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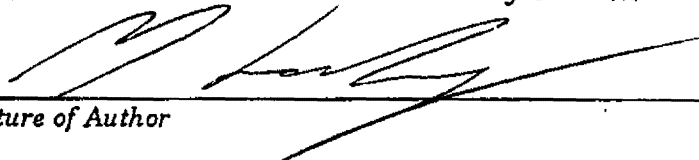
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Music and Kabbalah

Music as the vehicle for mystico - emotional expression of the Jews

Thesis submitted by Michel Laloum in partial fulfillment of requirements for Masters of Sacred Music Degree. Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, School of Sacred Music, March 2001. Thesis advisor: Dr Leonard Kravitz

This thesis has eight primary chapters addressing historical, theological, philosophical and practical subjects, subdivided into twenty-three subsections plus the bibliography. Subdivisions are based on historical period, author or concept being addressed, function or role of music, and liturgical purposes.

This thesis brings together materials, which to my knowledge have never been compiled in this way before. Literature addressing the role of music in communities from Qumran to modernity has been reviewed. I have attempted to review the historic influences upon music and the way that this has impacted upon Jewish music and liturgy throughout history, as well as in our modern prayer books, home liturgy and secular music. The tension between the rationalist rejection of the mystical, and the historically ever present need humanity has for musical expression of the transcendent is examined, if not resolved. Ecstatic and emotional elements in music are recognized, as well as theories of cosmic harmony and the musical expression of philosophical thought.

Materials used range from copies of original manuscripts of the pietistic period through academic literature and unpublished contemporary works by modern day authors. Wide reading of musical, historical, philosophical and mystical writings have been compiled in their relevance to music as a vehicle for the mystico-emotional expression of the Jews.

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New York, New York

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Chapter I

Introduction

Throughout History, music has been the medium of expression of emotion with powerful magical and ecstatic implications. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the historical context of the Jewish mystical world and its influence upon the musical and liturgical realms. Contemporary Judaism is grappling with spirituality in our time. I am hoping that this thesis will help to bring a renewed focus on music's potentially continued powerful role. By retracing its mystical roots, we have access to a rich array of musical tools to shape and articulate the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual forces that form our movement.

Music is simultaneously at the heart and at the outskirts of modern religious expression. Music throughout history has been at the core of prayer and folk life, transmitting central beliefs and traditions. Yet music also contains controversial elements in its seductive invitation to the less tangible realm. Emotion or ecstasy, magic and mysticism stand at the opposite extremes of most modern religious modalities. The spiritualization of the contact with the Divine in Western mysticism, invites detachment from the body – and from corporeality in general – in order to be able to enjoy communion with the Divine. However mystics throughout the ages have combined in their praxis these two ways of relating to reality, which were so characteristic of archaic modes of religion. This thesis examines some of the ways that mystics have used music to connect with the divine. Texts as early as Qumran provide evidence of the role music as a human expression

affects the upper-worlds. Mystical practices have impacted upon liturgy, which in turn impacts the development of Jewish music. This has been true throughout the centuries. From Pythagoras through to the renaissance period music was widely accepted as a science that could influence the cosmos and had the ethical power to affect man's soul. This period forms one of many contextual backdrops that influenced Jewish mystics, their thoughts, poetry and compositions. Chassidic movements adopted the concepts of their mystical predecessors and made it accessible to the public through music.

In writing on the musico-mystical experience, I wish to engage in a dialogue generally ignored by musicologists, and open the horizon for perceiving the musical culture of the time. I hope to describe some alien strands of the musico-mystical culture, and allow that description to interact with and alter our conceptions of ostensibly more familiar strands. I hope to momentarily turn away from the easily heard voices of our western dominated musical perceptions to listen carefully to other voices that have seemed almost too distant to hear. In discussing the hushed voices of our musico-mystical past, I hope to open the possibility to enrich our collective conversation with Jewish culture as a whole.

Jewish music cannot be studied in a vacuum, but must be seen within its context as an articulation of a larger system of beliefs. "Kabbalah", writes Gershom Sholem in his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, "is not the name of a certain dogma or system, but rather the general term applied to a whole religious movement... which has been going on from Talmudic times to the present day". In his attempt to discover, beyond the purely historical connection, a common denominator between the different currents of thought

characterizing respectively the early mysticism of the talmudic period, the Pietists or Hasdei Ashkenaz (9th -12th c.+), Spanish Kabbalah (13th c.) the school of Safed (16th c.), and later Hassidic movements, G. Sholem writes "Such a common denominator can, perhaps be discovered in certain unchanging fundamental ideas concerning God, creation, and the part played by man in the Universe. Two such ideas are namely the attributes of God and the symbolic meaning of the Torah". Indeed, it is through the mystical interpretation of the Torah, that Jewish mystics have sought to find a way of mystical cognition of God and His revelation. However I would argue that the religious movement that birthed the Kabbalah could already be identified in pre-talmudic literature, most notably in the texts of Qumran.

