated status and was specifically created by God for the Jewish people.[123] Thus, the Kuzari's conclusion that any sort of pleasant musical sound should be sacrificed in order to understand the words better is very fitting with the poet-philosopher's belief in the importance of language.

There is, however, a clear connection with the poems discussed here and music. In the medieval world as today, rhythmic poems were frequently combined with special tunes to which they were could be sung. The Khazar king objects to the notion of the superiority of Hebrew because, he says, many Arabic songs were specifically constructed metrically and arranged for tunes. Halevi's Rabbi points out, however, that tunes can be composed independent of meter or the number of syllables. "Halevi spoke here from rich experience. Musical tunes often had indeed a completely independent existence and...were readily borrowed for use in poems of different metrical structure."[124] That is to say, one cannot judge the music of a people just because the lyrics do or do not fit perfectly with the tune. This is an interesting twist on some of the negative rabbinic comments about music in the Talmud. As we learned previously, many of the Rabbis' concerns regarding music were related to the inappropriate lyrics sung by laborers and in taverns. Their response, however, was to ban secular music altogether, to "throw out the baby with the bathwater." Halevi, on the other hand, seems to recognize that music has the potential of being worthwhile, as it should be viewed independently from the words. The best use of music, of course, is cantillation, combining both great music and

[123] IV:25.
[124] Baron, 203.

Scripture, but music itself does not need to be disregarded when separated from its highest possible usage. It seems that Halevi recognizes that music can be more than just a vehicle to express a *piyyut*, yet the words are more important than its accompaniment.

In stressing the superiority of cantillation, the ancient, partially improvisational style of chanting music, one can see that Halevi was also being quite critical of metrical music. Yet his ideas were not shared by many of his contemporaries, whose attitudes were representative of an amalgam of biblical, Greek, and Arabic ideas. Though little documentation has survived to prove this theory, the works that still exist show that "a number of Spanish-Jewish writers, mostly writing in Arabic, showed considerably more understanding of the musical demands of metrical poetry; they even stressed the value of musical theory and championed its study."[125]

In many ways, Halevi's opinions of how Hebrew poetry should be written were behind the times, as a great transformation in Hebrew meter was taking place in the medieval world. Biblical meter emphasized tonality and focused primarily on the rhythmic, metrical patterns of words rather than syllables. The Arabs, however, had long cultivated a syllabic rhythm, a system that was based on their borrowings from Greco-Roman civilization, and other Jewish poets picked up on these ideas.[126] "The Spanish Hebrew poets themselves were fully aware of the foreign origin of some of their basic technical devices, particularly their rhythmic forms...Halevi rebelled against this indebtedness and wished to curtail the emulation of Arabic patterns." [127]

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[125] Werner, *From Generation to Generation*, 88.
[126] Baron, *A Social and Religious History*, 194.
[127] Ibid. 193-194.

In his later years in Egypt, Halevi wrote a treatise that essentially restates what was written in his earlier philosophic work, and he denounced the Hebrew emulation of Arabic forms of poetry. Yet it appears that despite his protests, Halevi was guilty of incorporating these Arabic methods into his own works! "Halevi himself, at least during his earlier rich poetic creativity, had never followed such negativistic counsels. Much of the beauty of his poems came from the employment of the manifold Arabic meters...."[128]

A bit more can be gained from this passage regarding Halevi's attitude towards music. Previously, in II:65, he explained the manner in which music can work revolutionary changes in a person's nature. The moment of a personal, intimate bond between two people depends both on them seeing each others' faces and hearing each others' voices. Oral communication, whether spoken or sung, was the highest manner in which two people could relate and understand one another. In II:72, he expressed his belief that there was a possibility for perfect communication between two people which would transmit the idea of the speaker into the soul of the hearer. Verbal communication of any kind uses various aids, including pausing or continuing to speak, using different dynamics, raising or lowering the voice. While one certainly could use these vocal techniques when speaking or even reciting poetry, using ideas such as dynamics and pitch change seem far more suited to the task of singing. It is also worth noting that Halevi believed divine speech took the form of voices that reach the prophet's ear.[129] He understood the voice itself as a powerful, magical tool that even God utilized in order to communicate with the prophets.

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[128] Baron, 201.
[129] I:89.

IV:25

אמר החבר- מהם, ספר יצירה' והוא לאברהם אבינו...ומהם ספר
וסיפור וספר. רצונו בספר, השעור והפילוס בגופים הנבראימ...
והמידה והמשורה והמשקל, וערך התנועות וסידור המוסיקה הכל
במנין, רצוני לומר-ספר, כאשר אתה רואה הבונה-לא יצא מתחת
ידו בית עד שקדם ציורו בנפשו. ורצה ב,סיפור, הדיבור והקול,
אבל הוא דיבור אלוהי, קול דברי אלוהים חיים.

The Rabbi said: One of our works is the Book of Creation, by Abraham our Father...One of the teachings is *S'far, Sipur* and *Sefer*.[130]

S'far discusses the measuring and weighing of objects...The properties of motion, musical arrangements, and so forth, must be done with an inventory, *s'far*. This is similar to what a builder would do. He would not build a house before first envisioning it in his mind.

Sipur discusses speech and voice, meaning Divine speech and the voice of the living God.

In this final passage regarding music in *The Kuzari*, Halevi discusses music in relation with the natural sciences. The harmonies found in music are in perfect number, similarly to measures, weights, and the very order of the universe. One can see in this the Pythagorean aspects of music, both ethic and mathematical. Halevi is, in a manner, discussing the Pythagorean idea that the planets all moved in mystically perfect paths of exact mathematical proportions. In the late 16th century, Johannes Kepler would describe Pythagoras' laws of planetary motion in a musical sense as the "harmony of the

[130] Translated respectively as: mental inventory, verbal instruction, and physical inscription.

spheres."[131] Halevi does not use this terminology, as it was written centuries after his death, yet one gets a sense that he was already aware of the way in which the properties of music connected to the very ideas on which the planets were ordered.

In this chapter, one begins to see the deeply mystical aspect to Halevi's writing. He discusses the mystical Book of Creation, which says that God created the universe with these three words based on the root ס.פ.ר. These are said to connect with the ten sefirot described in many kabbalistic texts.[132] While in the previous examples, Halevi did not resort to mystical explanations, mysticism was an inherent part of his understanding of the world. Living in 12th century Spain, he was surrounded by the new language of religious experience that had taken hold of medieval Islam. Sufi mysticism was reshaping the predominantly Muslim world in which Halevi lived, and to weave together these worlds "required a scholar equally conversant in philosophy, law, poetry, theology, and mysticism, one whose talents and sensibility enabled him to perceive common threads and forge innovative connections."[133]

Summary

As the one bonafide artist in this group of philosophers, it is intriguing that Halevi speaks so minimally on the subject of music in *The Kuzari*. His first comments, in which he discusses the Levites and their role in the musical practices in the Temple, speaks the most explicitly on the subject of music, and it is in this passage that one can find the

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[131] Sagan, 63.

[132] N. Daniel Korobkin, translator and annotator, *The Kuzari: In Defense of the Despised Faith* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998), 235.

[133] Diana Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi's Kuzari* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 1.

greatest parallels between his writings and those of the other philosophers discussed in this thesis. He concludes in this passage that music is, in fact, a powerful spiritual tool that can be used to alter one's spirit, but that this technique can no longer be used now that the Temple has been destroyed and the Levites cannot serve as the musicians. In this way, he is agreeing fully with the Rabbis. While Halevi is rarely focused upon as a great Talmudic scholar, he was a student of the Rif and clearly was influenced by his respect for and understanding of the text. Furthermore, one must remember that Halevi was reacting with opposition towards Kalam; unlike Saadia, he was not out to find rationality in sacred texts or prove his philosophy scientifically. In fact, Halevi's understanding of the Jewish people as the fifth element can hardly be considered scientific by any standards; fascinating, yes, but one would have great difficulties genetically proving what served as the basis for Halevi's ideas about the Jewish race. Thus, the problems that Halevi faced in making a *shidduch* with the outside world were not the same as Saadia's; in this instance, Halevi would have been fine relying on the authority of the Rabbis alone.

However, Halevi has his own struggle in making a *shidduch*. This can be seen in the following passages regarding the merits of the Hebrew language and the inferiority of Arabic meter in both poetry and song. Halevi speaks so strongly on this subject and on the superiority of Jewish techniques, yet he himself used Arabic meter profusely in his own poetry! In fact, it is this meter that made so many of Halevi's poems as spectacular as they are. What, then, does this say about Halevi regarding his interactions with the neighboring culture? It seems that at least in terms of music and poetry, Halevi was saying one thing and doing its opposite. Theoretically, he stressed the superiority of

Jewish rhythmic techniques, yet in his own practice he utilized the wisdom of his neighbors to create his art.

In the last chapter of the Kuzari translated above, Halevi made brief references to music and its role in mysticism. Sadly, Halevi's mysticism does not seem to have influenced him to examine music from a mystical perspective. It would take other medieval philosophers and kabbalists such as Abraham Abulafia to make that a reality.

