JOURNEY TO GOD:

Personal and Professional Benefits of Spirituality Development for Cantors

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Introduction

Music is elemental to the human experience. In utero, a fetus can, and often will, respond to music as soon as the ability to hear develops (around the sixteenth week of the gestational period.) Once born, infants respond to, and are often soothed by, the sound of music, as testified by the large repertoire of lullabies found in most cultures. As humans continue to develop, music maintains its influential place in the human experience, especially as technological advances have rendered music nearly ubiquitous and commonplace, as well as easily accessible, in our contemporary American culture.

The importance of music to the human experience is testified to in the Torah, whereby the profession of a musician is mentioned as one of the earliest vocations, alongside that of a shepherd and a metallurgist:

<u>בראשית פרק ד פסוק כ- כב</u>

וַתֵּלֶד עָדָה אֶת יָבָל הוּא הָיָה אֲבִי יֹשֵׁב אֹהֶל וּמִקְנֶה: וְשֵׁם אָחִיו יוּבָל הוּא הָיָה אֲבִי כָּל תֹּפֵשׂ כִּנּוֹר וְעוּגָב: וְצִלָּה גַם הִוא יָלְדָה אֶת תּוּבַל קַיִן לֹטֵשׁ כָּל חֹרֵשׁ נְחֹשֶׁת וּבַרְזֶל וַאֲחוֹת תּוּבַל קַיִן נַעֲמָה:

<u>Genesis 4:20-22</u>

Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who dwell in tents and amidst herds. And the name of his brother was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the pipe. As for Zillah, she bore Tubal-cain, who forged all implements of copper and iron. And the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.[1]

Technological advances that allowed people to domesticate and raise cattle and to work with metals were instrumental in advancing the progress of humanity. That music-making is mentioned among these fundamental displays of progress testifies to its importance in human history.

[1] Translation from *JPS: Hebrew-English Tanakh*; Second edition, The Jewish Publication Society: Philadelphia, 2003.

The significance of music in human society is, therefore, incontestable. More difficult to establish is the precise meaning of that music within any given society, or even the meaning of a particular music event, let alone a specific piece of music. To explain what I mean by "meaning," I would like to borrow the concept of an "enduring understanding" from the field of education. An "enduring understanding" is defined as a statement summarizing important ideas and core processes that are central to a discipline and have lasting value beyond the classroom. Similarly, by "meaning," I have in mind the extra-musical messages that music communicates during its performance and how these are interpreted in the aftermath of the performance. What is the enduring understanding left behind once a piece of music has been experienced? What remains of a take-away once the notes are no longer being played or sung?

By its very definition, music involves multiple levels of interaction and interpretation: any given piece of music and its composer (if such is known), the performer, the actual music event whereby the performance takes place, and the members of the audience who are experiencing the music. Meaning may occur in any one of these areas, depending on the interest of the person seeking it out. Take, for example, "Hatikvah." As a piece of music, it may "mean" a variety of things. Composed by Samuel Cohen in 1888, the piece derives from a Romanian folksong "Cucuruz cu frunza-n sus" ("Maize with up-standing leafs,") which itself derives from "La Mantovana," a 17th century Italian madrigal. Cohen's transformation of a non-Jewish melody into a Jewish melody might be interpreted as a sign of his admiration of the Jews' ability to learn from the nations around them. Or, perhaps, since the melody is written in minor, it may signal Cohen's lack of optimism with regard to the eventual success of the Zionist

venture. The lyrics of "Hatikva" are written by Naphtali Herz Imber, a secular Galician Jew. Since he does not mention God in his poem and the melody has a somewhat mournful feeling to it, the listener's take away might be the high toll that the Zionist venture has exacted, undertaken through human effort rather than Divine intervention. On the level of the performer, the piece may be heard as celebratory when performed by the Israeli National Orchestra composed of a large number of recent émigrés from the Former Soviet Union, or as haunting owing to its harmonic structure when played by a high-school orchestra of mostly non-Jews in Iowa. Similarly, the piece will have special resonance on Israeli Independence Day, heard as especially redemptive by Israelis or as particularly oppressive by the Palestinians. Thus, a single piece of music can be imbued with different, diametrically opposed meanings based on where, when, and by whom it is performed and experienced.

This issue of meaning is what cantors constantly worry about. As musical experts concerned with matters of the spirit and involved in the very staging of sacred drama that is worship, we can ill-afford to avoid it. But, as we saw with the example of "Hatikvah," what "counts" as a proper understanding of meaning depends on what level of meaning is sought. Is it facts about the composer? An understanding of musical borrowing? An internal study of musical structure and style? All of these presuppose the existence of meaning outside the actual music event. I propose locating meaning in the matter of the actual event itself, in our case, a liturgical event that we call worship. We must understand, therefore, some of the factors at play in musical meaning-making and how they interact to create the cohesive whole that is the music event.

Western music theory suggests that musical creations contain innate meaning, which can be discovered through the analysis of the composition's melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic structures. In such analysis, any piece of music can be broken down into smaller components and put back together to convey meaning, as understood, interpreted, and described through established, Western musical conventions. At its most basic level, examples of these musical conventions might include the following: minor is sad, major is happy, tritons are ominous, etc.

On a more sophisticated level, research such as that done by neurophysiologist and concert pianist Manfred Clynes supports the claim that a precise emotional state in others can be generated by repeatedly producing that emotion's typical musical expression, or "essentic form."[2] In other words, human emotions can be connected to particular musical expressions, the use of which can lead to the music's ability to generate a specific desired emotional state in the listener. Clynes' thesis accords with Gustav Becking's observations that while the underlying pulses of the music of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert are quite different, they often use similar melodic phrases in their compositions for a comparable emotional effect.[3]

It may thus be argued that music contains specific emotional messages that necessarily evoke in listeners music's inherent meaning – what we might call "the argument from inherent technical structure." But experience with most music suggests otherwise. It is not uncommon, for example, for two listeners to walk out of the same performance with starkly different opinions of what the emotional or analytical message

[2] M. Clynes: *Sentics, the Touch of Emotions* (London, 1977) as described in "The Biology of Music-Making" by John Blacking, published in *Ethnomusicology: an Introduction*, ed. Helen Myers. W.W. Norton & Company: New York and London, 1992.
[3] G. Becking: *Der Mesikalische Rhythmus als Erkenntnisquelle* (Augsburg, 1928/R1958) as described in "The Biology of Music-Making" by John Blacking

of the performance was. In addition, neither Clynes nor Becking make universal claims in their research. Clynes deals only with music that is familiar and repeated enough to elicit a predictable emotional response from the listener. Becking only makes claims about Western classical music from a particular, relatively short period of time in history. Neither researcher says anything about the absolute emotional messages inherent in all music.

Contrary to their claim, it is more logical to assume that the same chords, pitches, keys, and melodic lines would produce starkly different reactions from listeners at different times in history and in different geographic locales. Western classical music would have a different emotional effect on European listeners than on uninitiated Australian aborigines. Similarly, a jazz progression would likely be experienced as exciting in twentieth-century America, but not so during the Renaissance in Europe, where listeners would likely find jazz to be odd at best and distasteful or ugly at worst.

One might argue, in response, that the listeners who hear the intended emotional message of a piece of music "incorrectly" lack the appropriate level of education or enculturation to realize the "correct" meaning. This may be the case, but enculturation is in itself a process which conditions the listener to associate certain meanings with particular phenomena, thereby undercutting the claim that specific music by its very nature contains particular meaning. Had the latter been the case – had music contained specific meaning - then no acculturation or education should be necessary for the listener to realize the intended emotional message of a musical work.

Such, however, is not the case. Different people do, in fact, experience the same piece of music differently - not to mention the fact that the same person can experience

diametrically opposing emotions upon experiencing the same piece of music at different times in one's life. At the least, even if music were to contain innate meaning determined by its structure, the realization of that meaning would still be muddied by factors that lie outside that structure.

If not determined by the technical structure of the musical creation, perhaps the message of a piece of music is largely determined by the composer's intention in writing the piece – what we might call "the argument from authorial intent." In this context, a piece of music – as a form of communication - can be compared to a piece of literature. Historically speaking, the argument from authorial intent came early in the study of literature, before the argument from technical structure. Throughout the nineteenth century, it was simply imagined that authors have ideas they wish to convey and that the task of literary criticism is to get at those ideas. It was simply assumed that a good reader could deduce the big idea of what a good author intended to communicate through the plot of his story or from a further study of the life of the author. Similarly, then, by analyzing the musical "plot," its flow of ideas perhaps, and then by enhancing that understanding with an analysis of the composer's life, it should be possible to understand what the composer's big idea was in writing a piece of music. Just as we can surmise that in writing "Crime and Punishment," Fyodor Dostoyevsky wanted to communicate the mental anguish and moral dilemma of a murderer who is simultaneously guilt-ridden (for having committed a terrible crime) and self-justified (feeling that murder for a higher purpose is meritorious), so we should be able to listen to Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D minor and experience the brotherhood of all humankind and our joy in experiencing God.

In both cases, moreover, we should be able to expand that understanding by some aspect of the author or the composer's life. Dostoyevsky, for example, was known as a Slavophile religious believer, who opposed westernizing ideas in general and the ideas of utilitarianism and rationalism in particular. The latter ideas inspired the Russian nihilists, whose doctrines Dostoyevsky was known to want to counteract. Thus, the main character, Rodion Raskolnikov, exemplifies the disastrous dangers of the abandonment of their country, their religion, and their roots by Russian nihilists. Beethoven, for his part, was attracted to the ideals of Enlightenment. He was so intolerant of the abuses of church and state, that when he learned of Napoleon's imperial ambitions in 1804, he took hold of the title-page of his Third Symphony, which had been dedicated to Napoleon as the champion of the French Revolution, and scratched the name Bonaparte out so violently that he made a hole in the paper. He later changed the work's title to "Sinfonia Eroica, composta per festeggiare il sovvenire d'un grand'uom" ("Heroic Symphony, composed to celebrate the memory of a great man"), and he rededicated it to his patron, Prince Joseph Franz von Lobkowitz.

Knowing about Beethoven's strong commitment to the ideals of Enlightenment may help to hear his Symphony No. 9 in D minor as an ode to the brotherhood of all humankind. This message can certainly be derived when the music is combined with the lyrics:

> *Oh friends, not these tones!*
> *Rather, let us raise our voices in more pleasing*
> *And more joyful sounds!*
> *Joy! (Joy!)*
> *Joy! (Joy!)*
> *….*
> *What custom strictly divided.*
> *All men become brothers,*

…
Before God!

….

Divinity!

Without the knowledge of Beethoven's personal politics and without the benefit of the lyrics, would it be possible for a listener to understand Beethoven's exact message? Perhaps the feeling of joy would be conveyed, but what of God and humanity's oneness, what of the unity of the human experience? It appears that while music may sometimes (at least) be capable of communicating the composer's general intention and mood, the clarity of the message cannot be guaranteed, especially in instances where the musical composition is not supported by lyrics. And, even in those cases where lyrics do exist, sophisticated analytical or emotional messages intended by the composer in writing the piece of music, while relevant, are not absolute because music is experienced first and foremost on the emotional level, a level which is hidden deeper in the maze of the human psyche than the analytical.

A parallel can be drawn here with textual hermeneutics, a much more unambiguous discipline than music in that the medium being analyzed uses words, which, although often imperfect, do convey more exact meaning than the symbolic language of music. As noted by Paul Ricoeur, the meaning of a hermeneutical passage does not depend altogether on the intention of the author. Rather, the reader is an interpreter, and it is the level of reader interpretation that counts at least as much as artistic structure and authorial intent. By extension, the same can be said about music: the interpretation of the listener is as significant as the musical structure and the intention of the composer, even in those cases when the intention of the composer is known. In

fact, listener interpretation of music may even be more important that reader interpretation of text, because a text has words that more sharply delimit what the text can mean. In other words, while the intention of the composer in writing a piece of music may be a part of the puzzle in determining the meaning of a piece of music, it is ultimately not the determining factor in how the piece of music is actually understood and perceived in a performance.

We arrive, therefore, at our third and deepest level of analysis, the one that will engage me here: listener interpretation – a level of understanding that depends on the entirety of what we can call the music event. The true meaning of a piece of music emerges during a music event, when that piece of music is experienced by listeners. Thus, we turn to the experience of the listener in our search for the meaning of music.

This experience of the listener can serve only for what anthropologist Clifford Geertz would call "a first-order construction" of what actually happens in cultural performance. The music being performed is the actual event in its true form. However, the moment that the listener begins to reflect on the music event and analyze its effect on her, she is offering an interpretation of what actually happened – a first-order construction of the event. When, however, we think about the experience of the listener, we enter what Geertz would call a second-order construction, a construction of the construction, of the music event. Scholarly analysis can do no better; it depends on first-order constructions of those experiencing the music, and using these, it arrives at an analysis of the event as a whole, an analysis that transcends the immediate experience of the individual listeners. We are at best dealing with interpretations, reflections, and reconstructions of an event that has already taken place.