Isaac Arama (d. 1494) says that the secret of music was delivered to Israel together with the Torah¹, while Ibn Sahula (1244-after 1284) claims that knowledge of the secret song leads to knowledge of the Torah². The close interrelationship between music and basic mystical concepts is so clear to period authors, that despite 196 passages from the *Zohar*, *Zohar chadash*, and *Tikkunei Zohar*, no individual passage discussed music for its own sake. In order grasp the mystical symbolism assigned to this art we must attempt to penetrate the hidden worlds sought by the mystic and to seize the scattered musical references in them.

¹ Cited in Amnon Shiloah *The symbolism of Music in the Kabbalistic tradition*, p56.

² Isaac Ben Solomon Ibn Sahula, , as quoted from I. Adler Hebrew writings concerning Music, p173; see also Godwin, Joscelyn, *Music, Mysticism and Magic* p59.

It may be somewhat difficult to establish the way actual music or musical practice influenced mystics in their pursuit of ecstasy and mystical union, or in the way they express this in their musical thought. In contrast to Muslim mystics who usually describe in great detail how music and dance play a decisive role in sending the devotee to ecstasy, Jewish mystics generally abstain from revealing personal experiences, or from providing autobiographical details. While describing the objects of his contemplation in an abstract or impersonal manner, Jewish mystical contemplation is an intimate act, not for public exhibition.

The mystics' ecstatic experience may be described as a "profound meditation through which the mysteries of the Divine Name reveal themselves to the illuminated"³. This state may be reached by prayer with intention (*kavannah*), the singing of hymns, and the science of letter combinations. In every respect the sounds of speech and the speech associated with musical sounds are involved, together implying, recourse to the language par excellence, Hebrew. In the chapter of the song of creating in the tract called *Perek Shirah*, we read that all beings are gifted with language for the sole purpose of singing the 'praise of the creator'. The prevailing idea of the pre-eminence of the Hebrew language and its superiority over all other languages is founded on the concept that it is the one and only language of God; its mystical value arises from the premise that all of creation is an expression of God's language. Furthermore, each individual word and letter takes on mystic and numeric significance which can then be expressed through musical intervals and ultimately become an auditory manifestation of a mystical concept.

³ Amnon Shiloah *The symbolism of Music in the Kabbalistic tradition*, p56.

Chapter II

Historical Context

One of the fundamental principles in Kabbalah is that everything is connected. Thus Jewish music and Kabbalah did not develop in isolation. The classical philosophers as well as many other prominent thinkers of the non-Jewish world of that time struggled with similar ideas as Jewish mystics. Their writings and ideas provided the cultural backdrop wherein a dialogical relationship began. Jewish mystics developed and articulated their own mystical framework within which music played a distinctive role.

1/ Music and Magic: Overview from Pythagoras to the Renaissance

Mag.ic (maj'ik), *n.* 1. The art of producing desired effect or result through the use of various techniques, as incantation, that presumably assure human control of supernatural agencies or the forces of nature.

Mu.sic (myoo'zik), *n.* 1. the art of combining and regulating sounds of varying pitch to produce compositions expressive of various ideas or emotions

The Random House College Dictionary

Of all the musical conceptions handed down from the ancient Mediterranean world, two more than any other have captivated European minds and resonate throughout Jewish literature: the ideas of music's ethical power to affect man's soul and of the presence of harmony in the cosmos. Both ideas are venerable, of course. Already in the fourth century, Plato attested them in terms sufficiently developed enough to suggest that each had a considerable pre-Platonic history. In the *Republic* (398c-403c) he located music's moral effects in rhythms and, more famously, in the *harmoniai*, each with its particular ability to induce an ethos or affective character. And in the myth of Er that ends the same work, (614b-621d) he described a cosmos in which each planet, revolving on its own well or rim, was accompanied by a siren singing its distinctive note. Behind Plato's views stand, dimly visible, authorities of earlier musical thought: the fifth century Damon of Athens, who believed that music produced motions corresponding to its own in the soul and to whom Socrates ascribed the principle relating musical style to political and social order⁴; and, earlier still, Pythagoras of Samos, who seems to have believed that musical numbers guide soul and cosmos alike, to whom Aristotle attributed the doctrine linking

⁴ Plato, *Republic* 424c

the heavenly spheres in harmonic proportion⁵, and who was accredited, in a story surviving from much later sources, with the ability to hear this music of the spheres⁶.