Chapter 8-Music and Mysticism

The links between medieval Jewish mysticism and music are vast, and to attempt to explain them here far exceeds the scope of this thesis. However, to discuss these three medieval philosophers and not mention the possible influence of mysticism on their thought would also be to do a disservice to the subject at hand. Therefore, I will offer just a brief discourse into the role of music in medieval Kabbalah, specifically Abraham Abulafia's ecstatic, or prophetic, Kabbalah.

In 13th century Kabbalah, many of the discussions of music related to attempts to establish a link between kabbalistic practices and the rituals of the Temple. It was believed that the Temple musicians had such skill that the *Shechinah* dwelt in them and they were able to use music to draw human hearts and souls up to the spiritual world. Their music would awaken the power of the High Priest to fully direct his concentration on the emanations and exert influence by means of the holy *Seraphim.*[134] This approach to music was an active attempt to have an impact on the divine realm.

The Kabbalist scholar Moshe Idel refers to this as theurgy, one of three religious models used by kabbalists to interact and influence mystical realms. The other two models are magic, defined as attempts to manipulate nature, and the mystical model, which attempted to shape the inner state of consciousness.[135] All three of these methods could be achieved musically, and though they differ greatly, each of these models can be understood using a single musical metaphor of two violins. As a string on one of the violins is plucked, the parallel string on the other violin will naturally resonate. This

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[134] R. Solomon ben Samuel, *Pitechi 'Olam*, 68.

[135] Moshe Idel, "Conceptualizations of Music in Jewish Mysticism," *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World's Religions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 159.

principle of acoustical resonance shows the manner in which music as a human ritualistic action can impact on the divine realm, on nature, and within each person.

The transitive power of music was understood by many kabbalists, including Abraham Abulafia. Abulafia was born in Saragosa in 1240 and died some time after 1290 in Comino, spending most of his adult life as a wanderer. He was a devoted student of the writings of Moses Maimonides, and he understood *The Guide of the Perplexed* as a mystical text. He believed that the prophetic gift was the highest goal one could attain, which seems to indicate the influence of Yehuda Halevi's description of prophecy in *The Kuzari*, but his idea of the nature of prophecy itself is closer to that of Maimonides.

Abulafia is often associated with gematria, the symbolic employment of Hebrew letters as numerals. He believed that all language was a means with which one could engage God, and thus music, as both its own form of wordless language and a vehicle for carrying words to God, played a key role in his mysticism. Unlike other kabbalists, however, Abulafia was not interested in music's connection to the Temple rite. He was neither a Kohen nor a Levi, and perhaps for this reason he did not relate his musical model of mysticism to the High Priest or the Temple musicians. Unconcerned with 'templar' music, he was interested in the active use of music in relation to the ancient prophets and to the paradisiacal experience.

The most commonly referenced biblical passage regarding the use of music to obtain prophetic revelation is found in the story of Elisha: "And when the minstrel played, the spirit of the Lord came upon him" (II Kings 3:15). Abulafia used this passage to describe his understanding of prophecy in one of his more than fifty works, *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz:*

> The proof that song indicates the degree of prophecy is that it is the way of song to make the heart happy by means of tunes, as it is said, "And when the minstrel played, the spirit of the Lord cam upon him" [2 Kings 3:15], for prophecy does not dwell in him [unless there is] joy. This was already hinted at in two words appearing at the end of Ecclesiastes where he says, "The end of the matter, all being heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" [Eccles. 12:13]. Join *yare'* with *shamar*, and you find *shir 'amar*. There is a hint [of this] in "and they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them" [Num. 6:27].[136]

This passage from *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, while appealing, does not strike me as entirely convincing. The line from II Kings is quite powerful as is, but I'm not sure that the "hint" from Ecclesiastes does much to further Abulafia's point that song indicates the degree of prophecy because it makes the musician-prophet happy. Yet Abulafia's prophetic, ecstatic mysticism was individualistic, a search for perfection not entirely based on halacha or Torah, so perhaps to use seemingly disparate texts to prove his personal agenda fit perfectly with his goals. He, like all those who wished to undertake his method of language mysticism, was free to create new meanings in whichever way he saw fit.

The technique of gematria that Abulafia uses in this passage is common throughout his kabbalistic works, though the gematria has an additional layer of meaning when applied to music. Abulafia believed that his prophetic kabbalah, the kabbalah of the Divine Names, was superior to sefirotic kabbalah. However, despite his opinion of sefirotic kabbalah, he was probably aware of the concept of the "celestial alphabet"[137] in which mystically, the seven note musical scale or cycle was commonly connected to the seven (lower) sefirot. Each note of the solfege (that is, the syllables associated with each

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[136] Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer 'Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford 1580, fol. 62a.
[137] Farmer, *Sa'adyah*, 7.

note of the scale, i.e. do, re, mi, etc.) connects to a Hebrew letter, and as the notes continue on to a higher octave, the alphabet continues accordingly.

Analyzing Abulafia's use of gematria with a musical frame of mind, his techniques appear to be less of a simple word game and incur a deeper meaning. Just as a note on the scale is simultaneously the same yet different as the parallel note an octave apart, a letter in the Hebrew alphabet can be both completely unique yet replaceable in the understanding of a word. This method of *temurah* is backed Talmudically in Shabbat 104a, where it states that the letters א, ח, and ה are interchangeable, being the first notes of the scale.

To provide each sefirah with a musical note is a valuable tool for understanding ecstatic kabbalah. The notes of a scale in solfege are always theoretically present and active, even when not 'in use'. This understanding can help one visualize the stable yet mutable nature of the mystic tree. What's more, just as a scale is a never-ending cycle with no beginning or end yet retaining a clear order, the sefirot take a similar shape, each sefirah playing an individual role in existence yet inseparable from the other sefirot.

To return to Abulafia's writings, the mystic most strongly connected music to the prophetic, ecstatic experience. He relates this understanding in a parable in which he compares the body, where the divine spirit dwells, to a musical instrument:

> It is known that sound is heard more loudly in a place which is hollow or pierced, due to the purity of the spiritual air which enters therein, as in the case of the kinnor and similar musical instruments, which produce sounds without any speech, and so also the concavities of the upper stories, caves, mountains, bathhouses, ruins, etc., whose interior is hollow...By means of this secret you will understand the meaning of "Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice" [Ex. 19:19], i.e., in a voice similar to that of Moses. You must know that the body of man is full of holes and cavities, from which you may understand how the

> *Shechinah* dwells in the body which is pierced and [contains] cavities and which produces speech.[138]

The *Shechinah* can no longer dwell in the Temple, and therefore must dwell in the human body. The body, passive, receives the action of the musician when the divine effluence reverberates within it. This understanding of the human body as an instrument was apparently common in mystical literature, though as Moshe Idel comments, "Abulafia was more drawn to this image than any other mystic with whom I am acquainted."[139] What I find most striking about this image is the implications of humans as an instrument. Who is the musician that plays the human instrument? Is it the Shechinah, dwelling within? Or is the human both the instrument and the instrumentalist?

This argument seems to touch on the Talmudic sugya in Succah 50b, analyzed previously in the text, that deals with the issue of the nature of music in the Temple. In Succah 50b, the question arises as to whether the Temple song was vocal or instrumental. An in-depth analysis seems to reveal that the Temple song was, in fact, vocal, though this conclusion raises a number of problems. Human song requires fallible language and fragile bodies-could such a voice truly connect with the Divine? Yet Abulafia's passage gives meaning to this rather unclear Talmudic argument. A human instrument loses its frailty when played by divine forces. If the *Shechinah* dwells within each instrument, then it is She who truly sings words of praise to God, reverberating within God's own creation. What is more, for Abulafia, language is infallible-the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet are the divine name, so to sing them is to sing out the name of God. In this understanding, perhaps to fear and to know God really is to shir *amar*! Ecstatic music

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[138] Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Mafteah ha-Re'ayon*, MS Oxford Heb. E 123, fol. 64b.

[139] Idel, 177.

need not be performed within the Temple walls, and it now is accompanied by a paradisiacal vision of mystical experience. Music can create a spiritual, personal experience of heaven in this world, one that for Abulafia might even be preferable to an experience within the ancient Temple. Abulafia believed that prophecy is indeed attainable, and by utilizing music to bring about the prophetic state, the goal of the mystical experience could be realized.