Needless to say, such reflections and reconstructions are not the objective meaning of what actually happened, but are estimations and recollections of what happened as the participants remember experiencing the music event. It is unclear how much of this reconstruction can be attributed to the innate qualities of the music event itself and how much is a result of the specific genetic make-up, prior experience, current emotional state, or mood of any given listener.

It is plausible that in interviewing a significant sample of audience members following a music event, a dominant perception of the music event's meaning might emerge. Nevertheless, this dominant perception can only testify to the set of listener perceptions – in themselves first-order constructions – of a singular occurrence. It says nothing about the meaning of the same piece of music when performed in another context, or even in front of the same audience on a different day, or when the "platform" changes from live performance, to taped hearing in a public space, to hearing on a Walkman or Ipod.

In addition, the dominant perception is also likely influenced by national events or the nature of the gathering in which the piece of music is being performed. To that extent, the performance of "The Star Spangled Banner" at any given football game immediately following the tragedy of 9/11 was likely perceived very differently than a similar performance at any other given time in American history. By the same token, hearing Carl Orff's setting of "O Fortuna" from the *Carmina Burana* collection would be experienced very differently and likely produce strikingly dissimilar dominant perceptions following a performance in a concert hall versus an annual convention of nihilists. The same piece of music would be perceived even differently following a

speech on the dangers of fracking and a call for environmental responsibility. Hence, the dominant perception of a music event's meaning by listeners is limited not only by the fact that it is a first-order reflection on a past event, but also because it is shaped by who the audience members are as individuals and as a collective entity, as well as by the context in which the piece of music is being heard.

Furthermore, the vast majority of contemporary listeners lack sufficient music education to engage in serious discussion of music's meaning. While most people spend years of formal education learning to decode and interpret texts, much of music education stops at learning basic tunes. Even in those cases where people do learn to appreciate music on a deeper level and possess the skills to engage in musical analysis, most lack the vocabulary and the experience to engage in extended discussion regarding the music's affect upon them. As a result, most conversations about music lack focus on the music's meaning and are limited to expressions of like or dislike.

Another factor to consider in a conversation about meaning within a music event is the performer. Like the composer, the performer has no control over how a piece of music will be perceived while it is enacted, but the performer stands in a unique position of a two-level interaction with that piece of music. Specifically, as the performer learns and rehearses the piece throughout the rehearsal process, she imbues it with certain meaning, which she then has the opportunity to attempt to communicate through a dynamic interaction that is the performance.

Put another way, the process of the performer's interaction with a piece of music can be broken down into two stages: 1) the planning and 2) the performance. The performer is caught between two foci: the musical piece being performed and the

audience for whom the performance will occur. In the planning stage, the performer must have the composition most firmly in mind; in the performance stage, the audience plays a larger role. While planning, the performer negotiates the possibility of instilling meaning into the piece of music by drawing fully on composer's stated or imagined intentions, musical analysis, personal perceptions, and only then, the expected context of the music event. While performing, the performer concentrates on presenting a piece of music to a specific set of listeners in an equally specific setting: a concert hall, a parade, or a sanctuary service. Performers must now worry about how the listener will interpret the musical meaning. Additionally, while presenting a live music event, a sensitive and thoughtful performer has the ability to respond dynamically to the listeners, potentially altering the meaning of that piece of music beyond the pre-existing intention of what its meaning was thought to be in the planning stage.

To be sure, the performer's personal state of mind, health, and spirit play a part in the actual performance of the music event and the meaning that the performer is able to convey to the listener. But outside forces too, such as the other musicians involved in the performance, the physical characteristics of the venue, the news of the day, the performer's personal interactions with the world, and the like, play a role as well. All in all, a multitude of other factors all affect the performer's ability to communicate the meaning of a piece of music; and in any event, the same set of factors impact independently the listener's understanding of that meaning, so that ultimate meaning is negotiated at the point where the two intentions coincide – the meeting place of the meaning presented by the performer and the meaning intuited by the listener.

Furthermore, in its performance, any piece of music becomes an event that has life outside of the actual piece of music itself, thereby complicating the meaning of that piece of music even further. Listeners bring their own sets of assumptions with them – the performer's understanding of a piece and the way she delivers it are only part of how it will be received by listeners. It is noteworthy that in most Western contexts, responding dynamically to cues from the audience takes a particularly high level of sensitivity on the part of the performer, since contemporary audience members are taught to be quiet, polite, and attentive, regardless of the level of enjoyment a given performance generates. Gone are the days when members of the audience would hiss or throw tomatoes in reaction to a performance they did not particularly enjoy. Nevertheless, even as the performer's ability to arrive at a music event's true meaning is severely limited, it does appear that the performer stands in a unique position vis-à-vis the music in that it is she, as performer, who infuses the music with particular meaning through personal interaction and interpretation: she responds to her own personal state of being that day and to forces outside of herself, such as the context of the performance and the response of the audience.

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In engaging with music and the meaning contained therein, we are necessarily dealing with the world of symbols and perceptions, which by their very nature are polyvalent and ambiguous. Yet, as music meaning-makers, cantors would benefit from gaining clarity on this process and on their role within it. While recognizing that the music event's innate meaning and effect on listeners ultimately cannot be controlled and

are too complicated to be accurately and consistently predicted, the cantor can nevertheless understand how she functions within the greater whole.

The cantor's primary area of expertise is liturgical music and its use within worship services. Moreover, at least one of the goals of worship is to help congregants connect to the Divine. Therefore, cantors would benefit from a deeper development of how they understand and relate the meaning of music to the realm of connecting to the Divine. It is conceivable that at least one part of this process includes gaining a deeper understanding of one's own relationship to the Divine and the development of one's own spirituality, defined as the personal relationship to and understanding of the nature of God.

Accordingly, this thesis examines how personal spiritual development undertaken by cantors influences their cantorial identity and self-understanding, as well as their relationship to liturgical, sacred music. Our era provides many potent paths that lead to personal spirituality, but this thesis looks at just one of them: the Institute for Jewish Spirituality (IJS), an organization that has pushed the envelope on issues of contemporary spirituality, while managing to remain squarely in the mainstream of Jewish communal consciousness. To date, sixty cantors have trained at the IJS, developing their personal spirituality over the course of an intensive 18-month program. This thesis examines the effect of this training on the cantors and their cantorial identity. Chapter 2 of the thesis inspects the history, challenges, opportunities, and teachings of the IJS. Chapter 3 evaluates the method used in the shaping of this thesis. Chapters 4 and 5 report the findings of the cantorial interviews.

Chapter 2
The Institute for Jewish Spirituality

In its very focus, the Institute for Jewish Spirituality (IJS) taps into contemporary Jews' search to relate to God and to experience God in their lives. This need is expressed in the broader culture through the contemporary spirituality movement, a trend that has continued since the 1960s when Jews began to turn away from strict rationalism of previous decades in favor of Jewish mysticism. At that time, validated by Gershom Scholem's exposition of previously spurned mysticism as a "coherent intellectual structure"[4] and fueled by widely popular experimentation with psychedelic drugs, an interest in interpersonal relationships and personal individuality, as well as a general rebellion against the establishment, Jewish mysticism made a roaring comeback. Curiosity about mysticism developed into a more broad-based interest in spirituality in the 1990s.

This interest underlies the spiritual "seeker" phenomenon, which continues to be at the forefront of our contemporary cultural backdrop. As natural communities[5] have continued to disappear in our modern life given increased social and geographic mobility, as well as a general sense of uncertainty about the future, people have become painfully aware of a perceived lack of meaning in our modern lives. With this realization of a lack of meaning, comes the desire "to make meaning and to identify with something greater than ourselves."[6] All of this is happening in a society that exhibits a tremendously high threshold for religious pluralism, where exposure to other sacred traditions and practices

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[4] Borowitz, Eugene B. *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: a Partisam Guide*. Behrman House, Inc, Springfieled, NJ 1995, pg. 250

[5] "Natural communities" is a term used by Dr. Lawrence Hoffman in "What is Jewish Spirituality?" in *Synagogue 2000: Prayer Curriculum*. He defines this term as "farm communities where people lived all their lives, married each other, and settled down into predictable ways of life until they died." These communities are characterized by stability and certainty.

[6] Hoffman, Lawrence. "What is Jewish Spirituality?" in *Synagogue 2000: Prayer Curriculum*

is easily accessible, and where personal choice and diversity are highly valued and praised. In this social milieu, the disillusionment felt by the current generation with regard to the triumph of reason has freed religion to be grounded in faith and experience directly, rather than in rational arguments, as leading sociologist Robert Wuthnow has observed.[7]

It is in the midst of this social context in the late 1990s that the idea for the Institute for Jewish Spirituality (IJS) was born. While the IJS is only one response to the spiritual seeker movement, it serves as a valuable case study, especially given its relatively significant reach within the Reform movement at present. The idea for the Institute began developing after Charles R. Halpern, the then-president of the Nathan Cummings Foundation, came back from a conference where he had heard Drs. Arthur Green and Michael Fishbane speak about the environment, Judaism, and spirituality. Electrified by these presentations, Halpern turned to the then- Program Director of Jewish Life at the Nathan Cummings Foundation, Rabbi Rachel Cowan, and charged her with creating a response to what Halpern and the Foundation felt was a "dearth of living spirituality and day-to-day practice in the liberal Jewish community."[8]

Cowan reached out to Rabbis Nancy Flam, Sheila Peltz Weinberg, Larry Kushner, Jonathan Omer-man, and Dr. Arthur Green. The group brainstormed, trying to identify the need and the possibilities. These original six, with the exception of Kushner, continued to expand their thinking in the second stage of brainstorming, when the think tank was expanded to include Rabbis Shefa Gold, Michael Strassfeld, and Alan Lew, as well as Sylvia Boorstein, and Drs. Michael Fishbane and Melila Hellner-Eshed.

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[7] Wuthnow, Robert. *After the Baby Boomers : How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007; pg. 89, 110.
[8] Interview with Rabbi Nancy Flam; August 18, 2011

According to Flam, from the beginning of the process, there was an understanding that personal stories and experiences of the think-tank's members needed to be "up-front, accessible, and clear." As part of the brainstorming, each of the participants chose and presented a favorite spiritual teaching and led ***davening*** or some kind of a spiritual practice. At the end of this program, the plan emerged for an eighteen-month cohort-based program, which would include four retreats, as well as ***chevruta*** study and individual work on spiritual practices between the retreats.

Given the group's emphasis on personal stories and experiences, it is not surprising that the approach to the development of spirituality, as adopted by the IJS, emerged from the think-tank's participants' areas of expertise and personal interests. To that extent, the fundamental emphasis of the Institute on contemplative practices was largely inspired by Jonathan Omer-man's work since 1985 as the president and founder of ***Metivta: a Center for Contemplative Judaism.*** This was an academy for adult religious education in California that "sought to provide an integrated approach to Jewish religious life, centered on practice of meditation and the exploration of traditional spirituality."[9] Additionally, Sylvia Boorstein's work in mindfulness development, as well as the systematic approach in which mindfulness meditation can be taught, led to the adoption of mindfulness meditation as a core practice. This core practice was developed further by Sheila Peltz Weinberg, Boorstein's student, whose Rabbinic education allowed her to infuse the mindfulness meditation practice with specifically Jewish language.

From the beginning there was no question that ***t'filah*** and ***talmud torah*** would be fundamental core practices of the Institute, according to Flam. Arthur Green's expertise in Jewish mysticism and Hasidism was influential in the Institute's decision to adopt the study of

[9] http://www.omer-man.com/CV.html

Hasidic texts for the core practice of Talmud Torah. This choice of Hasidic texts made sense on its own grounds, for, as Gershom Scholem has observed, the founders of Hasidism enacted a shift in focus away from theosophical speculation on the dynamic process of divine emanation toward a "mystical psychology" focused on the dynamic structure of human experience.[10] Given the Institute's focus on mindfulness and the inner life, the language of Hasidut appealed to the organizers because of its tendency to psychologize and personalize. Furthermore, in the contemporary context, where the importance of the individual and her experience are of foremost importance, texts that psychologize and personalize the Divine, the unknown, and the mystical, thereby creating a connection to the personal human drama, are likely to resonate with the modern learner.

The significance of finding the appropriate Jewish language to characterize the Institute's version of contemporary spirituality should not be minimized since, from the very beginning, the IJS was shaping a specifically Jewish expression of spirituality. According to Flam:

> A really fundamental impulse of the Institute is helping Jews learn language that they can move into and practice, …with which to speak about the inner life. And that's of fundamental importance to us. Without the language, without the articulation, without the recognition, without bringing this into community, our own deep, most treasured experiences in spiritual life stay hidden, even to ourselves.[11]

In order to be able to communicate to participants a specifically Jewish language to understand and describe their inner experiences, the IJS needed first to develop this language for themselves. Although not exclusively, the Institute has largely adopted the language of Hasidic teachings and concepts from the first, second, and third generation of Hasidim for reasons discussed above. Green was influential in the beginning of this process and it was developed further by Rabbi Jonathan Slater, who came on board the IJS's staff in 2001, after the establishment of the Institute.