While music may be a relatively comfortable or familiar medium, magic is a great distance from our historical and cultural perceptions and presumptions. Mystical or occult thought plays little role in today's Western dominated culture as a whole. It offers a radically foreign and generally discredited alternative to more central strains of rational and analytic thought. Investigating occult thought therefore can challenge the universality of our post-Cartesian, technological, western European view of the world.

Musical magic, or mystical expressions through music are marginal, at best, to the concerns of conventional euro-centric musicology, however the black and white opposition of rationalist and occultist appears, on closer inspection, to be a somewhat blurred picture with more subtle shadings. It would appear that occultists think more rationally and rationalists more magically than either group realizes, or perhaps, wishes to realize. Pure rationality and pure occultism play small roles in our lives, or even in the lives of those who would contentedly characterize themselves as rationalists or occultists. Instead, we sit in between, on the fence, suspended – leaning to one side or the other, but always on the fence. In our construction of positive and objective worlds on the one hand, and of worlds in which the supersensible or even supernatural forces are at work on the other, we play ceaselessly at a balancing act, teetering between what seems to us familiar and comfortable, and what seems distant. In a slightly different connection, this

⁵ Plato, *Metaphysics* 985b-986a, *On the Heavens* 291a.

act can even be posited as a fundamental feature of all our understanding, historical or otherwise.

For Ficino, magical song was one of the most powerful affective magic's precisely by virtue of its nature as music. (Ficino's magic was one of the most comprehensively 'musicalized' occult philosophies that the western world has created). There are many Renaissance conceptions of cosmic harmony, which for many renaissance thinkers provided the most concise image of and explanation for magical powers all told.

Together sympathy and antipathy, ontologically, if not historically equal, sustain the magical cosmos. They constituted a world of likeness and its opposite, that was differentiated but unified. They maintained the universe, thus, in the image of *discordia concors*, or harmony created from dissimilarity (or dissimilarity in harmony). Thus it is no accident that renaissance writers including Agrippa repeatedly framed this world in metaphors of harmony. These metaphors were not mere tropes of imagined relationships where none existed in reality (for this is a post Renaissance conception of metaphor), but that instead, discovered in their creation truths about the structure itself of the world. Musical sound was the most powerful image of difference bound into unity available to the renaissance magician. This fact alone placed it at or near the heart of most Renaissance magical conceptions and assured the magician that it offered privileged insight into the nature of things.

⁶ Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, pp. 351, 357.

Where occult powers spring from the similarities and resulting dissimilarities of things, all magical operations will be grounded in the discovery and exploitation of likeness and difference. Numbers, shapes, and letters gained occult powers from their likeness to higher forms; human passions were abetted by the stars insofar as they accorded with them; images gained miraculous powers from similarity to the heavens; and music attracted celestial influence by its power to imitate. In general, the magician's power sprang from his duplication of the complex forms of the super-celestial and (especially) the celestial realms. According to Agrippa in his *De Occulta philosophia*, the magician's power was proportional to his competence in such mimetic acts: "whoever better imitates celestial things with nature, study, action, movement, gesture, appearance...and will be able to receive greater gifts from them"⁷.

There is some ambivalence within renaissance literature as to conceptions of magical processes. Whereas renaissance magic appears fundamentally imitative in nature, it is not so clearly defined whether the purpose is to achieve unio-mystico by being elevated unto God, or by drawing God down. Agrippa speaks of three means by which the human soul might come into unmediated contact with God. Of these three at least two, ecstasy and divine frenzy, and perhaps even the third as well, prophetic sleep, had the effect of removing the soul from the body and transporting it to the presence of the divine. Man, made in the image of God, could wander on earth, among the stars, and above the heavens.

⁷ Agrippa, *De Occulta philosophia*, I:52

Agrippas posits three types of magic, natural, celestial and ceremonial: Ceremonial magic aims to unite man's soul with the divinity, Celestial magic disposes man to receive the benefits of the heavens through the use especially of incorporeal forms or their representations: numbers geometric figures, characters, images and music. Natural magic treats elemental things, the things perceived by sensation, a function of the sub-rational soul, in order that they may focus and exploit the celestial gifts raining down on them.