While Abraham Abulafia was not dealing with the same struggle to create a *shidduch* as the medieval philosophers discussed in this thesis, he too was highly influenced by the Muslim environments in which he lived and traveled. Rather than try to straddle two worlds, Abulafia easily incorporated the ideas of Jewish thinkers, particularly Halevi and Maimonides, with both ancient Jewish mystical texts and the teachings of Sufi mysticism. Abulafia, it should be noted, was a unique and perhaps mentally unstable person; he believed himself to be both a prophet and the Messiah, going so far as to travel to Rome in 1280 to effect the conversion of Pope Nicholas III on the day before Rosh Hashanah of 5041 on the Jewish calendar. Yet even this *meshugass* gives insight into his understanding of music as compared to the ideas of the medieval philosophers. Saadia, Halevi, and as we will shortly see, Maimonides, all believed that the music in the Temple was perfect. Until the Temple is rebuilt, one cannot and should not attempt to create music, and tradition tells us that that time will come when the Messiah arrives. Yet Abulafia believed himself to be the Messiah! Therefore, Abulafia's positive, mystical understanding of music does not have to be understood as a divergence from rabbinic teachings; if indeed he were the Messiah, it would be perfectly acceptable to start discussing the ways in which music could once again be used as in days of old.

Chapter 9-Moses Maimonides

Biography

Moses Maimonides was born in Cordoba, Spain in 1135. At the fall of Cordoba to the Almohads in 1148, he and his family fled and wandered for years through Spain and possibly Provence, settling in Fez in 1160.[140] Five years later the family escaped Fez, traveling to Eretz Yisrael and finally settling in Egypt. Maimonides devoted himself to scholarship until his brother David died in 1169, at which point he was forced to make the medical profession the source of his livelihood.[141] In 1185 he was appointed as one of the physicians to the vizier under Saladin, al-Fadil, the virtual ruler of Egypt after Saladin left the country in 1174. He was only one of al-Fadil's many Jewish court physicians, but his role was of great importance and we still have many of the fascinating medical treatises he wrote during this time. When Saladin died in 1193, his son al-Afdal Nur ad-Din Ali appointed Maimonides as the chief court physician. During these years Maimonides wrote his two most monumental works, the *Mishneh Torah* in 1180 and *The Guide of the Perplexed* in 1190. Maimonides died in Cairo on December 13, 1204. He was one of the greatest halachists of tradition, the supreme Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, and perhaps the most illustrious figure in Judaism in the post-talmudic era.

Maimonides was a "Renaissance man" before the term had even been invented. While keeping his day job as a doctor, he was an incredibly prolific writer, and his interests covered an expansive range of subjects. In this chapter, we will analyze a number of segments from different Maimonidean texts dealing with music, including philosophy, law, and medical treatises. While examining these texts, it is important to be

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[140] Husik, 238.
[141] Katz, 81.

aware of the manner in which Maimonides' perspective on music changes profoundly dependent on from which professional capacity he was writing.

Maimonides was deeply influenced by both Greek and Arabic philosophers, though he did not always follow them in their analysis of the importance of music. "Through the Arabic translations of Aristotle he knew both the view and concepts of the post-Platonic, Aristotelian, and later peripatetic schools concerning music."[142] Aristotle, whose philosophy Maimonides revered, regarded music highly as an educational instrument, and he found music useful in that it was both ethically good and useful and also beautiful. Maimonides, however, shunned much of Aristotle's discussion of music based on these premises.

For the most part, Maimonides adhered to a Platonic viewpoint, using an ethical rather than an aesthetic evaluation of music. This led him to believe that rhythmic music in particular should be forbidden, perhaps because of the potential sexuality inherent in such music, though he also rejected *piyyutim* and their inclusion in the liturgy.[143] It is also interesting to note that despite being such a prolific writer who commented on nearly every aspect of Jewish tradition, including the prayer service, Maimonides never took the opportunity to offer his perspective on the tradition of cantillation. Leonard Kravitz and Eric Werner, fascinated by this omission, wrote in *The Silence of Maimonides*,

> If this massive traditional background (regarding cantillation) is taken into consideration, it is hard to understand how so universal and contemplative a spirit as Maimonides could simply ignore the entire work of the Masoretes, its effects upon the public reading of Scripture, and remain silent on so characteristic a feature of Jewish worship-to which he himself devoted an entire book; to completely disregard the cantillation of Torah and Prophets. His silence is strange, to say the least; but it becomes eloquent, when one remembers his

[142] Kravitz, 190.
[143] Isaacs, 69.

rationalist approach in general and his moralistic evaluation of music in particular."[144]

Though Maimonides found many aspects of music and its role in society to be troubling, he was not entirely opposed to music. He was influenced by his art-loving Greek mentors as well as by Arab scholars who dealt with music and its practical, theoretical, and moral sense. Also, he did not disregard the therapeutic value of music. As will be seen in his medical treatises for the Arab sultan, he frequently advised people to use musical instruments to make the hearts of melancholic people swell and to distract their minds from upsetting thoughts.

The Guide of the Perplexed

Maimonides completed *The Guide of the Perplexed* in 1190. It is perhaps the most important Jewish philosophic work ever written, and though it is one of his later works, it offers an essential starting point for examining Maimonides' corpus of writings on music. The following excerpts from *The Guide of the Perplexed* are critical either in terms of understanding Maimonides' unique viewpoint of the world or because they specifically deal with the subject of music. I have not included the entirety of any chapter, only incorporating sections that I believe relate to the subject at hand.

I: 54

...ויבאו מאתו אלו הפעלות כשיור וכפי הדין, לא לרדיפת ההפעלות
לבד...כי כל הפעלות רע, אבל ישמר מהם כפי כח האדם...אבל
הוא פעל שיגזר אותו הדעת האנושי, שיוסר כל מי שיטא מדרך
האמת וירחקו המונעים כלם אשר ימנעו מן השלמות, אשר הוא

[144] Kravitz, 189.

השגתו יתי.

> Acts must be performed by him (a ruler) moderately and in accordance with justice, not merely as an outlet of his passion; for all passions are bad, and they must be guarded against as far as it lies in man's power.... It is an act demanded by the tendency of man to remove everything that might turn him away from the right path, and to clear away all obstacles in the road to perfection, that is, to the knowledge of God.

While this passage does not explicitly relate to music, it offers key insights into the lens through which Maimonides views the world. He makes clear that anything relating to the passions is highly negative. Maimonides is a rationalist above all, and as such, he believes that anything that gets in the way of logical, reason-based thinking and causes one to go astray is to be avoided at all costs. Music, as an art form, is unnecessary, and worse, as we learned from the Rabbis, it often leads one to licentiousness and lewd behavior. This theme is prevalent in nearly all of Maimonides writings on music that will be examined in this thesis.

It is interesting to note that just as Saadia provided leadership to advice to rulers at the end of *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, Maimonides does the same here. Their advice, however, is profoundly different. While Saadia suggested that rulers use music to control their passions in order to lead better, Maimonides wants rulers to avoid their passions altogether. This is quite in line with Maimonides' rationalist worldview, but one cannot help but wonder how practical such advice might be. Maimonides may have been able to follow his own advice (he was the first to admit that as a philosopher, he was of a higher nature than the majority of *behemoth* that made up the remainder of the population

and thus able to control his passions quite well), but he was probably aware that to live entirely unswayed by one's passions is nearly impossible for most individuals.

Such thinking can be seen throughout Maimonides' work; he often prescribes various behavioral and intellectual manners that, while they theoretically might lead to perfection, simply cannot be followed practically. Perhaps, in a passage such as this, it might have been more useful for Maimonides to follow Saadia's lead and at least offer a doable way for people to attempt to control their passions.

III: 45

אך הכונה בו אמיר השיר לבד, הוא נפסל בקול-כי המכון גם כן בשיר-
להפעל הנפש בדברים ההם, ולא יפעלו הנשות רק לקולות ולנגונים
הערבים, ועם כלי השיר גם כן, כמו שהיה הענין במקדש תמיד.

The duty of the Levites was performing vocal music, thus when a Levite lost his voice, he became disabled for service. The purpose of singing is to produce certain emotions. This purpose can only be attained with pleasing sounds and melodies accompanied by music, as was always the case in the Temple.

This is the first of two passages in *The Guide of the Perplexed* where Maimonides discusses the musical nature of worship in the Temple. He begins by defining the role of the Levites as it is detailed in both the Tanakh and the Talmud. His explanation of the purpose of their role, however, "to produce certain emotions", is not based on Scripture. The notion that the goal of music is to achieve emotional changes in the listener was posited first by the ancient Greek philosophers and later built upon by Saadia Gaon. Maimonides does not attribute this idea to any other thinker, nor does he go into detail as

to which emotions can be produced and in what manner. He does specify that the music is melodic, which certainly corresponds with the Talmudic argument over the vocal or instrumental nature of the Temple song, though it differs from Saadia's description of the rhythmic modes in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions.* He also states that the music had a pleasing sound, and while he does not elaborate on how one would make such a sound or what desired emotion would be produced, it is probable that Maimonides believed that in the Temple service, pleasant music would lead to a positive worship experience. As will shortly be shown, Maimonides did not necessarily feel that the same was true in terms of modern Jewish worship.