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[10] Scholem, Gershom. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York: Schoken, 1941; pg. 341.
[11] Interview with Rabbi Nancy Flam; August 18, 2011

Since its founding in 2000, the IJS has branded itself as a unique response to "the yearnings of countless Jews – rabbis, cantors, educators, and lay leaders alike – to find a deeper, more meaningful connection with the Spirit of the universe, with God."[12] The institute's goals have broadened to include "intensive learning experiences for Jewish professionals and lay people who are committed to deepening their own Jewish spiritual lives and making the connection between the 'inner' work of spiritual growth and the 'outer' work of creating more justice and compassion in the world, [as well as] to support these Jewish professionals in creating environments in their own communities that will provide such learning opportunities for others."[13] The Institute's understanding of spirituality involves "nurturing the human capacity to develop one's personal understanding of God; to seek out truth and purpose; to discover meaning in personal and communal prayer; to develop relationship with one's deepest and most authentic self and with others; to find strength and hope and maintain balance in the face of challenges; and to experience deeper joy at times of ***simcha.***"[14]

The eighteen-month program, as originally envisioned, includes four five-day retreats at each of which, the participants explore core practices, which have been expanded by the Institute's staff to include not only mindfulness meditation, prayer and text study, but also yoga and spiritual direction. According to the leadership of the Institute, many of the texts are offered for the first time for study in English. In between the retreats, participants are involved in weekly ***chevruta*** study with their colleagues, as well as in intentional development of their own spiritual practices.

[12] http://www.ijs-online.org/about.php
[13] IJS website: http://www.ijs-online.org/about_mission.php
[14] IJS website: http://www.ijs-online.org/about_spirituality.php

One indication of IJS's success is the fact that every one of their seven rabbinical cohorts over the course of the last ten years has been oversubscribed. According to the leadership of the Institute, there is a waiting list to get into the program. To date, 210 prominent rabbis have completed the program[15] and interest remains strong. The Institute is committed to being a part of the mainstream, according to the Chair of the Board of Directors Larry Schwartz.[16] Their efforts appear to be paying off, given the fact that the majority of the rabbis and cantors who have participated in the program serve in mainstream Reform congregations. In addition, the IJS is expanding its reach into the educational arm of the Reform Movement. As of the fall of 2011, the IJS began offering a course on developing personal spirituality to students on the New York campus of Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion. Eighteen rabbinic and twelve cantorial students signed up to take this brand new elective, which concentrates on the core practices of the Institute, including mindfulness meditation, text study, yoga, and prayer.

To date, sixty cantors have participated in The Cantorial Program of the IJS, a program described by the Institute as a process of study and practice for cantors who seek to "deepen their own spiritual lives and develop their abilities as spiritual leaders and guides for others."[17] According to the IJS's website, through silence and study, cantors become aware of their inner lives and spiritual paths, with the next challenge being the need to "touch the unique way that they, as musicians, express their spiritual beings through music. Out of a deepened awareness of the body and breath in meditation, cantors discover inner resources to translate the spiritual into song. Through study of

[15] E-mail exchange with Rabbi Jonathan Slater
[16] Interview with Larry Schwartz on April 22, 2011
[17] http://www.ijs-online.org/programs_cantor.php

texts, they uncover frameworks for conceptualizing the effect of song on the soul and on God."[18] By engaging in such spiritual exercises, the IJS seeks to bring all of these learnings to song. Like rabbinic retreats, cantorial retreats combine meditation, prayer, text study, yoga, and spiritual guidance, but also include musical study and engagement in singing as a spiritual practice.

According to Rabbi Jonathan Slater, a co-director of Programming who has been responsible for the cantorial program at the IJS since 2001, the Institute from its inception was committed to training the spiritual leaders of the synagogue, starting with the rabbis and then cantors and educators. Despite this commitment, only two cantorial cohorts have been actualized, the first in January 2003-July 2004 and the second in January 2006-July 2007, compared to seven rabbinic cohorts, which happened back-to-back and in some cases even overlapped. The rabbinic cohorts have been oversubscribed and have needed little recruiting following the completion of the first cohort, which began in 2000 and had thirty-five participants. Not so with the cantorial cohorts, which required a serious degree of recruitment on the part of the Institute's staff, and still resulted in undersubscribed cohorts, and even an inability by the Institute to fill a third cohort.

Rather than a lack of interest on the part of the cantors, however, both Larry Schwartz and Rabbi Slater point to three factors that make participation in the Institute challenging for cantors. First, despite the fact that the IJS charges the cantors a lower tuition than the rabbis, it is more difficult for cantors than for rabbis to pay the tuition fee because they tend not to have access to discretionary funds and other finances that would go to their educational opportunities. Second, cantors find it harder to receive time off to attend the retreat, especially twice in one year. As an example, one cantor could not

[18] Based on description of IJS' cantorial program; http://www.ijs-online.org/programs_cantor.php

attend because the rabbi with whom this cantor worked had a tradition of going to camp during a week that coincided with the timing of the retreat, and the rabbi's time off was "non-negotiable." This particular example points not only to time restraints, but also to a power differential between cantors and rabbis, as well as an unfavorable dynamic for cantors in prioritizing their personal and professional needs when faced with "competing" needs by rabbis. The third factor shedding light on tepid cantorial enrollment, according to Rabbi Slater, is related to the experience and identity of synagogue cantors as professionals who often feel limitations in their freedom and the level of personal expression in the course of their work. Specifically, according to Rabbi Slater, cantors who are directed by the rabbis with whom they work express the feeling that they are not able to fully realize themselves professionally and artistically in their work. They feel they can be fully themselves only when they are surrounded by other cantors at conventions. According to Rabbi Slater, "Getting a cantor to see personal nurturance as something other than conventions or being with friends someplace that they can perceive of as a safe place is a very tall order."[19] In other words, cantors value their time at cantorial conventions as a safe space to be with friends and colleagues who understand them, and as soul-food that they may not be willing to give up in favor of attending the IJS, which may or may not prove to be as personally enriching as they know cantorial conventions to be.

In further reflection upon the tepid enrollment of cantors in the IJS program, Larry Schwartz and Rabbi Slater both noted that unlike the rabbinic cohorts, the cantorial cohorts were not conducted in consecutive years. As such, some of the momentum had been lost since the most successful recruitment for IJS happens by way of personal

[19] Interview with Rabbi Jonathan Slater on April 28, 2011

recommendations. The fact that the cantorial programs ended up being a year or more apart inhibited the IJS from fully capitalizing on the positive experiences that the cantors had enjoyed at the Institute.

In a separate development, the IJS received a grant in 2007-2008 to do strategic internal planning. In this process, they realized the importance of exploring opportunities for developing potential funding sources for the Institute and emphasizing programs that would be more beneficial to the Institute's financial bottom line. Focus therefore shifted away from cantorial programs, which required hiring additional specifically musical faculty and which were more expensive to run – especially if they might not fill to capacity. Instead, the Institute began emphasizing programming for the laity, who (unlike the cantors) not only paid the total cost of the retreats, but also constituted a base of potential donors and board members. Accordingly, Rabbi Flam, who had been in charge of programming for the rabbinic cohorts turned to developing programming for the laity. Meanwhile, Rabbi Slater switched to running the rabbinic cohorts, which in contrast to the cantorial cohorts, were oversubscribed. Despite the hiatus, however, the Institute is interested in restarting the cantorial program in 2013.

From its outset, the cantorial program was envisioned differently than the rabbinic program. Specifically, as we have seen, the cantorial program was developed and executed with the help of adjunct musical faculty, Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller and Dr. Rabbi Nehemia Polen. Cantor Schiller trained at Hebrew Union College where she has been a member of the faculty for a number of years. She is knowledgeable in Jewish Art Song, and both contemporary and classical liturgy – and possesses particular strength in musical interpretation. Rabbi Polen, Associate Professor of Jewish Thought at Boston's

Hebrew College, grew up in a Hasidic family and has a strong interest in music and *niggunim*– as well as Hasidic texts, which the Institute emphasizes anyway.

Cantor Schiller helped to frame the cantorial program so that the first year focuses on finding the cantor's inner voice while the second addresses the challenge of leading prayer from the spiritual "place" which one discovers "within." Finding the inner voice was intended to locate the voice in the body, a practice informed by the physical awareness deepened by yoga, and the spiritual consciousness gained through mindfulness meditation. The goal of the first year is for the cantor to explore not only where the voice arises within the body, but also what his or her authentic voice is. The aim of the second year is to work on leading from within one's newly focused awareness of the self that is discovered the year before. More aware now of one's own experience, one can more easily address what it means to pray for, with, and from within the constellation of communities where the cantor functions as spiritual leader.

Rabbi Polen's concern with *niggunim* and his understanding of the role of music in Hasidic spirituality changed the nature of the program, as the focus became the desire to understand the spirituality of singing: singing was now seen as possessing the same transformative potential as other core practices of the Institute, such as mindfulness meditation or yoga. According to Polen, singing is an embodied physical activity, which offers spiritual potential insofar as one pays close attention to the vibrations that are coming out of one's vocal cavity, while simultaneously listening louder than one is singing:

> You really want to be attentive to the others in the room and if everyone wants to be attentive to every other in the room, everyone in that room is a *baal t'filah.* Everyone is leading from every seat. Everyone should feel that they're a prayer leader from wherever they're sitting, so that they are

> both emitting sounds and also listening to the sounds of others, and absorbing the vibration as much as they're emitting the vibrations. So, it's a physical practice. When you think of it as a physical practice, it becomes a spiritual practice, much like yoga.[20]

The realization that singing is a contemplative practice in its own right fed back into the rabbinic program around work that the cohorts were doing with respect to the core value of prayer. While identified as a core value, the goals of prayer as a contemplative practice had not previously been clearly articulated; nor had prayer been fully integrated within the other core practices - *t'filah* was just something that happened as part of the program because "that's what Jews do." Working with cantors revealed the Institute's need to readdress the significance of prayer as a spiritual practice in its own right. As a result, the Institute looked more closely at topics of personal and spontaneous prayer, as well as "the relationship to the personal experience, to the immediate experience, the root of prayer in the soul,"[21] areas that had not been previously tapped.

As mentioned previously, the texts studied by participants at the IJS largely come from the first three generations of Hasidim, beginning with the Baal Shem Tov,[22] the Maggid[23] and his students,[24] but also Sefat Emet[25] and Nachman of Breslov,[26] spanning

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[20] Interview with Nehemia Polen, August 10, 2011
[21] Interview with Rabbi Jonathan Slater; April 28, 2011
[22] Baal Shem Tov or BeShT (1698-1760) is the father of Hasidic Judaism.
[23] The Maggid (1704/1710-1772), refers to Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezeritch, who became a disciple of the BeShT and was appointed his successor following the death of his Master in 1760. The Maggid of Mezeritch, as he is also know, is one of the most important propagators of the BeShT's teachings and doctrines. He developed an academy in which he trained disciples to spread Hasidism across Eastern Europe.
[24] Among the Maggid's students and disciples were Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, Rabbi Aharon (HaGadol) of Karlin, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, and Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi.
[25] Sefat Emet – Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter (1847-1905) known for his main work, Sefat Emet; succeeded his grandfather Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter, who had been the first Rebbe of the Ger Chasidic dynasty in Poland.
[26] Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) was the great-grandson of the BeShT and the founder of the Breslov Chasidic movement. The concept of ***hitbodedut*** (unstructured, spontaneous personal prayer) was central to his thinking.

much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While the rabbis mostly study didactic texts, which come from Shabbat teachings by these Hasidic masters, the texts studied by the cantors mostly come from Hasidic tales because, according to Rabbi Slater, cantors exhibit varying levels of text skills. In addition, cantorial participants in the Institute likely exhibit a greater variance than the rabbinic in the range and level of their Jewish education generally. This is because the cantorial cohort draws from different denominations (which vary with regard to the amount of Jewish knowledge expected of cantors), but also because the IJS uses a broad definition of who can be called and identified as a "Cantor" for the purposes of participating in the cantorial cohort. To that extent, the IJS does not require its participants to have matriculated from an accredited cantorial institution or to be ordained, invested, or certified as a Cantor. As a result, some of the participants of the cantorial cohort would be more accurately described as "cantorial soloists" than cantors. Certainly, the degree of variation in the level of Jewish knowledge exhibited by participating "cantors" points to the problem of the contemporary cantorate as an entity that is not fully professionalized, an issue that is worth mentioning in this context, but which is ultimately outside the realm of the current discussion.