I: 59

שאנחנו כל דבר שנאמר אותא, שנכון בו הגדלה ושבח-נמצא בו מעמס
אחד בחקו ית', ונשקיף בו קצת חסרון; אם כן, השתיקה יותר ראויה
וההסתפקות בהשגת השכלים...ולא כמו שעשו הפתאים באמת, אשר
המריצה בשבחים והאריכו והרבו דברים בתפילות חברום ומליצות
קבצום,להתקרב בהם לאלוה...וירבה התר זה אצל המשוררים
והמליצים ואצל מי שיחשב שהוא עושה שיר, עד שחברו דברים,
קצתם-כפירה גמורה, וקצתם- יש בהם מן השטות והפסד הדמיון,
מה שראוי לאדם שישחק עליו לפי טבעו כשמעו, ויבכהו עם
ההתבוננות, איך נאמרו הדברים ההם בחק האלוה ית'.

Whatever we utter with the intention of extolling and praising Him contains things that cannot be applied to God, and contain derogatory statements. Therefore, it is better to be silent, and to be content with intellectual reflection…

We cannot approve of what foolish people do who use extravagant and flowery praise in the prayers and the hymns they compose in their desire to reach the

Creator...This license is often found in the compositions of singers, preachers, and those who imagine themselves able to be poets. Such writers compose things that are in part heretical, in part folly and absurdity that naturally makes others laugh but also makes them grieve at the thought that this things are uttered in reference to God.

III: 46

כי הטוב שבדברים לכח התאוה, אשר מבועה הכבד, הוא הבשר;
והטוב שבדברים לכח החיוני, אשר מבועה הלב, הוא היין; וכן הכח
אשר מבועו המח,והוא הנפשי- יערב לו הנגון בכלים; ומפני זה
התקרב כל כח אל האלוה בנאהב שבדברים לו, והיה הקרבן-
הבשר והיין ושמע קול- רצוני לומר השיר.

(Regarding the sacrifices)...Meat is the best nourishment for the appetites whose source is the liver, wine is the best for the vital faculties whose source is in the liver, music is most agreeable to the psyche whose source is in the brain. Each person's faculties approach God with what it likes best, thus the sacrifice consists of meat, wine, and music.

While the two proceeding sections are from different chapters in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, they offer a notable contrast in Maimonides' approach to music and prayer. In the first passage, Maimonides focus is less on music than on the words used in hymns and other liturgical innovations. He was opposed to the insertion of *piyyutim* in the service, and this is clearly reflected here. Maimonides takes this idea to an extreme, suggesting that it is better not to pray at all, to be satisfied with "intellectual reflection"

rather than praise God in a manner that is less than perfect. This is a classic statement of Maimonidean theology. He did not see God as a physical Being to be praised, but rather understood God as the Active Intellect, an Idea that could be gained only through intensive study and knowledge of the sciences.

In the following passage, however, Maimonides seems to be offering a very different theology and manner of approaching God. He is discussing the Temple service, so perhaps he was speaking theoretically about a system that no longer existed, but Maimonides, like other medieval Jews, probably still believed in the idea of redemption and the dream that one day the Temple would be rebuilt. Thus, if one reads the latter section as a statement about both the technique of prayer in the past and the hope of renewed Temple prayer in the days to come, it seems to oppose what he said in the former paragraph. In III:46, he says that each person approaches God with the offering that most resonates with them, music being an option. Implicit in this idea as well is the understanding that God appreciates such a musical offering as a form of sacrificial worship. This God is not the Active Intellect, nor is the person chastised for attempting to praise God in an unsuitable manner!

It is also worth noting that Maimonides, like both the Rabbis in the Talmud and Yehuda Halevi, is supremely concerned with the inappropriate use of language that often accompanies music. Perhaps, like Halevi, Maimonides is attempting to say that it is faulty language that has brought music to a low point in the medieval Jewish world, not the music itself.

III: 8

וכבר ידעת גדל האסור שבא אצלנו בנבלות הפה, וזה גם כן מחיב.

שזה הדבור בלשון הוא מטגלות בני אדם וטובה, גמלה האלוה לאד,
להבדילו בה משאר בעלי החיים, -כמו שאמר "מי שם פה לאדם?"
ואמר הנביא "אדני יי נתן לי לשון למודים"- ואין צריך שנשתמש
בטובה ההיא. אשר נתנה לנו לשלמות-ללמד וללמד-, בגדול
שבחסרונות ובחרפה השלמה, עד שנאמר מה שיאמרוהו הגוים
הסכלים, הזונים, בשיריהם ודבריהם הנאותים בהם,- לא במי
שנאמר להם "ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדש." וכל מי
שישתמש במחשבתו או בדברו בדבר מעניני החוש ההוא אשר הוא
חרפה לנו, עד שיחש במשתה או במשגל ביותר מן הצריך לו או
יאמר בו שירים- כבר לקח הטובה אשר גמלו אלוה אותה והשתמש
בה ונעזר בה במרי הגומל אותו ועבר על מצוותו...

You know the severe prohibition against obscene language, and rightly so, for speech is one of the properties of mankind and a benefit that is granted to him and by which he is distinguished from all living creatures. As it says, "Who has made man's mouth?"[145] And the prophet says, "The Lord God has given my the tongue of them that are taught."[146] Now this benefit which God gave us in order to allow us to perfect ourselves, to learn and to teach, should not be used to do things which are degrading and utter disgraceful. We should not imitate what the ignorant and sinful Gentiles say in their songs and their stories, which is suitable for them but not for those to whom it has been said, "And you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy people."[147] He who applies his thought or his speech concerning that sense which is a disgrace to us, who thinks more about drink or copulation than is needful or recited songs about these matters, he has

[145] Exodus 4:1.
[146] Isaiah 50:4.
[147] Exodus 19:6.

made rebellious use of the benefit God granted to him, applying and utilizing it to commit an act of disobedience with regard to Him who has granted the benefit and to transgress His orders.

Similarly to the preceding passages, Maimonides is once again talking about inappropriate language, though in this situation he is not referring to liturgy. In general, one should be careful with one's words, but especially so as to ensure that the Jews don't imitate the Gentiles. As holy people, Jews are held up to a higher standard, and this manifests itself not only in the way we speak but also in our actions. Specifically, Jews should not act or think excessively about sex, alcohol, or sing songs about these sinful acts.

Maimonides definition of this "unholy trinity" is plainly echoing the concerns of the Rabbis-where there is music, there is sex and alcohol, and that leads to illicit behavior. Though the context here is regarding the subject of obscene language, it is the dangerous result of such language, whether it be sung or spoken, about which Maimonides is primarily concerned. Again, he is echoing the Talmudic concerns about the use of language.

II: 8

מן הדעות הקדומים המתפשטים אצל הפילוסופים ורב האנשים,
שלתנועת הגלגלים קולות נוראים עצומים מאד, והיתה ראיתם על זה-
אמרם שהגרמים הקטנים אשר אתנו, כשיתנועעותנועה ממהרת,
ישמע להם קעקוע עצום וצליל מרעיד; כל שכן גרמי השמש והירח
והכוכבים לפי מה שהם מן הגדל והמהירות. וסיעת פיתגורס כלה

תאמין, שיש להם קולות ערבים, נערכים עם גדלם כערך נגוני המוסיקה; ויש להם מתת עלות להיותנו בלתי שומעים הקולות ההם הנוראים העצומים. וזה הדעת מפרסם באמתנו גם כן. הלא תראה ה'חכמים' יתארו גדל קול השמש בעת מרוצתה בכל יום בגלגל; וכן ראוי לכלם. אמנם אריס"טו ימאן זה ויבאר שאין קול להם, ואתה תמצא זה בספר השמים והעולם ומשם תבין זה. ולא תרחיק היות דעת אריס"טו חולק על דעת החכמים בזה, כי זה הדעת ר"ל היות להם קולות אמנם הוא נמשך אחר האמנת גלגל קבוע זמזלות חוזרים, וכבר ידעת הכרעתם דעת אומות העולם על דעתם בעניני התכונה האלו, והוא אמרם בפירוש ונצחו חכמי ישראל, וזה אמת כי הענינים העיוניים אמנם דבר בהם כל מי שדיבר בפי שהביא אליו העיון, ולזה יאמן מה שהתאמת מופתו.

It is one of the ancient beliefs that are widespread among the philosophers and other people that the motion of the spheres produces very fearful and mighty sounds. They observed that when small objects move with a rapid motion, a great noise and a disturbing boom are produced. It follows that this should be all the more the case with respect to the bodies of the sun, the moon, and the stars, considering their size and velocity. The Pythagoreans believe that these bodies emit pleasant sounds that, though loud, have the same proportions to each other as the musical notes. They also explained why we do not hear these fearful and mighty sounds. This opinion is also widespread in our religious community. Thus our Sages describe the might of the sound produced by the sun in its daily circle in orbit.[148] The same description could be affirmed of all the heavenly bodies. But Aristotle rejects this, saying that they do not emit sounds. His opinion is found in the book *The Heavens and the World.* You should not find it

[148] B.T. Yoma, 20b; Genesis Rabbah VI.

disconcerting that here Aristotle differs with the beliefs of our Sages. The theory of the music of the spheres is connected with the theory of the stars moving in a fixed sphere. In this question of astronomy, our Sages have disregarded their own theory in favor of the theory of others. As it is stated, "The wise men of other nations have defeated the wise men of Israel." It is correct that our Sages disregarded their own theory, for speculative matters should be understood according to one's own study of them, and everyone should accept would appears to be established and proven.