The idea to use Hasidic tales, as opposed to didactic texts for the cantorial cohorts was originally suggested by Rabbi Polen. Polen compares Hasidic didactic texts to calculus, which is "great, but challenging – it helps to have a teacher and a lot of prior knowledge. Hasidic texts with their references to Biblical, midrashic, Zohar, Kabbalistic materials, the way they play with words, and the way they handle illusions…it really helps to have it in a classroom setting… It's a little more challenging. Hasidic tales are

meant to be more accessible, are meant to be more open, meant to speak to the heart, and meant to be transformative."[27]

In addition, while some cantors study text seriously, many others, according to Rabbi Slater, are more inclined toward other ways of approaching Jewish classical sources. Accordingly, cantors of the second cohort were offered the opportunity to study a different kind of a "text" in their weekly *chevruta*: the "text" of a *niggun*. A *niggun* is a wordless melody, so the "text" here refers to the ideas (or, we could say the "meaning") communicated by the melodic line of the *niggun*. The thought-process behind this exploration, according to Rabbi Slater, was that "the *niggun* was our own investigation of the experience of singing the *niggun*, the experience of the body, experience of spirit, experience intellectually and then trying to process that together."[28]

Unlike the relatively strict attitude employed with regard to the origin and dating of the texts studied at the Institute, the attitude with regard to the provenance of the *niggunim* and melodies is far more relaxed, reflecting the Institute's "neo-Hasidic element."[29] "We are not looking to become Hasidim of a particular Rebbe, but rather to use the approach and the spirituality of Hasidut in a contemporary mode," admits Rabbi Slater.[30] Accordingly, the leaders of the Institute are more interested in the character and the perceived effect of the *niggunim* that are used than in the sources, which could be Rabbi Polen's childhood or personal knowledge, Shlomo Carlebach,[31] Jewish Art Song, or a contemporary composer.

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[27] Interview with Rabbi Nehemia Pole
[28] Interview with Rabbi Jonathan Slater on April 28, 2011
[29] *Ibid,* term used by Rabbi Jonathan Slater
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] Shlomo Carlebach (1925-1994) – one of the foremost Jewish religious songwriters of the 20th century created his own brand of neo-Hasidic Judaism which relied heavily on his personal charisma and music to spread his message.

While the attitude with regard to the origin of any given ***niggun*** is relatively relaxed, great attention is paid to the way the ***niggun*** is introduced and handled, especially during services at retreats. Rabbi Polen, who together with Cantor Schiller envisioned and enacted most prayer experiences during the retreats explains: "There's certainly nothing wrong with getting people in a participatory mood, and getting people happy and joining – that's really great. But, I think that should only be the first step. That is to say, we want to have people really transformed by the melody – that's really the goal." The efficacy of the ***niggun***, according to Polen, comes from its integration into the holistic whole of the service, as well as from the way in which it is introduced within the context of the service:

> …regarding the mode of presentation of a ***niggun***, I find that I always start softly… First of all, I don't play guitar – I simply don't have that for better or for worse. I think sometimes it's a virtue, but if you have a guitar, I think what sometimes winds up happening is that one may use it as an injection of adrenalin. Sort of like, people are not in a certain place and you're revving up the engine. So, you're pulling people, you're using it as an injection of energy. And, it's my feeling that a deeper and more permanent transformation happens when you beckon people, but allow them to come onboard, be sure to open up the space for them to come on board. That's the subtle difference. So, that is to say, I generally start a ***niggun*** slowly and softly to say: 'I'm opening up the space and inviting you to come into the space, rather than sort of pushing you onto the bandwagon and let's have fun together.' That's the crucial difference.[32]

When probed about those musical qualities of ***niggunim*** that hold the potential to transform, Polen says that he looks for melodies that have a "beckoning, yearning, soaring, searching, anticipatory quality." While suspecting that these qualities would be difficult to capture musicologically, Polen shares a conversation that he once had with Rabbi Carlebach in which he said to the late artist, whom he deeply admired: "Every one

[32] Interview with Nehemia Polen

of your melodies has the following quality: that each note turns to the note that preceded it and says: 'Thank you for being my teacher.' And then, each note turns to the note that follows it and says: 'I give you permission to be even more beautiful than I.'"[33] Clearly, the criteria for the choice of a promising ***niggun*** is not scientific, but has to do with a feeling on the part of Rabbi Polen or Cantor Schiller that a melody will work well for a given situation.

While it may be difficult to put one's finger on the musical qualities of a ***niggun*** worthy of investigation, Polen is clear about ways to evaluate whether the ***niggun*** he has chosen to use is working:

> I certainly do look for participation – that's for sure. I think there's a mutuality of trust that you want to build up and expectation. You know that it's working when the congregation starts to take over and something happens that you didn't expect or foresee. Then, you know it's working. I mean, it's sort of like…once you feel you're pushing, then it's less successful. When you feel that you're being swept along, then you know it's happening… The function of the leader is to create sacred space and that can mean physical space in whatever room you're ***davening*** in, but more broadly the sacred space of the ***kahal*** itself. So, at some point, the ***kahal*** really becomes a sacred space and then it takes over. It becomes the resonant cavity and the emitter of the sacred sound.[34]

While participation by the congregation is important, Polen is describing more than simple singing along by a congregation that is being led by the prayer leader. Rather, he is referring to a level of give and take between the congregation and the leader and a feeling by the leader of letting go and responding to the energy of the congregation, as opposed to blindly pushing ahead to get to wherever the leader envisions the congregation going. The difference between the two styles of leadership is important; it is reflected not only in the way that the prayer leader leads, but also in the way that the

[33] *Ibid.*
[34] Interview with Nehemia Polen

congregation is able to respond. This idea is also related to Polen's view of singing as a spiritual practice, as discussed previously.

In describing the general teaching method of the Institute, Larry Schwartz, who participated in the Institute before becoming a board member, mentioned that the teachers are students and students are teachers. From very early on and until this very day, the instructors teach in a way that does not claim to have all of the answers. Rather, each learning session is seen as an opportunity for the presenters and the participants to learn together, to investigate the depth of whatever comes up as a result of the energies generated in that particular interaction. This approach seems to also correspond to the way that Rabbi Slater described the cantorial program and its future. Given what he knows now from running the previous two cohorts, as well as from his own learning and study, he imagines the next cantorial cohort exploring questions that the first two cohorts may not have done so directly.

Specifically, Rabbi Slater is interested in investigating the role of the cantor as participant and also as the orchestrator of the spiritual performance in its most fundamental meaning. Other areas for possible future investigation include thinking more deeply about the music as it affects the body, mind, and spirit and what it is that we do when we sing together; exploring what it would be like to think about an experience we want to create physically, emotionally, and intellectually by having people sing and use their bodies individually and collectively. Another part of this future investigation would be to examine what it is like to create a culture of participants who understand their role as "pray-ers" in a completely novel way – not as observers and followers, but as

an integral part of the creation of the praying community and the generation of its energies.

Even though the Institute has been quite successful over the course of the last ten years, there is clearly a constant drive to continue to re-envision its offerings, areas of investigation, and agenda. According to Larry Schwartz, the Institute expects to undergo a sizeable expansion in the next three to five years, reaching out to more clergy and laity, as well as to younger members of the population, including the coveted unaffiliated 20-30s. Among the developments is the initiative with its fiscal sponsor, the Jewish Meditation Center (JMC) of Brooklyn, which expects to "sprout" JMCs all over the country in the coming years. In addition, the IJS is looking to provide instructor training in Jewish yoga and mindfulness meditation. With Rachel Cowan stepping down as the Executive Director of the IJS and becoming a Senior Fellow, especially given the new Executive Director Rabbi Lisa Goldstein's background in social justice work, the IJS expects to delve deeper into that area of interest as well.

The current financial structure of the Institute relies equally on foundation support, private donations, and program fees; each provides one third of its budget. In the coming years, by offering more programs for the laity, the Institute hopes to increase the revenues it brings in from program dues, as well as private donations. "Truth be told, spirituality is a hard sell. And, supporting Rabbis and Cantors is also a hard sell for funding," admits Schwartz. "So, the challenge has been: how do you give people a taste of what you do to get them inspired?"[35] Expanded program offerings for the laity just may do the trick.

[35] Interview with Larry Schwartz, April 22, 2010

Despite the strong emphasis on lay programming, the IJS is still fully committed to providing clergy training given its belief that clergy hold the potential to influence more people through their congregations than the IJS could access individually. In practice, however, many of the clergy members have found it difficult to transfer their learning into practice within their congregations, despite the transformative personal experiences that they might have had. In some cases, the community is not ready for change, or the culture is change-averse. In other cases the clergy member does not have enough power and influence within the congregation to enact the change – a factor of particular relevance in the case of cantors who have completed the training, but who work in congregations where the rabbi has not. The IJS has been carefully re-tuning its offerings at alumni retreats, providing leadership training, support in implementing changes within the congregation, and instructor training.

At the same time, the IJS is very clear that congregational change is a long-term project, rather than a short-term expectation. To that extent, the first-year focus remains on the spiritual life of the participants, who are discouraged from teaching or replicating anything of what they learn. Rather, this time is given over to witnessing and processing how they are affected by their spiritual development. Only after the first year, is the participant allowed to begin laying the groundwork for long-term change, starting with how they approach the B'nai Mizvah process or adult education or pastoral care and eventually finding their way into conversation about worship, prayer, and music.

The degree of the Institute's success in affecting the participants, of course, varies. According to Rabbi Slater, some of the cantors who have completed the program emerge with a body of knowledge that they now have access to, but it is just one of many

resources that they can tap into. For some, the experience was personally transformative and leads them to make relatively minor changes in their personal lives and to continue engaging in some new spiritual practice, which sustains them personally. However, for about 10-20% of all the cantors who have gone through the program, the experience is transformative personally and professionally. These cantors "understand how the self-awareness, the non-judgment, the compassion, the moment to moment commitment that's grounded in the mindfulness meditation and yoga is precisely what they need in order to be effective as leaders…whether it's leading *t'filah*, or leading by having a conversation with someone. And while they are living out those practices, they are probably still practicing yoga and meditating, but they understand that this practice then informs how they live and how they work as cantors."[36]

It is the latter group of cantors, the ones who have been transformed by their IJS experience on a personal level and have also been able to translate their learning to their work in the synagogue, whom I interviewed for this study, in the hope of learning how their personal spiritual development has influenced their cantorial identity and their relationship to music. The cantors believed to have been most affected by their IJS experience were identified by Rabbi Slater based on his work with all of the participants as they underwent training and continued to stay involved in alumni programming.

[36] *Ibid.*

Chapter 3
Method

As we have seen, the IJS has conducted two programs for cantors, both under the leadership of Rabbi Jonathan Slater, one in January, 2003-July, 2004 and the other in January, 2006-July, 2007. Sixty cantors participated in the two cohorts, with 21 of these serving in various cantorial capacities within Reform congregations. For the purposes of this thesis, 11 of these 21 Reform cantors were interviewed - just over fifty percent of the total number of participants.

The selection of these eleven cantors was based on an assessment by Rabbi Slater. Specifically, Rabbi Slater arrayed the 21 participants based on the extent to which they had been influenced by their IJS training: 1) Tier I - cantors he believed to have been very strongly influenced; 2) Tier II - cantors he believed to have been somewhat influenced; and 3) Tier III - cantors he believed not to have been influenced by the training at all, or to have been influenced only marginally. Of the 21 Reform cantors, 8 were identified as significantly influenced, 5 as somewhat influenced, and 8 as marginally influenced or influenced not at all. Each of the eight cantors in Tier I (strongly influenced by the program) were invited to participate in the study. Seven actually participated, while one was willing to interview, but ultimately unavailable due to her personal circumstances. Of the five cantors in Tier II (somewhat influenced by the program), four participated in the study, while one was willing to interview, but responded too late to be included. None of the cantors in Tier III (marginally influenced or uninfluenced entirely by the program) were invited to participate in the study. While the cantors interviewed were not randomly selected, the method chosen served the purposes of the thesis, which is to examine the various outcomes of personal spiritual

development on the professional and spiritual identity of the individual cantor in those instances where such outcomes are believed to have actually occurred. As such, the experiences of those cantors marginally affected by the program hold little relevance to the focus of this work.

The interviews with the said eleven cantors were conducted during the summer of 2011. All of the interviews were conducted by phone or through video-conferencing. The average length of the interviews was roughly one hour. Six men and five women were interviewed.[37] In all cases, the interviews demanded that the cantors look back four to seven years in evaluating the effect of the IJS training. In some cases, this distance allowed for the cantors to reflect more deeply on the effect of spiritual development on their cantorial identity: it was compounded by continued involvement with spiritual practices individually and/or supplemented by IJS alumni retreats. However, in some cases, the significant time lapse between the IJS experience and the time of reflection seemed to have blurred the accuracy, specificity, and depth of detail of the information provided by the cantors.

In addition, some of the cantors were simultaneously involved in IJS training and other professional and personal development programs, such as Clinical Pastoral Education. The cantors' involvement in more than one program at the same time makes the establishment of clear causal relationships challenging, especially given the fact that the data is being collected retroactively. A superior method of data collection for the purposes of this work would have required that the cantors reflect on their experiences and any changes in their self-perceptions while they were going through the training at

[37] It is interesting to note that of the 21 Reform cantors who had participated in the program, 15 were women and 6 were men. All 6 men were identified by Rabbi Slater as having been significantly or somewhat influenced by the program.

the IJS; this could have been encouraged through regular journal-keeping, or a series of ongoing interviews at the time. Since no cantorial cohorts are currently running, this notebook version of the study was not a viable option.