In the last of Maimonides' passages regarding music from *The Guide of the Perplexed* that we will examine, the philosopher discusses the ancient Greek idea that came to be known as the harmony of the spheres. Though Maimonides shunned many of Aristotle's ideas, in this instance, he sides with Aristotle in order to reject the doctrine of the harmony of the spheres and the ancient Greek understanding of the correspondence between earthly music and celestial melodies. Maimonides opposed these ideas vehemently, even though many in the Jewish world disagreed with him. "It (the doctrine of the harmony of the spheres) offered too attractive a rationale for the old Jewish concept of the heavenly hosts singing the Lord's praises in unison with Israel to be discarded on mere philosophic grounds."[149]

It is also important to note that at times, Maimonides is comfortable saying that the Sages were incorrect. In this instance, he only does so after saying that the Sages disregarded their own mistaken theories about the planets emitting music, but to admit

[149] Baron, *A Social History,* 210.

that the "wise men of other nations" have shown themselves to be superior to Israel is a bold statement. If Maimonides is comfortable rejecting the writings of Jewish tradition in this instance regarding music, one could say that it sets up a precedent for him to disregard them in other instances as well.

The Mishneh Torah

The *Mishneh Torah*, or "Repetition of the Law," is an enormous work that took Maimonides ten years to complete. In it, Maimonides classified by subject matter the entire Talmudic and post-Talmudic halachic literature of the Jews in a systematic manner. [150] For this reason, the *Mishneh Torah* created tremendous agitation in the wider Jewish community. By creating such a complete, orderly code of Jewish law, many people believed that rabbis and the study of the Talmud would no longer be necessary-anyone could find the answers they were looking for in a clear, organized text written in simple Mishnaic Hebrew. The *Mishneh Torah* is divided into 14 books, each representing a category of the Jewish legal system. The number 14 equals the word *yad* in Hebrew, so this book is frequently called *Yad Ha-Hazakah*, the "Strong Hand." It is a primarily halachic work, though one can learn a great deal of Maimonides philosophical and scientific ideas from the *Mishneh Torah* as well.

Maimonides knew that music had a positive, even ennobling effect on some people, but since the law was intended for the majority of people, music was banned as a wanton and manipulative thing. The purpose of the law against music was to help Israel become a holy nation, forbidding acts that don't lead to moral excellence. However, "the

[150] Katz, 86.

law prohibiting music was never fully observed, because it ran counter to human nature."[151] Some of these prohibitions can be seen in the *Mishneh Torah*, though it covers such a vast corpus of Jewish law that even those regarding music are too numerous to be described here. For instance, Maimonides describes the musical function and role of the Levites in the Temple as well as the chambers in which the instruments were kept. He also offers a vivid description of the rejoicing in the Temple during the festival of Tabernacles. In his tractate regarding the laws of Shabbat, he carefully lists the many ways in which one should not make music on Shabbat, including tapping one's finger on the ground, on a board, or against another finger, slapping things or clapping hands, rattling nuts or even ringing a bell to keep a baby quiet, for if it were to break one might be led to repair the musical instrument.[152]

I have limited my selection to just two relevant musical topics discussed in the *Mishneh Torah*: the participation of the ancient Israelites in holiday celebrations, and the rabbinic ban on music.

Hilchot Shofar Succah Villa 8:13

והיאך היתה שמחה זו? החליל מכה, ומנגנין בכינור ובנבלים
ובמצלתים, וכל אחד ואחד בכלי-שיר שהוא יודע לנגן בו. ומי
שיודע בפה-בפה. ורוקדים ומספקין ומטפחין ומפזזין ומכרכרין,
כל אחד ואחד כמו שיודע, ואומרים דברי שירות ותשובות...

What was the nature of this celebration [of Succot]? The flute would be sounded and songs played on the harp, lute, and cymbals. Each person would play on the

[151] Boaz Cohen, "The Responsum of Maimonides Concerning Music" *Jewish Music Journal* (New York: Posy Shoulson Press, 1935), Vol. 2, No. 2, 181.
[152] Mishneh Torah Shabbat 23:4-5.

instrument he knew how to play. Those who knew how to sing would sing. They would dance and clap their hands, letting loose and whistling, each individual as he knew how to do it. Words of song and praise were recited. This celebration does not supersede either Shabbat or the festival.

Hilchot Shofar Succah V'Lulav 8:14

מצוה להרבות בשמחה זו. ולו היו עושין אותה עמי-הארץ וכל מי
שירצה; אלא גדולי חכמי ישראל וראשי הישיבות והסנהדרין
והחסידים והזקנים ואנשי מעשה--הם שהיו מרקדין ומספקין
ומנגנין ומשמחין במקדש בימי חג הסכות. עבל כל העם,
האנשים והנשים, כלן באין לראות ולשמע.

It is a mitzvah to maximize this celebration. It was not performed by the common people or anyone who desired, but rather only the greatest of Israel's wise men: the heads of the Yeshivot, the members of the Sanhedrin, the pious, the elders, and the men of stature. They were those who would dance, clap their hands, sing, and rejoice in the Temple on the days of the festival of Succot. However, the entire people, men and women, would come to see and hear.

In these two passages, Maimonides describes the celebration of Succot during the Second Temple period. Not only was the festival clearly a merry, music-filled experience, but also the manner in which Maimonides writes about it is itself profoundly joyful. These passages offer a fantastic description of music in the Temple cult, and one can see in Maimonides' words that he clearly approves of this celebration and the music it involved. For a rationalist like Maimonides who has so plainly stated that one should

not be swayed by emotions, this is a vivid, nostalgic vision of a time in which Jews were allowed, if not mandated, to have such vibrant, expressive festival experiences.

It is also interesting to note that the musical activities of Succot were not performed by the common people but by the highest leaders in the Israelite community. Yehuda Halevi also commented on the idea that in Temple times, only the highest level of people could participate in the sacred music. Maimonides claims that the entire people were able to witness the music, but in both cases, it is clear that music, even under the watchful eyes of the Sanhedrin, was too powerful and important to be truly experienced by everyday people.

Hilchot Ta'aniot 5:12, 14

משחרב בית המקדש, תקנו חכמים שהיו בותו הדור...שלו ינגן בכלי שיר. וכל מיני זמר וכל משמיע קול של שיר אשור לשמח בהן ואשור לשמען, מפני החרבן. ואפילו שירה פה על היין אסורה, שנאמר "בשיר לא ישתו יין. וכר נהגו כל ישראל לומר דברי תשבחות או שיר של הודאות לאל וכיוצא בהן על היין.

After the Temple was destroyed, the Sages of that generation decreed...[153] Similarly, they decreed that one should not play songs with instruments. And all types of songs and all that one hears sung by voice are forbidden to celebrate with them and forbidden to hear them because of the destruction. Even a cappella songs over wine are forbidden, as it says, "Do not drink wine with song."[154] It is already a custom for all of Israel to say words of praise or songs of thanksgiving to God and the like over wine.

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[153] B.T. Bava Batra 60b.
[154] Isaiah 24:9.

In this text, Maimonides explains the rabbinic ban against music discussed previously in this thesis. Maimonides ruling is based almost entirely on the Talmudic sugya from Gittin 7a and not from Sotah 48a. He avoids the question from Sotah about the time in which the Sanhedrin ceased to function by simply saying that the ban was on account of the *Hurban*. Yet even though Maimonides is able to clarify that question, his own terminology leaves room for debate. He first forbids instrumental songs, and then proceeds to say that all types of song are forbidden, both for the listener and the singer. An initial interpretation of this text would be quite plainly that music of all kinds is always forbidden.

However, Maimonides follows this statement by saying that "even a cappella songs over wine are forbidden." Why was this line necessary? If all types of music had already been forbidden, this insertion would be superfluous. Perhaps it was added to imply that if one is forbidden to sing while drinking, when one is inebriated and it feels so natural, all the more so should singing be forbidden at other times.

Another answer might be that the phrase "over wine" is a qualifier that attaches to each part of the prohibition, thus implying that Maimonides only had a problem with music when there was drinking involved. This is not completely illogical, as Maimonides was certainly opposed to drunkenness and the manner in which it could so easily lead one to follow one's passions. He realized, however, that the majority of people did enjoy singing and drinking together, regardless of his feelings about it. This can be seen in his final admittance that, "it has already become customary for all of Israel to sing words of praise or songs of thanksgiving to God over wine." He does not, of course, say that such vulgarities are permitted, simply that they have become the custom.

Still, to read the text as saying that music was forbidden only with wine implies such an odd grammatical reading of the phrase that it seems an unlikely explanation.

In *Orah Hayyim*, 560, the Tur (Jacob ben Asher, 1270-1340) offers an alternate solution. The Tur believes that Maimonides intended to say that instrumental music is always forbidden, and singing is forbidden only over wine. Singing, one might say, only creates excessive joy when it is accompanied by drinking. Also, since singing is natural and requires no talent or equipment, it would have been very difficult to decree a law against it.

The Tur's explanation of the differences between instrumental and vocal music would be particularly plausible if Maimonides thought that the song in the Temple was vocal. In our earlier analysis of Succah 50b, we determined that indeed, the nature of the Temple song was vocal. In fact, Maimonides also believed this to be true, as he expresses elsewhere in the *Mishneh Torah* in Hilchot Klei Hamikdash 3:3.

In the earlier presentation of Talmudic references to music, it was noted that many of these rabbinic discussions, including Sotah 48a, were regarding wedding celebrations. Yet Maimonides does not mention wedding music at all in Hilchot Ta'anit 5:14. This could lead one to several possible alternatives of his perspective on wedding celebrations and the use of music. The most lenient approach might suggest that as weddings are special situations of rejoicing, both instrumental music and various forms of songs could have been permitted. However, knowing Maimonides' strict views about the music prohibition, it is highly possible that instrumental music was still forbidden in his assessment, even at wedding celebrations. An even more stringent approach would suggest that, as wine would be present at a wedding celebration, even singing the praises

of bride and groom would not have been permissible. A final viewpoint might be that Maimonides didn't feel the need to legislate or share his perspective on this matter, which is why the subject isn't broached.[155]

Responsa Literature

As a great legalist, Maimonides was often asked for advice from members of the wider Jewish community. Two of his responsum written in Arabic in Hebrew letters were on the subject of music. These responsum "seem rarely to have been copied in the Middle Ages; they remained unpublished until 1873."[156] Despite their relatively recent recognition, these responsum offer incredibly interesting insights into Maimonides feelings about music. In these writings, he approached the questions about music from an ethical and philosophical perspective. Unfortunately, the Hebrew translations that have been done of these texts are not completely reliable, so my translations are based on various English texts and the Hebrew words interspersed in the Arabic. I have also chosen to include only one of the original texts (primarily in Arabic, written in Hebrew letters) for the sake of brevity.

Responsa 143

שאלה- הל יגוז סמע אלגנא באלמושחאת אלערביה ואלזמר
אלגואב- מעלום אן נפס אלזמר ואלאיקאעאת כלהא חראם ולו
לם יקל עליהם כלאם אצלא לקולהם ז"ל אודנא דשמעא זמרא
תעקר וקד בין אלתלמוד אן לא פרק בין סמע אלזמר או תנגים
אלאותאר או תלחין אלאלחאן דון אלצלאת ויגב כסר אלפנם

[155] Kahn, 66-70.
[156] Baron, *A Social History,* 206.

וגברהא חראם כמא דכרנא ואסתנדוא אלי אלנהי אלנבי קאל
אל תשמח ישראל אל גיל כעמים ועלה דלך בינה גדא לאן
הדא אלקוה אלשהואניה ינבגי קמעא ורדעהא ומסך ענאנהא
לא אן תתור ויהי מיתהא ולא ינטר פי מר אלואחד אלשאד
אלקליל אלוגוד יוגב לה דלך רקה אלנפס וסרעה אנפעאל
לאדראך מעקול כשוע ללאמור אלדינה לאן אלחכמה
אלשריעיה אנמא תכתב בחסב אלאכתר ואלאגלב שדברי
חכמים בהווה וקד בינוא לנא אלנביון דלך וקאלוא מנכרין עלי
אסתעמאל אלאת אלאלחאן עלי גהה אלעבאדה בסמעהם והו
קולהם הפרטים על פי הנבל כדויד חשבו להם כלי שיר וקד
בינא פי שרח אבות אן לא פרק בין אלאקאויל אלעבראניה
ואלערביה אנמא יחרם דלך או יחל בחסב אלמעני אלמראד פי
תלך אלאקאויל ואלספהה באלחקיקה חרם סמעהא ולו קילת
ותרא פאן לחנת עליהא כאן הנאך תלאת חרמאנאת חרמאן
סמע אספה נבלות הפה וחרמאן סמע אלגנא אעני זמרא בפומא
וחרמאן סמע אלאותאר ואן כאן דלך פי מקאם שרב שראב כאן
חרמאן ראבע והו קולה תעאלי והיה כנור ונבל תף וחליל ויין
משתיהם פאן כאנת אלמגניה אמראה כאן הנאך חרמאן כאמם
לקולהם ז"ל קול באשה ערוה פכיף אן כאנת תגני וקד באן אלחק
באלברהאן והו אן אלמקצור בנא אן נכון גוי קדוש ולא יכון לנא
פעל ולא קול אלא פי כמאל או פי מא יודי אלי כמאל לא פי
אתארה אלקוי אלנפסאניה מן כל כיד ולא פי אהמאלהא פי אללהו
ואללעב וקד בינא פי הדא אלגרץ פי אלדלאלה מא פיה כפאיה פי
אלגז אלאכר מנהא באקאויל יקיניה ענד אלפצלא ואלדי דכרוא
אלגאונים ז"ל הו תלחין דברי שירות ותשבחות כמא דכר בעל
הלכות ז"ל ואמא דבר מגונה בהא הם ושלום לא נשמע זאת בישראל
לא מן גאון ולא מן הדיוט ואלעגב מן קולכם במחצר כשרים ו
כשרים ענדי מא יחצרון מקאמאת אלשראב אלמסכר וקד בינא פי
דלך איצא פי אלדלאלה מא פיה כפאיה אן דלך אלדי יבדינא

Request: Is it permissible to listen to the singing of Arab ballads and to the reed pipe?

Response: It is well known that the reed pipe and the rhythms (of the Arabs) are all forbidden, even if nothing had been said in the pronouncement, 'The ear that listens to the reed pipe shall be cut off.' (B. Sota, 48a). And the Talmud has explained (Gittin 7a) that there is no difference between listening to the reed pipe. hearing stringed instruments, or the modulation of melodies except in prayer. And it is proper to break the soul and unlawful to comfort it.

And they (in the Talmud) base themselves on the prohibition of the prophet. He said, 'Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy like other people.' (Hosea 9:1) We have explained the reason for that thoroughly. Since, regarding this sensual faculty, it would be best for us to tame it, repress it, and tighten its rein. It should not be excited and brought to life.

One should not judge this by an individual man who may be an exception, and is rare, for whom it (music) brings about a mental delicacy and quickness necessary for perception or following religious matters. Legal wisdom only writes in accordance with the majority and the prevailing because, 'The wise have spoken concerning what ordinarily happens.' (B. Shabbat 68a) And the Prophets have explained that to us. They have spoken prohibiting the use of instrumental music by way of hearing them, and they say, 'That chant to the sound of the *nevel* invent themselves instruments of music, like David.' (Amos 6:5)

And we have already explained in the Commentary on Avot (1:16-17) that there is no difference between Hebrew and Arabic words. Some are forbidden or

allowed in accordance with the intended meaning of those words. In reality, it is the hearing of folly that is prohibited, even when accompanied by stringed instruments. And if they are put to tunes, there would be three prohibitions: the prohibition of listening to folly, and the prohibition of listening to singing, I mean playing with one's mouth, and the prohibition of listening to stringed instruments. And if it were happening in a wine shop there would be a fourth prohibition, as in the saying of Him Most High, 'And the lyre, and the lute, and the timbrel and the flute, and wine are in their feasts.' (Isaiah 5:12) And if the singer is a woman, then there is a fifth prohibition according to their saying, 'A voice in a woman is a sexually illicit.' (Berachot, 24a) Then how much [greater the prohibition] if she is singing.

And the truth is clarified and proved, because it is aimed at us that we should be a holy nation, and we shouldn't work or use words except in perfection. Neither in the stirring of the sensuous faculties to the neglect of all that is good nor in letting them run loose and wild and play.

And we have explained with sufficiency to this purpose in the last part of *The Guide to the Perplexed* with words that carry conviction to worthy people. And that which the blessed Geonim have discussed about setting melody to songs and praises, as the blessed author of halachot said, "As for improper subjects being in them-God forbid!"[157] This was not heard in Israel, either from a Gaon or illiterate people. One must wonder at your saying, "in the presence of pious persons," for, in my opinion, they are not pious as long as they are in wine shops. But we have

[157] Itzchak al-Fasi, *Berakhot*, f. 25b.

explained enough about that in *The Guide*. This is what seems right to us regarding listening to instruments of music. And Peace. Wrote Moses.

This responsa confronts the issue of listening to Arabic songs and instruments. Maimonides condemned this matter for a list of possible reasons, including prohibitions against listening to follies and listening to singing or instrumental music in general. There were added prohibitions if the music were heard in a wine shop or if the singer was female.