Another inherent shortcoming of this data is its lack of objectivity since the cantors are reflecting on changes in their own cantorial persona. Can anyone be altogether certain about their own spiritual progress and the causative factors bringing it about? Then too, we do not know the extent to which respondents may have felt an obligation to judge the impact positively – to justify their going to the program in the first place, perhaps, or just to satisfy what they might have felt to be the bias of the person doing the study. And in the long run, we chose only those who thought the IJS had made a difference in the first place, not Tier III – the people who did not. We have no way of determining what differentiated the two groups, and it may even be that the impacted group would have been equally impacted by any one of many programs because they were in a state of readiness as searchers to be molded by anything, not just the IJS. We cannot say, therefore, what specifically the IJS accomplished, so much as we can say that for these cantors (and, presumably many others) it made a difference – because of what it is and because of what they were. Their personal search corresponded somehow to what the IJS offered at a unique point on their lives as cantors. This is not to say that the IJS is not a significant program: it clearly is. We just do not know the reasons it worked for some but not for others; and we do not know if it alone worked or other programs too, of a similar nature, would have worked equally well.

Hypothetically, we might have overcome at least the personal bias about one's own persona by interviewing the cantors' clergy partners or congregants in evaluating the

perceived changes in the identity of the cantors. But, the significant time lapse in the cantors' training and the difficulty of locating the right respondent-partners made such interviews logistically problematic. In addition, there was an issue of privacy - the potential sensitivities that such interviews might have evoked in the cantors who were being discussed.

Finally, it is notable that in terms of present-day regimen, a wide range and level of spiritual practice is evident among the eleven cantors interviewed. Some of the cantors continue to practice on a somewhat regular basis at least one of the techniques that they learned at the IJS. Some are actively involved in many, if not all, of the spiritual practices that they learned at the IJS and have sought out exposure to other spiritual practices through IJS alumni retreats or other venues. Other cantors, however, have incorporated the tools gained at the IJS into their broader toolbox, but only pull these tools out when they need to use them for teaching purposes. They do not personally practice on a regular basis any of the spiritual disciplines learned at the IJS, despite frequent expressions of regret that accompany this lack of practice. The current analysis does not control for the cantors' present level of involvement with spiritual practices.

Within these limits, however, the current study does claim some validity. My goal has been to learn from the cantors what kind of an impact the development of their personal spirituality has had on their cantorate. Each of the cantors interviewed has undertaken an intensive 18-month program, each of them has contributed a lot of time and money to participate, which suggests that the program was important to them and that they experienced at least some benefit as they were going through it (otherwise, they

would have quit.) Even if the method for collection of this data is not perfect, what follows is a valuable study that helps us to understand how the development of personal spirituality by cantors influences their cantorial persona.

Chapter 4
Findings: the Cantorial Persona

"[…S]piritual practices train our minds, shape our consciousness and mold our character […] We undertake spiritual practice in order to change in some way, even if it is only a change of perspective. In more traditional language we undertake spiritual practices because they bring us closer to God's will."[38]

- Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg

As discussed previously, the IJS employs contemplative practices in its teaching - mindfulness method that permeates the Institute's approach to meditation, yoga, text study, and prayer. Contemplative techniques encourage practitioners first and foremost to reach inward and learn to understand themselves. Reaching God is understood as a life-long endeavor, rather than an immediate concern - something that can be accomplished only through self-knowledge that is ongoing and growing daily. The IJS simply starts its adepts off on a track that is intended to become a regularized regimen for life.

Such association of self-knowledge with spirituality is rooted in what sociologist Robert Bellah calls America's "religious individualism."[39] "It is the self…that must be the source of all religious meaning," Bellah writes.[40] Connected to this phenomenon is ethnomusicologist Jeffrey Summit's observation that when members of Jewish worship communities whom he interviewed spoke about their spiritual lives, they did not say much about God.[41] To explain this occurrence, Summit quotes his mentor and influential ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin who suggests that "many people do not talk about God

[38] http://www.ijs-online.org/about_meditation.php
[39] Bellah, Robert N. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life.* Berkley: University of California Press, 1985.
[40] *Ibid.,* pg. 229.
[41] Summit, Jeffrey A. *The Lord's Song in a Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship.* Oxford University Press, 2000.

because contemporary religious expression is primarily about themselves."[42] It should not be surprising that in such a milieu, contemplative practices find appeal.

Although mindfulness meditation has Eastern roots and is widely practiced by people in North America outside of any religious structure, the Institute's leadership understands it as not simply in concert with Jewish tradition, but as deeply rooted within it. To that extent, Rabbi Peltz Weinberg writes:

> Shabbat, or Sabbath, is a kind of retreat. During a Sabbath you do not engage with your environment in order to change it. Shabbat means literally to sit or to cease. When you sit or cease, you become present to the created world. We are so busy creating more, trying to survive and reach goals during the week. Sabbath is a meditation, a 25-hour-a-week mini-retreat. When we go on retreat in a way we are recreating a Sabbath.
>
> Another core Jewish principle is the principle of freedom. We celebrate it in Passover, getting out of Egypt. We ask ourselves: "How do we become free moment to moment in order to be a model to others?" Mitzrayim means "narrow," referring to Egypt, to coming out of the narrow place of slavery, into freedom.
>
> Another fundamental Jewish idea is of turning or returning, called Teshuvah. The high holy days, this time of the year, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, have that theme. We come back to our attention, our own sense of being worthy or being beloved or in God's presence. Coming back to attention is meditation practice. It describes how the mind moves away from attention and needs to be brought back. It is natural to turn away. How can we cultivate the willingness, the desire to turn us back to attention?
>
> So those are some examples of what you might call "Jewish mindfulness." Judaism is mindful; mindfulness is also Jewish. That's how I think of it and that's the way we teach it.[43]

Thus, the Institute understands mindfulness practices as deeply rooted within the Jewish tradition and reflecting Jewish values and teachings.

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[42] *Ibid.*, pg. 152.
[43] "An Interview with Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg." Featured in the *Garrison Institute Newsletter* (Autumn 2008) http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=180&Itemid=156

Much ink has been devoted to describing the benefits of practicing mindfulness spirituality. Daniel J. Siegel, for example, summarizes the benefits of mindfulness, as reported through scientific research.[44] Defining mindful awareness as a form of intra-personal attunement, Siegel writes that mindfulness creates documented improvements in immune function, inner sense of well-being, and capacity for rewarding interpersonal relationships.[45] According to Siegel, specific applications of mindful awareness "improve the capacity to regulate emotion, to combat emotional dysfunction, to improve patterns of thinking, and to reduce negative mindsets."[46] Furthermore, Siegel (and other authors[47] whom he quotes) claims that mindfulness may commonly result in outcomes, such as patience, non-reactivity, self-compassion, and wisdom. Relationships with others are improved because of an enhanced ability to perceive non-verbal emotional signals from others and an augmented ability to sense the internal worlds of others.[48] An additional study quoted by Siegel, revealed five factors regarding the effects of mindfulness meditation as follows:

- Non-reactivity to the inner experience (perceiving one's emotions without needing to react);
- Observing/noticing/attending to sensations, perceptions, thoughts, feelings and choosing to remain with them even when unpleasant;

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[44] Siegel, Daniel J. *The Mindful Brain: Reflections and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being.* New York: WW Norton, 2007.
[45] Siegel, Daniel J. A Brief Overview Adapted from *The Mindful Brain: Reflections and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being*, pg. 1.
[46] Siegel, Overview, pg. 5.
[47] Bishop, S.R., Lau, M., Shapiro, S., Carlson, L., Anderson, N.D., & Carmody, J. et al. "Mindfulness: A Proposed Operational Definition." *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, (2004.)
And, Dimidijian, S.D. & Linehan, M.M. "Mindful Practice." In O'Donohue, W., Fisher, J. & Hayes, S.(Eds.), *Cognitive Behavior Therapy: Applying Empirically Supported Techniques in Your Practice.* New York: Wiley (2003)
[48] Siegel, pg.5

- Acting with awareness/not on automatic pilot/concentration/non-distraction;
- Describing/labeling with words (ability to put one's beliefs, opinions, and expectations into words);
- Being nonjudgmental of experience (refraining from judging self for thinking certain thoughts).[49]

Improved Self-Understanding

Scientific findings related to the above benefits find support in interviews with cantors involved in the development of their personal spirituality through the use of mindfulness practices while at IJS. Many cantors cite improved self-understanding as an outcome of their spirituality training there. "Meditation is wonderful for me," one cantor who has been in the field for over twenty years testifies. "Especially if I'm in an anxious, overworked, stressed kind of time. If I can make the time to meditate even a little bit every day, it's so helpful. It just helps me get the clarity to recognize when I'm allowing something to bother me perhaps more than it really needs to, or when I just have free-floating anxiety that isn't necessary."

Another cantor says that IJS training has helped him to refocus how he approaches his cantorate fifteen years post-investiture:

> It helped me relax, […] helping to refocus on what's really important. Not only in terms of what needs to get done, but also where I want to spend most of my energies and how I want to establish my cantorate. It helps me to ignore the distractions and to be able to handle a lot of the things that come across my desk[…] This is positively affecting the cantorate that I want to establish. It also helps in dealing with Temple politics.

[49] Baer, R.A., Smith, G.T., Hopkins, J., Krietneyer, J., & Toney, L. (2006). Using self-report assessment methods to explore facets of mindfulness. *Assessment,* 13 (1), pgs. 27-45.

Improved self-understanding helps this cantor to prioritize his numerous professional demands and to concentrate on the issues that are more pressing for establishing the kind of cantorate that he envisions for himself.

Improved Inter-Personal Relations

Cantors emphasize that spirituality training has improved their capacity for inter-personal relations.

> I realized that I have been running away sometimes physically, or psychologically, or emotionally from those difficult people in the congregation. Every congregation has its crazies and there's this one person in the congregation who when I would see her, I would literally hide behind the pillar. And, then after [mindfulness training and] acknowledging the Hasidic teaching [that every person is made ***b'tzelem Elohim***] I realized that why don't I just go toward her – not only psychologically, but physically go toward her. A couple of weeks ago, in the middle of services, I just sat next to her and she is somewhat disagreeable, and I put my arm around her. For me to do that, to that woman in the first place who is so difficult, but I realized that that was what she needed. I don't think that I would have done that naturally. I think that that's something that you learn – you learn to recognize that, you learn to recognize yourself. I think that the IJS did that.

This cantor's observations are in tune with research demonstrating that mindfulness development improves the subject's ability to perceive non-verbal emotional signals from others, and that it enhances the capacity for empathy. These are skills that are highly relevant and valuable for cantors, as members of the clergy.

Regulating Personal Emotion

The same cantor, who has been with his congregation since his investiture in 1988, continues: "In the interpersonal stuff, it's never forgetting that we're ***klei kodesh,*** but also the humanity that I try to seek out, that I try to embrace in each person. I think

we all try to do that, but I think from IJS, this journey has allowed me to become a better listener. My ears are more attuned to what's going on." Also commenting on her improved listening abilities and character traits, another cantor – currently in a leadership position within the American Cantors Conference (ACC) - says:

> [Training at the IJS] really undid a lot of personality scaffolding that I had constructed over the years – sort of reactive, flippant, stressful, high – not high-energy, but high tension that came to me naturally from my home life growing up. And, so I sort of had this scaffolding around me that was short, or sharp, or reactive, or sarcastic, superficial even. It was scaffolding. [Mindfulness training at IJS] opened back up to me a different way to listen and respond. I did not listen well before then. I just didn't. I mean I heard a lot of things, but I did not listen. I talked a lot. I talk much less now. I listen a lot more now.

The development of her spiritual being allowed this cantor to improve her capacity to regulate personal emotion, which in turn has made her a more generous listener and has allowed her to undertake and successfully function in her high-visibility position within the ACC.

Challenging Preconceived Notions

One cantor notes that a text she had studied at the IJS challenged her not only to listen better, but also to reconsider the assumptions she brings to her interactions with others, "trying to be more open on preconceived notions, on what we all think based on how a person is without really knowing what's behind it." Practicing such openness and compassion has improved this cantor's ability to better respond to the specific needs of the congregants in front of her, rather than to the assumptions that she brings to her interactions. At the same time, this practice has allowed her to accept her congregants as

flawed human beings that they are, a quality that has helped her to function within a divided congregation.

In a similar vein, another cantor notes:

> I became much less judgmental. I became *much* more aware of my speech and the words that I put out into the world, particularly as they concern other people. I think I became a better listener. And, I think I saw myself more as part of a larger community – Jews, human beings. I just felt more integrated into my own life. I don't think that I feel as fragmented in my own life as I used to.