Maimonides believed that secular music should not be tolerated, and he sees the biblical and Talmudic prohibitions against music as solid grounding for his idea that this music incites lust. While he admits that some study music to attain wisdom, he believes that the laws of the Torah were not written for this small minority. Like Plato, Maimonides gives music an ethic, not an aesthetic, evaluation.

Unlike Maimonides ruling in Hilkhoth Ta'anith, the responsa does not mention the destruction at all, but rather says that the reason for the rabbinic ban was that music inspires joyfulness which leads one away from serving God. This disparity can be accounted for by understanding that while Maimonides must have known that the ban dated from after the *Hurban*, the reason for the ban was directly linked to the purpose of the Jewish people as a holy nation. As such, he writes in his responsa that Jews are meant to only engage in actions and words that lead to such perfection.

Responsa 129

Request: May it please your excellency to help us decide about the custom of *chazzanim* to recite *piyyutim* or other songs of praise or songs in honor of a bridegroom or circumcision. They insert these between the benedictions before and after the *Shema* in both the morning and evening services, and also in the evening service on festival days. The congregation cannot follow the *chazzan* and they become unaware as how far he has gotten in the service, whether he is still at the *piyyut* or whether he has gotten to the paragraphs both before and after the *Shema* and their benediction formula (all of which is obligatory). Therefore, will our Master Moses instruct us what to do? Specifically, should the *chazzan* say these things in the framework of the benediction prayer, after reciting the benediction prayer, or before beginning to say the *Kaddish* which follows the prayer beginning...Should he then say these *piyyutim* and then proceed with the required service or is it does it not matter?

Response: It is very wrong to allow any interruption in the paragraphs before or after the *Shema*, but if there is some need, let them be said preceding the paragraphs before the *Shema*. Nevertheless, he may not break up the benediction formula or add to it.

This responsa deals with the permissibility of certain melodies and metrical poetry that were being utilized in the synagogue. As opposed to his earlier statement in *The Guide of the Perplexed,* in this instance Maimonides condemned the singers and the preachers regarding the content of their poetry, not the poetry itself. This resonates more with comments Maimonides made in Hilchot Tefillah 8:11 in the *Mishneh Torah* about

finding an appropriate *shaliach tzibbur*. One can see how the *chazzan* can get carried away with the music, taking attention away from the parts of the service required in the Talmud and adding in unnecessary *piyyutim* and other songs. Maimonides is firm in his answer, insisting that it is "very wrong" to interrupt the fixed structure of the prayer service, and if it must be done, it must happen early in the service.

Shmoneh Perakim

Maimonides wrote *Shmoneh Perakim* as an introduction to his commentary on *Pirkei Avot*. In it, he discusses the various categories of speech, one of which includes songs. The commentary begins in the middle of his discussion on I:16.

I:16

ואני אומר שדיבור יחלק לפי חיוב התורה לחמישה חלקים

א' מצוה בו ב' נזהר ממנו ג' נמאס ד' אהוב ה' מותר....

I say that from the perspective of our Torah, speech is divided into five categories.

I-what we are commanded to speak,

II-what we are forbidden to speak,

III-speech that should be avoided,

IV-speech that is desirable,

V-speech that is left to our discretion...

החלק הד' הוא הנאהב והוא הדיבור בשבח המעלות השכליות או מעלות המדות ובגנות הפחיתיות משני המינים יחד להעיר הנפש למעלות בספורים ובשירים ולמנעם מן הפחיתיות בדרכים ההם בעצמם. וכן לשבח החשובים ולהודות מעלותיהם כדי שיטבו

מנהגיהם בעיני בני אדם וילכו בדרכיהם ולגנות הרעים
בפחיתיותיהם כדי שיתגנו פעולתם וזכרם בעיני בני אדם ויתרחקו
מהסולא יתנהגו הם כמנהגיהם...

IV-The fourth category, speech that is desirable: This refers to speech that praises positive virtues, intellectual or ethical, and the deprecation of undesirable qualities of these types. This includes inspiring the soul with addresses and songs, and the use of these to encourage shunning undesirable traits. Similarly, it includes the praise of the wise and describing the importance of their virtues, in order to endear and cause to follow their actions in the community. In the same way, it encompasses denigration of the wicked and their undesirable traits in the community, so they will shun them and not follow their behavior...

ודע שהשרים המחוברים מאיזה לשון שיהיו צריך שיבחנו בעיניהם
אם הם הולכים על דרך הדיבור אשר חלקנוהו. ואמנם בארתי זה
אע"פ שהוא מבואר. מפני שראיתי זקנים והחסידים מאנשי תורתינו
כשיהיו במשתה יין כחופה או זולתה וירצה אדם לשיר שיר ערבי
אפי' ענין השיר ההוא שבח הגבורה או הנדיבות והוא מן החלק
האהוב או בשבחי היין ירחיקו זה בכל צד מן הרחקה ואין מותר
אצלם לשמע, וכשישורר המשורר פיוט מן הפיוטים הערבים לא
ירחיקוהו ולא ירע בעיניהם עם היות בדברים ההם המוזהר ממנו או
הנמאס, וזה סכלות גמורה שהדיבור לא יאסר ויותר ויאהב וימאס
ויצוה באמירתו מצד הלשון שנעשה אבל מצד ענינו, שאם יהיה ענין
ההוא מעלה יתחייב לאומרו באיזה לשון שיהיה ואם יהיה כוונת
השיר ההוא פחיתות באיזה לשון שיהי אסור לאומרו באיזה לשון שיהיה.

Songs, regardless of the language they are composed in, should be judged according to their content. We should follow the same guidelines for them as the above guidelines for speech. Although this point of clarification is clear, it is

necessary to mention it because I have seen important and pious men from our nation (who ignore it). They attend a party, a wedding or the like, and if a person wants to sing a song in Arabic, they object and refuse to let them sing the song. This is true even when the song is praising courage or honesty, meaning it is in the category of desired speech, or if it is over wine. If, conversely, the singer sings a song in Hebrew, no one objects or complains even if the content of the song is about forbidden subjects. This is just foolish. The decision regarding whether or not a certain subject is forbidden or allowed, desirable or problematic, is not dependent on the language it is said in but in its content. If the contents of a song are inspirational, it is good to sing it, regardless of the language it is written in. If the subject matter is wrong, we must shun it, regardless of the language it is written in.

Previously, in our analysis of Hilchot Ta'aniot from *Mishneh Torah*, there was some question regarding the nature of Maimonides' exact prohibition of certain types of music. It may, perhaps, have been connected to his theories about right speech. This idea is expressed in *The Guide of the Perplexed* 3:8, when he discusses the sanctity of language and the dangerous effects of vulgar and licentious speech. More explicitly, it can be found in this commentary to *Pirkei Avot* 1:16. In the commentary, he discusses the varieties of speech, all of which could apply equally to all varieties of songs depending on their subject matter. The category of desirable speech includes the arousing of a deeper appreciation of what is desirable and good through orations and songs. Music could be permitted, though it depended completely on the circumstances in

which it was used. Any time that folly was connected with the playing or singing of music, it was forbidden, as folly was forbidden.

In the second part of this excerpt from *Shmoneh Perakim*, Maimonides explains that songs have merit depending on their subject matter, not the language in which they were written. This is a surprising response, particularly after his responsa in which he spoke so negatively about Arabic songs. However, it may be that the responsa was specifically referring to Arabic folksongs, which were assumed to be inappropriate in terms of their subject matter. The language and musical style of the Arabs, however, were not a problem for Maimonides. Halevi, on the other hand, was extremely antagonistic to the use of Arabic poetry and rhythms. Both men, though, stressed the importance of the words and their content most of all. If the language was appropriate, the nature of the song was essentially irrelevant.

Maimonides as Doctor

Thus far, much of what we have seen in Maimonides' writings on music have been rather negative. He has incorporated some affirmative aspects of music, both in his descriptions of music in the Temple and in his admission that for some rare individuals, music can have a positive and ennobling effect. However, it is only by examining Maimonides writings as a doctor that one begins to see a clearly positive, alternate side of his views on music. The basis of his medical knowledge was Greek, which would help to explain the presence of music in his medical techniques. He was, in a sense, a moral physician, and as such, he recommends the cultivation of the sense in order to quicken the soul.

When Maimonides composed *The Guide of the Perplexed* as well as some of his other theological and philosophical works, he wrote in Hebrew or in Arabic with Hebrew letters. This was done in order to carefully conceal his ideas from the non-Jewish community or from those who would be unable to understand his insights. Maimonides medical writings, however, were composed in Arabic with Arabic letters, as he had nothing to hide from the Muslims. "It is probable that he prepared most of his medical treatises for Muslim or Christian pupils and therefore preferred to use the Arabic language, the more so since medical terms had as yet to be created in Hebrew."[158]

In 1198, Maimonides wrote a four-chapter medical treatise known as the "Regimen of Health" that provided an answer for the poor and failing health of the Sultan. In another treatise for the Sultan, which is considered the fifth chapter to the above Regimen, he wrote "The Causes of Symptoms." In this work, he recommends a detailed musical prescription.