Practicing an increased degree of compassion for the people around her leads to a feeling of greater integration for this cantor, who often finds herself presenting in different congregations. The feeling of greater personal integration allows her to function more effectively in her cantorial capacity, as well as in combining her professional life with her roles as a mother and wife.

Greater Self-Acceptance

For the cantor quoted above, exhibiting more compassion toward congregants works hand in hand with (and is likely rooted in) her accepting herself as a vulnerable and imperfect human being. This journey to greater self-acceptance, understanding, and compassion begins on the IJS retreats. Another cantor, who participated in the IJS during a time of a major professional transition from working part-time to entering a new full-time position, recalls: "Each of us – we all were able to be completely human, to be vulnerable, to share our feelings in the most open-hearted way. Our feelings, our thoughts, our prayers – everything was very, very beautiful and open-hearted. We were ourselves, we weren't wearing masks." As this cantor recalls, the atmosphere of the

retreat allowed her to put down her guard, to be simply human, and to share her feelings with the people around her.

The process of opening up and the clarity that she gained through the process allowed this cantor to enter her new position with a fresh energy, unburdened by previous baggage that she had been carrying. It also allowed her to grow personally which, in turn, changed her view of what a capable spiritual leader might act and feel like: "I think all of us grew as compassionate human beings and we realized that we could be vulnerable and also be good spiritual leaders."

Importance of a Personal Spiritual Practice

The cantor goes on to explain that in order to encourage spiritual development in her congregants, she needs to have a rich spiritual life herself: "We had to touch that part of ourselves in the company of others and to feel together the kind of nourishment, comfort, and support that we got from praying together, studying together. This is the same thing that we want to bring to our congregations, but we don't often have the ability to do it ourselves." The ability to work on her personal spiritual being is essential in empowering this cantor to impart it to others.

Significance of Being a Part of a Cohort of Fellow Seekers

This cantor's reflection touches not only on the importance of accepting herself as a vulnerable human being, but also on the significance of doing this work in a cohort of other Jewish professionals: "We didn't have a title in front of us where we had to act a certain way and had to show up in a certain way, and I think that safety that we were

offered, the safe environment that we were offered in which to be ourselves, I think that was not only very healing for each of us, but it also helped us to be spiritual leaders for others, to allow others to be that way, and to have more compassion." Having the space to grow spiritually in a cohort of colleagues allowed this cantor, who has been in the field for over twenty five years, to grow personally and empowered her to pass what she has learned to her congregants.

Rediscovery of Purpose

The experience also helped the cantor above to reconnect with her professional purpose:

> I think we all said to each other that we could all remember why we went into this [profession] in the first place, what brought us to the cantorate in the first place – a deep love for Judaism or the music of the soul, which carried us through, being able to transmit the history of our people, the life of our people through music, and to be part of the community and leaders of the community. We were able to reconnect with that again.

The ability to remember why she went into the cantorate translated into her improved capacity to function in her job. This cantor participated in the IJS at a time of professional transition. Following a number of years without a full-time pulpit, she was once again entering the field as a full-time cantor of a congregation. Unlike in her early years in the cantorate, she felt that this time she had the spiritual support that she required to enter into a new position.

Nourishing the Self

The need to reconnect to a sense of purpose in the example above is one instance of many, pointing to the oft-sited phenomenon by the cantors interviewed of feeling

burned-out and uninspired in their jobs in an absence of a personal spiritual practice. The majority of the cantors interviewed have been in the field for close to twenty years at present and for over ten years at the time of their IJS experience. The spiritual training received at the IJS helped them to revitalize their cantorate by supplying this missing element. As one cantor remembers:

> The opening line to my essay for IJS, I think sums it up. I said that I felt continually in my job – and I have been here 23 years now, so at the time I was here 13-15 years in the pulpit – thinking 'Is this really all there is…?!' And, I really felt I had reached the apex of my career and they're going to find me one day slumped over my desk, drooling over the Haftarah with some Bar Mizvah kid. And, I didn't see a way out. I felt trapped, I felt constrained, I felt disempowered. And, IJS….I think it saved my life. I don't mean I would've killed myself, but I actually started looking at non-cantorial jobs.

Not only has this cantor remained in the field, embracing his work with B'nai Mizvah students, but he has gone on to become one of the leading Reform cantors, excited about the programming that he brings to his vibrant West-coast congregation, as well as about the richness of his personal spiritual practice.

While the story of burn-out by the cantor above is more extreme than most, other cantors also speak about their need to get "the tank filled." "It's such a luxury to be able to spend this time to really get in tune with ourselves," says one cantor, who has been in the field for sixteen years. "This should be a part of everyone's daily regimen and routine. And, especially in our pulpits, it's often more important. We, as clergy and spiritual leaders – for us to be able to impart [the importance of personal spiritual practice and attunement] that we want for our congregants, then we also need to pay attention to ourselves." This cantor, a regular yoga practitioner prior to her IJS experience, continuously referred to the training that she received at the IJS as a "necessary luxury" –

an experience that she enjoyed, but one that is truly essential to the cantor's ability to function well in her job and to inspire her congregants to develop their own spiritual lives. "You can't share that which you don't have" is a phrase that kept coming back in many an interview with regard to spirituality.

Significantly, "having it" was understood as a practice that needs constant development and nourishment, preferably outside of the community that one serves as its leader and, ideally, surrounded by other Jewish professionals.

Another cantor, who grew up Orthodox and had a very rich prayer life growing up, speaks to a similar point in her re-discovery of personal prayer in the course of her IJS training:

> We are very blessed to have this calling and it's really surprising how far-reaching our voice can go – if we just open up our sights a little bit and really understand the full meaning of prayer and when we really start praying. I think many years went by when I was a cantor in the early days when I lost my connection to prayer in some ways. I was doing it for others, but I wasn't doing it for myself. Finding that again, it rekindled a light for me and I've started to just discover prayer.

For this cantor, as well as for several others, praying and developing a personal spiritual practice within a supportive community of fellow spiritual seekers was one of the most rewarding features of the IJS.

Deepening Sense of Self and Awareness of God

Having the space to deepen the personal sense of self is another theme that emerged in several of the interviews. "Our task in life is to truly know ourselves," says one cantor, reflecting on her takeaways from the Institute. Another cantor remembers, "It was so enriching to really learn about myself by sitting in silence, by studying, by

working with a partner during the year and studying text, by doing retreats." While acknowledging a greater understanding of the self, virtually each of the cantors interviewed spoke about an increased awareness of God in their lives and an improved connection to the Divine, as a result of their IJS training.

Improved Ability to Communicate about God

Many of the cantors testify that the IJS helped them to find the vocabulary to speak to their congregants about God. "I feel very comfortable talking to teenagers and adults and anybody about God in a way that I just didn't before," says one cantor, who also comments on the fact that she now has a God that she can believe in, whereas before she did not. Other cantors also echo this sentiment, speaking to their improved ability to converse and teach about God to congregants and about finally possessing the vocabulary to describe their own religious experiences.

"I think my language has changed, my lexicon has developed," says one cantor in reflecting on how he has encouraged his congregants to bring a new openness to finding God in their own lives, just as he has in his. "I constantly put [God] out there. It's the way I write, it's the way I speak." The same cantor attests to a freshly gained sensitivity to the terminology he uses in speaking about God: "I'm reluctant to use the word God because I don't think that's where [the congregants] might be…I prefer to use 'the Holy' or 'the Imminent' or something like that, so that nomenclature is not an issue." As a result of his personal spiritual development, this and other cantors feel more comfortable conversing about God with their congregants. They also have more vocabulary to discuss

the topic, as well as a greater sensitivity to the kind of language that might be off-putting or appealing to their congregants.

At least one of the reasons for cantors' greater facility in speaking about God to their congregants stems from the fact that through their IJS training these cantors are learning to recognize God in their own lives and are gaining the vocabulary to describe such spiritually meaningful experiences. One cantor says that although prior to his IJS participation, he was aware of his connection to God and was attempting to define for himself the meaning of being in a relationship with the Divine, a satisfying articulation of this relationship in terms of a God image came only as a result of his work with the IJS. "The impact of the IJS was to integrate and form, expand, open and re-interpret that knowledge, information, and experience in an entirely new way."

Another cantor, who had experience with contemplative practices prior to the IJS outside of a Jewish context, notes that the IJS empowered him with a specifically Jewish vocabulary to express his theology: "It gave me the Jewish vocabulary for the same ideas that I had while I was studying yoga and Buddhism. It gave me the Jewish version of it and I think that ultimately deepened my experience of Judaism." It is noteworthy, that finding a Jewish vocabulary not only allowed this cantor to speak to his congregants in a more "Jewish" way, but also intensified his own personal connection to Judaism.

The outcomes discussed thus far have, for the most part, been directly related to the personal and interpersonal benefits of mindfulness practices. As we have seen, these benefits include increased capacity for empathy, improved ability to regulate emotion, and an enhanced facility to describe one's beliefs and opinions in words. As such, the

outcomes discussed thus far confirm the scientific research on contemplative practices and can be understood as natural extensions of such practices.

Enhanced Vocal Performance

A more surprising outcome - one that the literature on mindfulness could not have predicted - is related to the cantors' perceived enhanced vocal performance. Commenting on the time when she was involved in training at the IJS, one cantor who has always had music as part of her life recalls:

> My singing evolved in a whole new way in this period of my life than it ever has before. [...] I think that singing is a very holy practice and the more we know ourselves, the more comfortable we are with ourselves, and the more open-hearted we become as we grow ourselves and we heal, it shows in our voices. The voice is the window to the soul. There are voices that are beautiful voices and they're beautiful to hear and to listen to, and then there are voices that are beautiful to hear and to listen to, but they also can help people to open their closed hearts, and be really moved and inspired. And, the difference, I think, is that one person has really honed their skill as a singer and the other person has honed their skill as a singer and has also worked on themselves and evolved as a human being.

This cantor connects her vocal improvement to the better knowledge of self that she received as a direct result of her personal spiritual development. This statement should not be taken lightly. Through his or her work, every artist hopes to reach another human being in a meaningful way. If this is the case for artists working with secular art, how much more so should this be the case with a cantor, whose effectiveness is directly tied to her ability to inspire congregants to open up to the possibility of experiencing something greater than themselves. A cantor's ability to evoke an emotional response from congregants through her voice is at the core of creating a religious musical experience.

According to the opinion just cited, the ability to do so is directly related to the cantor's personal spiritual development, rather than technical training alone.

Another cantor, a lyric soprano who holds Bachelor and Masters degrees in vocal performance, recalls coming back from her second or third IJS retreat and having her accompanist comment after the service: "Wow! What happened to you? Your singing is so beautiful!" This cantor continues:

> I think I was just inspired. I think I'm more comfortable to allow more of myself to come through and not try to be anything that I think that [my congregants] want. […] And, I think they feel it in the music. And it's crazy – after all these years I'm sure that my voice as an instrument – it's not declining necessarily, but in very subtle ways I'm sure that it is. But, I think people are much more moved because I'm just more open and I allow the music to come through me more than I used to when I was more nervous, and more tied up in knots.

In response to whether this cantor's more relaxed presence is a result of a different psychological stance, she says: "Yes, it is psychological, but it's also in taking on a different sort of mindset, [in being connected] and feeling differently. […] I think there's a God in my life that I actually believe in now. And, I don't think there was before." For this cantor, a relationship to God translates into her improved ability to use her vocal instrument effectively. Interestingly, not only is this change noticeable in the cantor's self-assessment, but it is also noted by congregants, co-clergy, and fellow musicians.

A stronger relationship to God also leads to an altered understanding of the cantor's purpose in leading services. One cantor comments that her training at the IJS taught her to be more open and flexible during services, as well as to understand her role as a prayer leader in a different way – not simply as a musician, but as a guide on a journey, where music is a means to another end. More on this will be discussed in the

next chapter, but it is relevant to note at this juncture that an altered understanding of her purpose in services has improved this cantor's voice:

> Musically my voice is stronger. […] I think that I feel freer physically and that has freed up my voice. Because I'm quite aware that it's more effortless than it used to be. And, I think it's because I'm old enough and because I'm going for something different. I think it's because I'm not so concerned about what tones I'm producing – I'm more concerned about the bigger picture.

For this cantor, her training at the IJS has resulted in a more actualized relationship with God, which in turn has influenced the way that she understands her role as a prayer leader and has led to a perceivable vocal improvement. While the exact reasons why cantors think their voices have improved differ, the theme of vocal improvement as tied to personal spiritual development emerged in the majority of the interviews. This finding is significant in that for each of the cantors, the noted vocal improvement did not stem from increased technical training, but was tied to spiritual and personal development, which in turn affected the physical.

We see, then, that cantors who participate in IJS training report that they are more effective clergy and musicians as a result of their personal spiritual development. Many of the improvements cited by them are related to the healing benefits connected to contemplative practices, such as mindfulness meditation, which the Institute employs. Some of these benefits include improved self-understanding and inter-personal relations, enhanced ability to regulate personal emotion and to challenge preconceived notions, greater self-acceptance and compassion, rediscovery of personal and professional purpose, deeper awareness of God, and augmented ability to communicate about the Divine in theological and experiential terms. Another theme that emerged from the interviews is the cantors' enhanced vocal attributes. These personal improvements are

understood by the cantors as being significant in propelling their cantorate forward and in affecting the way that they understand themselves as professionals and clergy. The next chapter will explore the ways in which personal spiritual development by cantors has augmented their service leadership and their role within the congregation.

Chapter 5
Findings: Teaching and Worship

The personal spiritual development of cantors accomplished through training at IJS has an impact beyond the personal and interpersonal dynamics discussed thus far. Cantors who have gone through the program report, as well, that their enhanced personal spiritual development influences the way in which they approach their roles as prayer leaders, as teachers, and as visionaries. This chapter will examine these latter outcomes, which evaluate the impact not just upon who these cantors are internally, but on their role within the synagogue.

A significant number of the cantors interviewed speak about having more courage in the aftermath of their IJS training. For many of them, less fear translates into a willingness to think more creatively, with greater tolerance for taking risks and challenging the status quo. The accompanying freedom allows them to re-envision what they can do in their role as the cantor of a congregation. As one cantor reflects:

> Going through [the IJS] experience, I think gave all of us a certain confidence and expansiveness, so that we saw that… we were given permission to step outside a small box of thinking that we can only do this, this, and that in a certain way. Something about the program helped me to see that I could do many more things in my role as a cantor, and I could bring certain expansiveness to my teaching… It just helped me to think outside the box.

The timing of this cantor's participation in the IJS coincided with her beginning a new full-time position, where she was able to re-envision her teaching.

One of the ways this re-envisioning was manifested was that in her new congregation she started an adult confirmation class, which she teaches in a "very spiritual, mystical way." Through the new process that she has initiated, the adult students learn about each of the Ten Commandments, using extra-biblical materials, such

as midrash and Hasidic texts. In addition, the cantor asks each of the learners to select a Torah "buddy" – a biblical character - to accompany them on their journey of Torah study. Through the process, the confirmands learn about the biblical character they have selected and reflect on how this Torah buddy is enriching their personal and spiritual journey. The result is deeper Jewish learning and the creation of relevance on multiple levels.

In the aftermath of her IJS training, the same cantor also started leading a Kabbalistic hike in the woods. The hike includes activities, such as meditative silence and learning about the mystical qualities of the Hebrew letters. The cantor describes her innovation:

> We would gather in the beginning of the walk, and we would talk about ***shalshelet han'shamot*** [chain of souls] – that we all come into this world with a chain of souls who are here to guide us, to help us - our little circle of souls. And, I invited each person to invite on this walk someone who is still alive or not – just to take them on this walk with them. The first 20 minutes of the walk is a silent walk and I teach them a little ***niggun*** – a little part of the ***niggun*** at the beginning of the walk, then we walk, and then I teach them the second part of the ***niggun*** and I ask them to share what came up during the walk. And, the most amazing things come up in these things – it can be very emotional for people.

The cantor recalls one congregant, a middle-aged attorney, who did not want to go on the walk because she had never done anything like it before. Since the cantor had made the walk a requirement in order to become an adult Bat Mizvah, which this congregant was in the process of doing, she reluctantly came along:

> And, when it was the 20 minutes of walking, she started to cry and afterwards, she told me that she was walking along and she said that she felt that either she was having a psychotic break, or a deeply spiritual experience. She felt like her grandmother or grandfather – someone who had been very religious in her family – put his or her arm in her arm and was walking with her, was taking her by the arm and leading her. She felt this strong connection with this person.

In reflecting on how she came up with the Kabbalistic walk experience and the adult confirmation class, the cantor comments, "I don't know that I would've done that if I hadn't done IJS. Where did that come from?" This cantor credits her spiritual development with having unlocked the creativity hidden inside her and given her the ability to think outside the pale. "All of this stuff is inside of us – otherwise we wouldn't be in this calling. We have it within us and the [IJS] program helped me to expand enough and to think in different ways, in bigger ways, to take more chances, to express myself in a more human, vulnerable way." Her newfound perspective, resulting from personal spiritual development, allowed this cantor to bring fresh and creative programming to her congregation. As demonstrated by the experience of the attorney congregant on the Kabbalistic walk, the IJS empowered the cantor to discover her own ability to touch even the most skeptical of people on a deeply spiritual level.

Other cantors also speak about non-musical initiatives that they have introduced in the aftermath of their IJS training. Many of the cantors report feeling much more comfortable and, therefore, willing to lead Shabbat morning Torah study sessions. According to the respondents, exposure to Hasidic texts in the course of their IJS training leads to increased proficiency with these texts, as well as a significant amount of resources available within easy reach. As discussed previously, Hasidic commentaries tend to psychologize the text of the Torah. This bodes well for modern expressions of spirituality, which tend to identify the self as the source of religious meaning. Predictably, cantors who use Hasidic texts in their teaching report that congregants respond positively to them – no less than the cantors themselves, who first learned these texts at IJS retreats and *chevruta* sessions.

In the aftermath of their IJS training, many of the cantors interviewed chose to teach classes not just on Hasidut, but also on Jewish spirituality and Kabbalah. Some have also led spirituality retreats, which included learning about and practicing techniques experienced at IJS, such as meditation and Torah yoga. A few of the cantors have initiated meditation groups that meet weekly and that have expanded beyond strictly mindfulness meditation to spiritual practices, such as drumming and chanting.

In one example, a cantor taught an adult education class for four years, in which participants met for mini-retreats at the Temple that included Shabbat dinner, text study the following morning, and various activities that afternoon. For one such mini-retreat taking place around Purim, the theme was "Masks" – recognizing and taking off the masks that people constantly wear. The cantor recruited a congregant with expertise in art therapy to lead an activity in which everyone made a mold of their face and then decorated this mask during Shabbat afternoon. Other Shabbat afternoon activities included meditative walks along a nearby lake or sitting meditations. As I was interviewing this cantor, she was in the process of spearheading a new initiative in her congregation on the spirituality of aging with the working title "Mindful Jewish Aging." As the oldest clergy member on her team, the cantor feels that she is uniquely positioned to broach the topic of aging in her congregation. She also believes that the insights gained through her continued training at IJS alumni retreats has prepared her well to do this through the lens of spirituality.

The majority of cantors interviewed report that their personal spiritual development has augmented the way that they think about music in services. To that extent, some of the cantors report that they are now better equipped to explain their

musical choices. As one cantor, who spends a good portion of her time visiting different communities as an artist-in-residence, explains, "If someone were to say to me: 'Can we sit down and chat about the choices you're making musically or otherwise?' I felt better prepared. Because I used to think: 'Well, I don't know…it's just what I felt.' But, now I felt like I could really talk to somebody about the choices that I'm making from a really Jewish place." The ability to explain her musical choices has freed up this cantor to take more risks with respect to the repertoire she chooses.

The same sentiment is voiced by a West-coast cantor who credits the IJS with pushing him in the direction of "erring on the side of becoming a very strong populist." In thinking about an example of this, the cantor relates:

> I think that ***nusach*** is important, but not as important as the effect of quality of what happens in the synagogue. And, I'll give you an example. I stopped a number of years ago singing the traditional ***MiChamocha*** for Yom Kippur because Alan Naplan wrote this ***MiChamocha*** with a cello obbligato and I said: 'Why can't we do this on Kol Nidre?' And the piece has the uplift of a key-change and I knew it worked because when I looked out on Kol Nidre, people were crying. And I said: 'Is that not more important than singing the correct ***nusach***?' And, I really do believe that. I'm not making that up. I also think that…someone once said to me: 'I'm saving Jewish music.' And I said: 'Oh, really? I think I'm saving Jewish souls.' And, I think the saving of Jewish souls is far more significant than the saving of Jewish music. And, I have to believe that I got a lot of that from IJS – it just changed my world-view.

The significance of this cantor's statement should not be underestimated. He is talking about choosing to sing ***MiChamocha*** to a recently composed tune in place of the traditional High Holiday ***nusach***. The ***nusach*** is especially reserved for use at this time of year only and is considered to be a ***misinai*** melody - so ancient and venerated that its origin is mythically assigned to the moment of revelation at Mount Sinai. To add to the significance of the cantor's choice, it can be noted that he is doing so on ***Kol Nidre*** eve –

one of the most revered worship services of the year and one of the best (if not *the* best) attended. The cantor justifies his decision by the fact that the modern tune elicits an emotional response from the congregation in the form of crying.

It is worthwhile to note in this context that crying during worship services has been observed elsewhere as a sign of experiencing a deeply spiritual connection to God. Specifically, it has been documented by ethnomusicologists Ayala Fader and Mark Kligman in their research of B'nai Jeshurun (BJ), one of New York's most innovative congregations admired for really "getting" modern American spirituality. At BJ, Fader and Kligman write, crying is interpreted as "evidence of experiencing God… We call this the 'crying narrative.' The narrative begins with the narrator's search for meaning or a traumatic life event that has been probative; then an unexpected emotional response to BJ prayer; and, finally, breaking into tears that become feelings of joy or peace."[50] While not enough data is available on the how and why of congregants' crying upon hearing Alan Naplan's *MiChamocha* at the *Kol Nidre* service above, the cantor interprets the reaction of his congregants along the lines of a BJ "crying narrative" and as evidence that they are experiencing God.

Most significant, however, is the fact that the cantor credits his personal spiritual development at IJS with "changing [his] worldview" and helping him to realize that music is not an end unto itself. Rather, the cantor now believes that music is subservient to the greater end of "saving Jewish souls," which – it is being implied - can be accomplished at least in part through the successful execution of the sacred drama that is

[50] Fader, Ayala, and Kligman, Mark L. "The New Jewish Spirituality and Prayer: Take BJ, For Instance" in "Spirituality at B'nai Jeshurun: Reflections of Two Scholars and Three Rabbis," *S3K Report* (November, 2009): 10.

worship. In order to appreciate the full import of this idea, it is necessary to refer to the framework put forth by Dr. Larry Hoffman in his assessment of the cantorate in 1991:

> Insofar as two incompatible ideals compete for cantorial allegiance, we can say that there are two separate cantorates, and they are locked in combat. The artistic-aesthetic cantorate is dedicated to the principle that because cantors are, above all, singers, extra-musical concerns are accessory. The artistic-theological cantorate holds that cantors are singers, but above all, they are clergy, so that song serves sacred ends that are defined outside the song itself.[51]

Although this framework is over twenty years old, the tension described therein is still relevant. In many ways, the artistic-aesthetic cantorate is feeling more and more threatened as the post-modern style of American worship continues to evolve, just as the artistic-theological cantorate is strengthening. Hoffman writes that only the artistic-theological cantorate, which willingly engages with questions linking music to spirituality and theology is "spiritually able to meet the 21st century."[52] Using Hoffman's terminology, we can say that the personal spiritual development that the IJS provides transforms an artistic-aesthetic cantor into an artistic-theological one; the spiritual encounter experienced through the process of their personal spiritual development empowers cantors to respond to the spiritual needs of the contemporary synagogue.

In the example, considerations of spirituality and music led the cantor to abandon ***nusach*** in favor of a modern melody, but this is not always the case. In fact, this same cantor says that he uses a lot of ***nusach*** elsewhere in his services. The bottom line is that he understands his job as an arbiter of Jewish music, whose job it is to sift through the vast repository of Jewish music from all sources, but always asking: "What can I use in a synagogue setting that will have the maximum impact on people's lives? Or, on the

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[51] Hoffman, Lawrence A. "Responses" in "The Discussion of Music in Lawrence A. Hoffman's *The Art of Public Prayer*," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* (Summer 1991): 18.
[52] *Ibid.*

liturgy? What does it mean to be a part of the larger Jewish collective that is represented by Jewish music?" These questions could be satisfied by music from any number of sources. In fact, the specific music choices made reflect both the cantor's personal preferences and community norms. The true impact of cantors' personal spiritual development is seen in the kinds of questions that they ask themselves while making their musical choices.

Another cantor speaks to this point by reflecting on the fact that the repertoire he uses is the same as that heard in many contemporary Reform synagogues, including "song-leading repertoire, certain accessible Reform legacy pieces, certain amount of *nusach*, and newly composed works by contemporary composers of various stripes, whose repertoire is approachable." Rather than in repertoire choice, the impact of his work with the IJS is felt most acutely in ***how*** he uses that repertoire, his "interpretation of each of those strands of the current Reform musical practice" and the "mindfulness with which the rabbis and I currently try to integrate the experience that we're trying to create." In thinking about how this integration actually happens, the cantor says:

> I really think that the work that I'm doing has to do with the connection between musical elements in the service, the transitions between those various components, the pacing and articulation of those various styles and how we attempt to sculpt the energetics of the service as a whole. How music through its selection and interpretation corresponds to or guides the embedded experience of that liturgy and its revelation into the deep structure of prayer, and the potential emergence of moments of holiness within that experience.