> As an inducer of sleep, Maimonides recommends that the royal singer should sing to the sound of the lyre, and raise his voice and chant his songs for an hour. The singer should then lower his voice gradually, loosen his strings, soften his melody until the Sultan falls into a deep sleep, and then cease completely. Physicians and philosophers have stated that sleep produced in this way—by slowly fading music—endows the soul with a good nature, greatly widens it and thereby improves its direction over the body.[159]

Following this recommendation, he apologizes for having prescribed it, knowing that such music is forbidden to the Moslems. As a Jewish physician at a Muslim court, he could not forget that he was a Jew and an outsider. This meant that not only did he have to avoid speaking at length about the teachings of Jewish tradition, but also "when

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[158] Salo Baron, "The Medical Work of Maimonides" *Essays on Maimonides* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), 273.

[159] Rosner, 2.

he prescribed wine and music, shunned by orthodox Muslims, he had to apologize that he was only stating what he considered the best medical advice."[160]

Maimonides treatise "Discourse on the Explanation of Fits" was written in 1200 and was probably the last of his medical writings.[161] The Sultan suffered from fits of melancholy, and sent to Maimonides, who was ill in Cairo, for his medical advice. In the 21st chapter of the treatise, he advises the Sultan to

> rise with the sun, to take a little hydromel, after that to ride for several hours, and to consume a light meal, mostly consisting of fruits, followed by a siesta to the low voice of a singer, accompanied by a stringed instrument. After that should come reading and agreeable conversation, then drinking of a little wine with *bugloss*, a remedy which, very much in the favor of the Greek physicians, was known to them under the name of *euphrosyne* (cheerfulness), because it was thought to cheer the hearts of melancholic patients. This is to be followed by a light supper, and once more music for two hours until sleep overtakes the royal listener.[162]

Summary

The vast difference between Maimonides' other works and his writings as a physician are staggering. How could he be so firmly opposed to music of nearly all kinds, yet simultaneously realize that as a curative method, music was unbeatable? It is also apparent that Maimonides was not speaking theoretically about these musical cures. "Great healer that he was, he doubtless did not refrain from applying music, both vocal and instrumental, to patients in need of such remedy."[163]

Fred Rosner insists, "there is no contradiction between Maimonides prescription of music therapy for the prevention and treatment of psychiatric disease such as

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[160] Baron, *A Social and Religious History,* Vol. XV, 251.
[161] Baron, "The Medical Work of Maimonides", 283.
[162] Ibid. 284.
[163] Baron, *A Social and Religious History,* Vol. XV, 208.

melancholy and his prohibition of secular music for recreational purposes only."[164] Rosner seems to suggest that as a physician, Maimonides primary concern was the health of his patients, and as rabbi, legal codifier and philosopher, his focus was the Torah and adhering to the commandments. Yet while we, with the benefit of historical perspective, have the luxury of reading Maimonides works as representative of distinct parts of his life, one cannot help but wonder if such a separation truly existed for Maimonides during his lifetime. Perhaps Maimonides was able to reconcile his own internal contradictions, but he didn't expect his various audiences to be privy to the entire corpus of his works. Indeed, Maimonides was quite careful in his style of writing in order to ensure that only the correct audience would read the books he had written for them. The *Mishneh Torah* was intended for all Jews, and is written in basic, Mishnaic Hebrew that any literate Jew could read, while *The Guide for the Perplexed* is intentionally confusing, filled with hints and allusions to potentially blasphemous ideas that only those philosophically minded few who could handle such ideas would be able to understand. Additionally, his medical prescriptions for the Sultan were surely never intended for a wider audience.

Maimonides believed that the majority of the people were *behemoth*, unable to understand the many inconsistencies inherent in living a Jewish life while having knowledge of the sciences, philosophy, and the advancements of the outside world. He recognized the general population's inability to make a *shidduch* between the two worlds they were straddling and offered them only the information that they needed. Those wise few who were able to read *The Guide of the Perplexed* and understand its secrets,

[164] Rosner, "Moses Maimonides on Music Therapy", 11.

Maimonides asserted, should go and study the sciences in order to gain a true understanding of God and the universe.

Though the contradictions in Maimonides writings on music are more striking than either of the other philosophers, his ability to create the necessary *shidduch* makes the inconsistencies less problematic. Maimonides was not trying to explain the words of the Talmud in the name of science. As a halachist, he knew how to live a Jewish life and how to teach others to do the same, and whether he believed that the Tradition was scientifically true or not was irrelevant. Maimonides was able to be a devout, practicing Jew at the same time that he worked tirelessly as a doctor, codifier, halachist, and philosopher. Therefore, when it came to the subject of music, he could comfortably reassert and follow the stringent prohibitions of the rabbis while recognizing that music had worthy curative and spiritual powers. As a rationalist, he did not approve of anything that stirred the emotions and caused people to act without reason, but he was far more concerned with the possibility of inebriation, sexual impropriety, and inappropriate language that often accompanied music than the tunes themselves.

Chapter 10-Conclusion

After examining the role of and attitudes towards music throughout Jewish history, one key message is clear: music has always been a central part of Jewish life, from its beginnings recorded in the Bible and into the modern era. The importance of music in ancient Israelite culture was not even diminished with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE; though the actual creation of music may have been more limited, it continued to maintain a crucial role in the hearts and minds of the Jewish people. Music is such a natural human response to an endless array of emotions and situations that, even despite a wealth of prohibitive legislations, it could not be silenced.

In the medieval world of the tenth to the twelfth centuries, Jewish attitudes towards music were affected by the primarily Arab society in which most Jews were living. It was a time of great scientific and philosophical advancements, and Jews were faced with the dilemma of trying to live according to halacha while being influenced by the surrounding world. The medieval philosophers sought to reconcile these two opposing forces, trying to create a *shidduch* in which they could both be Jewish and gain from the wisdom of their neighbors. This was no easy task, however, and as a result, their writings on music in particular are often contradictory and unclear. The *shidduch*, it seemed, was not a match that could be made without making serious concessions or choosing to accept certain irreconcilable differences of opinion, even in one's own mind.

Each of the philosophers analyzed in this thesis had additional contradictions to face, though these were internal and unique to each individual. Not only did they have to make a *shidduch* with Jewish beliefs and those of the outside world, but they also had to reconcile the many different roles they played in Jewish society. Saadia, despite his role

as Gaon, showed himself to be more interested in liturgy and philosophy when it came to the subject of music. As a result, his writings on music are based on theoretical techniques for using music to affect the humors, though from a halachic viewpoint he was unwilling to say that Jews should utilize these musical techniques until the rebuilding of the Temple. Halevi, the poet, was primarily focused on the superiority and unique status of the Jewish people than on poetry. He was more concerned with the Jews retaining their special linguistic and musical techniques than creating beautiful songs that might use Arabic rhythms, even though in actuality, he used these rhythms in his own poetry. Maimonides, the consummate scholar, chose to teach and preach his theoretical, Talmudically based ideas about music, yet in practice, he was fully aware of and comfortable with using music for its healing properties.

Despite their many external and internal contradictions, all three philosophers state quite plainly that music has tremendous curative and spiritual powers. They each suggest certain moments and ways in which this potential can be and has been harnessed, though there is always an underlying sense that this information cannot or should not be widely used.

This in turn connects with a second important theme of this thesis, which relates to what Jewish tradition, from ancient times through the medieval period, fears about music. Music is an extremely powerful tool for affecting changes in mood and action, and as such it can be used by the religious and secular worlds alike for good or for bad. The danger in music, many have asserted, is that it is often understood as inextricably linked with sexuality and intoxication, and as such it needs to be censored; people need to be protected from their own evil inclinations. One can look at this from a liberal, modern

perspective and see what appears to be the inaccuracies and even potential political agendas inherent in these statements, yet this idea continues to be reflected upon even in our own culture. The danger of "sex, drugs, and rock and roll" is no more than a reiteration of the same ideas that have been expressed by many religious people for centuries.

While it can certainly now be asserted that there were varying conceptions of music in the medieval mind, it seems that like the medieval philosophers, we in the modern era are no closer to understanding how to reconcile tradition with contemporary existence and the role that music should play in our lives. Like our medieval ancestors, we still live in a non-Jewish world, constantly striving for a sense of Jewish authenticity while living secular lives. Like the Rabbis before them, each generation wonders if certain types of music are hazardous to an individual or society's health or if music can be of great benefit to the human experience.

Yet we have certainly gained the understanding that music is incredibly powerful and can be used to affect positive mental and spiritual health. Despite their reticence, these philosophers have made it quite clear that music's capacities are beyond what our tradition has had the chance to explore. My hope is that as Judaism continues to evolve and reform, so will our understanding of music-and God willing, perhaps even before ימי המשיח, we will be able to reinstate Jewish music to its place of honor in our conceptions of music in the modern mind.

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