The prayer experience is carefully structured by the cantor, who pays attention to the desired spiritual energy of the service, the overall experience of the liturgy and the theological message of the prayer experience.

According to this cantor, despite the meticulous planning, the ultimate goal for the service is complete spontaneity and the ability to respond to what is actually happening in each moment of prayer:

> There's a way as part of a contemplative practice that as a leader one can become attached to the collective spiritual energy of the congregation and I think it's an imperative for those of us who lead. And, when I say collective, it has to be understood not as some kind of a monolithic, unison congregational voice, but rather as the assembly into a larger whole of each individual spiritual presence of those who form part of that community. It's about attentiveness to each individual within that congregation as a unique expression of Divinity within that community and as the collective presence of that congregation as something greater than the sum of all of those individual expressions taken as a whole. This is the most important of all.

He understands that he must be intricately aware of his own spiritual experience, but simultaneously respond to the spiritual experience of each of his congregants. He is a conductor of sorts, keeping tabs on each individual member of the spiritual orchestra as the symphony is unfolding. He says, "The cantor as leader of prayer and especially as leader of music both attunes to and harmonizes the individual frequencies of all those individual spiritual experiences that could potentially be happening." Needless to say, this level of awareness takes an incredible amount of practice and may only be possible for a select few of us. Nevertheless, most important in this context is the fact that this cantor's thought process about service leadership is marked by considerations stemming from his deep involvement with contemplative practices, as learned at the IJS.

Boiled down to its basics, this cantor's understanding of his role as the prayer leader relates to the concepts of interconnectedness and mindful awareness. Both of these are concepts that are taught at the IJS and that other cantors speak about as well. Another cantor states: "I have a completely different notion of why I'm doing what I do

[in the aftermath of IJS] and it's less focused on me. It's more focused on us all being connected, which is another mystical thing – the fact that we are all connected. And, that puts a different flag on everything." This cantor is referring to the mystical concept taught at the IJS of *ein od milvado,* "there is nothing but God." All of Existence is interconnected and is One; any separation between us and the rest of creation is the result of our human misconception. For this cantor, remembering the concept of complete interconnectedness during services leads to greater enjoyment of her prayer experience, less concentration on the self, and the ability to feel closer to her congregants.

For another cantor, feeling "connected" as a prayer leader comes from being fully aware of himself in a non-judgmental way. "It could be my overall attitude to what I'm doing when I'm singing - that I'm trying to connect to what I'm doing. I'm trying to be aware, but not self-aware. When I feel like my playing and my singing is all connected and I can really taste every letter - that to me is me being connected, being aware of what I'm doing without being critical of what I'm doing." We saw earlier how refraining from judging one's experience is one of the benefits of contemplative practice. Here we see how this concept works to benefit the cantor in his role as a service leader. Namely, this cantor feels that his greater self-awareness experienced without judgment allows him to bring his congregants into the worship experience on a deeper level and create more spiritually meaningful prayer experiences for himself and the congregation.

Greater self-awareness also impacts the way that some cantors are able to experience personal prayer within the context of leading communal worship. One cantor comments that her IJS training helps her to find the personal prayer space that she needs when leading services:

> I guess that's where some of the IJS work comes in. We all – because we're performers on some level – we look around and we wonder what people are thinking about us. And, as soon as we go there, we've gone out of the space that we want to be in. So, it's noticing when we do that…the mindfulness practice helps me to notice when I've done that and say: "Oh, ok. Time to come back to the center." As opposed to letting myself be dragged away by all the distracting thoughts that do find their way in.

For this cantor, mindfulness practice translates into her ability to recognize when she is distracted. It also helps her to "come back to the center," regaining her state of personal prayerfulness and connection to the text. This is important because, as she explains: "I believe that if I'm really praying, that will help them [congregants] to really pray."

This sentiment is echoed by another cantor, who also finds that he is less distracted during prayer in the aftermath of his IJS experience. Through meditation, this cantor has learned to acknowledge thoughts as they arise without necessarily needing to act on them, or letting them distract him: "[Service leadership has become] easier, or I would have more resources to focus in on maintaining a good, positive energy flow during services and be less distracted by: 'Oh, I have an itch on the back of my neck…' Or, 'The guitar is a little out of tune.'" His IJS training has helped this cantor to maintain a higher degree of focus during services and to concentrate on his intention for the congregation, rather than on personal distractions. This has led to more meaningful prayer experiences for the cantor himself and, judging from the increased amount of positive feedback he receives regarding his service leadership, for the congregation also.

The propensity to exhibit greater awareness flows not only from cantors' engagement with contemplative practices, such as yoga and meditation, but also from ideas and teachings learned at the IJS. One cantor reflects:

> One of the things that we were taught was looking at each letter – each letter as a whole universe. So, once in awhile, as I'm ***davening***, or

> praying, or doing something, I'll grab onto a breath and realize: "This could be the last note that I ever sing and I'm just going to give everything to this one note." And, it doesn't mean singing it loudly, or singing it softly….I'm just going to express everything I have in my soul – just express this thing, right now, in this moment.

As a result of his training at IJS, this cantor has a specific teaching that he is able to lean on in order to experience being truly in the present moment; this teaching enriches his understanding of how he functions as a prayer leader. The cantor comments that it is difficult to sustain this level of presence for the whole service, but that he has been able to do it for one or two prayers at a time. Regardless of the amount of time that he is able to sustain this hyper-awareness, the fact that he holds it as a goal and has a teachings that helps him achieve that sensation is valuable.

Another theme that emerged in multiple interviews is related to cantors feeling that they better understand and can speak about the purpose of worship in the aftermath of their training at IJS. One cantor comments: "It's just a much bigger picture in my head, I think, because of IJS." For this cantor, the goal of worship is "to open people's eyes, hearts, and heads" to what might happen as they take risks during the prayer experience. She wants to know of her congregants:

> What are you hoping will happen when you walk in the door [of the prayer-space]? And, how can I help you to get there? Because that's my job. But, we have to figure out where we want to go and then, I bet, I can figure out how to help us get there… It's just a much bigger picture in my head, I think, because of IJS… If I can get anyone to admit that for them it's not about them and for me to, certainly, remember that it's not about me. It's about what's about to happen when we pray. And, I really think that IJS gave me the voice for that.
>
> When I'm leading, the goal is to try and figure out what the answer is for the group and how far I can take them along their path or off their path. I think I'm personally not interested in feel good prayer unless you walk out the door ready to do something differently or better, even if it's just making other people feel good - that's definitely a big something.

This cantor understands that as a prayer leader, she is akin to a tour guide. She needs to know where the people she is guiding would like to go and then help them to get there, without leaving anyone behind. As she understands it, her job is to ensure that the prayer experience has a direction and a message, so that – having emerged from the journey - the participants are somehow altered on a personal, spiritual, or intellectual level.

Other cantors speak about a similar desire to see their congregants somehow altered following the prayer experience. One cantor explains:

> If we can find a couple of places in the service where they [congregants] can find sanctuary within the Sanctuary, I think that I'm doing my job. And, that they somehow enter the sanctuary and that they leave…and then maybe once in awhile they leave in that kind of a Buberian way – somewhat changed. It doesn't always happen – they're in a weird place, I'm in a weird place, the room is in a weird place. But, if they can somehow let go for 50 minutes, I think that's in some way almost miraculous. So, that's the short-term, weekly journey, which then gets compounded over months, and years, and generations.

The congregants in this cantor's congregation have commented to him that they know that he is taking them someplace. They don't know where it is that he is taking them, but they can feel that they are on a journey. This journey, according to the cantor, is taking place in incremental steps, but it is happening. The cantor credits his personal spiritual development and the work that he has done through the IJS with helping him to envision change and to see it through, regardless of the slow pace.

Cantors' engagement with extra-musical concerns, as related to worship, identify them as artistic-theological cantors within Hoffman's framework. It is precisely this kind of thinking that needs to happen in order to create meaningful worship for the contemporary synagogue. Combined with the expansiveness and creativity that cantors bring to their teaching in the aftermath of their IJS training, it is evident that personal

spiritual development is essential in propelling the cantorate forward and should be an essential part of cantorial training and professional development.

Conclusion

In the beginning of my fourth year of cantorial school at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, I had what proved to be an important conversation with my mentor, a very successful and accomplished cantor. With two more years of school still ahead of me, I wanted to make sure that I was gaining the necessary skills in order to maximize my success in the cantorate. "Yes, I can sing in different ranges and various musical styles... Yes, I can play guitar... Yes, I have pastoral and teaching experience... Personal spiritual development? Well…what do you mean by personal spiritual development??" Up until this point no one had ever spoken to me about personal spiritual development, or my need for it.

What followed was a conversation in which my mentor described his experience with the IJS. I learned that his personal spiritual development influenced virtually every aspect of his cantorate. I became curious. Was my mentor the exception, or the rule? How have other cantors been affected by the process of developing their personal spirituality? What effect has the development of personal spirituality had on their cantorate?

This thesis research answers those questions. Through a series of interviews with the founders and organizers of the IJS and with cantors who have completed training at the Institute, I learned about the influence of spiritual development on cantors personally and on the work that they do. While all of the cantors interviewed received their spirituality training at IJS, this report makes no judgment as to the efficacy of the Institute as compared to any other institution that could provide opportunities for personal spiritual

development.[53] In fact, at least one of the cantors commented that the training received at IJS could have been gotten elsewhere. At the same time, certain aspects specifically make IJS an attractive option for cantorial candidates. These aspects include, but are not limited to, the specifically Jewish lens through which contemplative practices are taught at the Institute, the exposure to Hasidic texts, the opportunity to pray and to develop spiritual practices in a cohort of fellow cantors, and the one-stop-shop approach to different spiritual practices made available through the 18-month process. These characteristics make IJS a good fit for a Reform cantor looking to develop her spirituality.

My research demonstrates that the cantor who mentored me is not alone: others too report the positive impact of the IJS on their cantorate. The benefits fall into one of two categories: 1) personal and inter-personal relations, discussed above under the heading "cantorial persona" and 2) teaching and service leadership, discussed under the heading "teaching and worship." The two overlap, but we can understand the first as a matter of internal spiritual depth and understanding and the second as the impact on the cantor's professional calling.

In the realm of the cantorial persona, benefits include: improved self-understanding, better interpersonal relations, a more regulated personal emotion, greater self-acceptance, a deeper sense of self and connection to God, and as an enhanced ability to communicate to others about God and personal spiritual experiences. Other internal gains include the ability to challenge preconceived notions with regard to others,

[53] While IJS is unique in its offering of spiritual development over an extended period of time, there are other places to receive spirituality training. Examples of such places include meditation and retreat centers, programs offered through other movements (i.e. Renewal movement's Aleph Kallah) or non-Jewish entities, yoga centers, etc. One could also work on these practices independently.

rediscovery of professional purpose, and the realization of the importance of self-nourishment, especially through a personal spiritual practice. One of the most surprising benefits derived from personal spiritual development is enhanced vocal abilities, both an internal matter, obviously, but also central to the second category of impactful results, the cantor's professional calling.

In that realm, primarily related to worship, but also to teaching, cantors report: increased courage to redefine what a cantor can and should do, greater creativity, and improved ability to take risks and think outside the box. They are also more willing to teach text in the aftermath of their IJS training, especially the Hasidic texts that the IJS features, which tend to make Torah relevant through psychologization. In the area of service leadership, cantors feel that they are better equipped to explain the musical choices that they are making. They reflect that their role in facilitating prayer experiences for others relates to the concepts of ***interconnectedness*** and moment-to-moment ***awareness***. Cantors report new-found familiarity with teachings that provide the theoretical framework for understanding and verbalizing these concepts. They are also able to incorporate these concepts into their leadership of the service – they feel decreased distractions, can exercise an attitude of non-judgment, and have themselves the capacity to achieve deeper personal prayer. The result of all this is their enhanced ability to enrich the prayer experience of others. Cantors also report being better able to understand and speak about the purpose of prayer and how they go abut enriching prayer, given that purpose.

Much of this can be summarized by saying that in the aftermath of their personal spiritual development, cantors realize that music is not an end unto itself, but serves

sacred ends that lie outside the music. This understanding places these cantors at the "artistic-theological" end of the spectrum in Lawrence Hoffman's framework of the modern cantorate. Such a shift is nothing short of essential as it turns a cantor who is simply a sacred singer into a cantor who is a liturgist and a theologian, whose primary mode of expression is music.

When my mentor asked me whether I was involved in developing my personal spirituality, he was not only asking whether I meditate, do yoga, or have a personal prayer practice. Rather, he was asking whether I am thinking about the purpose of the sacred drama that is worship and the ways in which the Divine functions within prayer and music. It is this kind of a cantor, a cantor who willingly engages in questions linking music to spirituality and theology – an artistic-theological cantor - who possesses the ability to meet the spiritual challenges of the contemporary synagogue. The development of personal spiritual practice aids in the molding of this new kind of a cantor, highlighting the need to make this development an essential part of cantorial education and professional development.

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