Musical metaphor pervades Agrippa's writing and perception of the magical cosmos. Harmony, broadly conceived was one of the renaissance magician's chief means of conceptualizing world structure. For Agrippa, harmony represented the network of affinities that allowed influences to flow through all ontological levels: "God communicates all virtues through the soul of the world, by means of the particular virtue of the images and presiding (super-celestial) intelligences, with the specific accord of the rays and aspects of the stars, and according to harmonic concordance"⁸. At times in *De occulta philosophia* this harmony seems to merge indistinguishably with the world soul itself:

The soul of the world is therefore a certain unified life that fills and nourishes all things, collects them and binds them together, so that the whole world constitutes a single mechanism. It is as a monochord comprising the three species of created things, intellectual, celestial, and corruptible, and resounding with a single breath and a single life⁹.

On lower levels these harmonic affinities determined the particular powers earthly things derived from the stars.

All the stars possess their particular natures, properties, and conditions; they produce by their rays their signs and characters in inferior things, in the elements, in rocks, in plants, in animals, and in

⁸ Ibid., I:12

⁹ Ibid., II:57

their parts. Therefore, each thing has impressed on it, by its harmonic disposition and its shining star, a special sign or character signifying that star or harmony, and each thing contains a virtue different from other materials in type, species, or number.¹⁰

In a world such as this, empowered by its own harmony, music was a force both concentrated and diffuse, active and passive. It could appeal to and enhance the most specific harmonic convergences or assume a less operative place in general world harmonies. Or, better, each musical utterance could fulfill both roles at once. Music intersected with each of Agrippa's three magics, natural, celestial and ceremonial, in ways that are simultaneously separable and indistinct.

Music operated above all as a means of celestial magic. This was true because celestial magic was the magic of numbers and figures, and music was a mathematical discipline. In Agrippa's view, numbers, measures, proportions, harmonies, and movements were the proximate celestial sources of all sub-lunar things; they were the determinants of form, the representations of ideas: "Harmonies and words," Agrippa added, "are also composed of numbers and proportions, and take their power from the"¹¹. For Agrippa music was sounding number, sounding form, and therefore derived its special powers from the numbers inherent in the celestial realm. It did so above all by mimesis: "musical harmony is not bereft of celestial gifts. It is indeed the most powerful imitator of all things, and when it opportunely follows the heavenly bodies it marvelously provokes the heavenly influx..."¹². Music properly structured to reflect celestial numbers could seize heavenly benefits.

¹⁰ Ibid., I:33

¹¹ Ibid., II:2

¹² Ibid., II:24, Also paraphrasing Ficino, *Three books on Life* III:21

Music could not only capture celestial benefits, but also dispose sub-lunar bodies better to receive them: "thus no songs, sounds, and instrumental music are stronger in moving the emotions of man and inducing magical impressions than those composed in number, measure, and proportion as likenesses of the heavens"¹³. Music could also be used to evoke all sorts of demons and spirits of the dead, but more importantly, it could loosen the bonds of soul and body, allowing the soul to achieve unmediated contact with God, and even to return itself to the super-celestial real of its origins¹⁴.

Hence musical magic in the Renaissance may be understood within the following categories: First, the magic of music's effects on sub-lunar objects: on inanimate things, on animals, on the human body, and even on the soul in its earthly exile. The natural magic of music embraced in part the rich story of music's effects on the psyche, though this had obvious celestial and super-celestial implications as well. Second came the role of music in governing the movements of the heavenly bodies, the music of the spheres. Here music converged with astrology, and astronomy, and its practice entailed the mimesis of celestial musics in order to influence or enhance their effects on earth. Finally, music could bring about the most direct kinds of gnosis, inducing ecstatic trances and frenzied possessions.

Ancient testimony on the harmony of the spheres presents perplexities and contradictions. The general history of that testimony is one of increasing musical specificity and

¹³ Ibid., 1126

intricacy. From Plato's time to Ptolemy's a shift is apparent from a simple affirmation of the harmonic numbers manifested in the cosmos, to an acceptance of these and a detailing of the precise musical features of the planetary spheres. Early accounts such as Plato's myth of Er and the Cratylus (405c-d); Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1093b), and later references such as Philo Judaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Plotinus, Cassiodorus and Isidore of Seville refer generally to the intuition of a cosmos ordered according to harmonic principles. In contrast the detailed later accounts present abundant specifics on the cosmic harmony; including Cicero¹⁵, Pliny the Elder¹⁶, Plutarch¹⁷, Nichomachus of Gerasa¹⁸, Theon of Smyrna¹⁹, Ptolemy²⁰, Aristides Quintilianus²¹, and Macrobius²². In spite of the considerable variety of these often contradictory reports, here as in accounts of musical ethos there is a unifying thread. Almost all the ancient descriptions of cosmic harmony specific enough to take a position agree in assigning a single pitch to each planetary sphere. Of all the surviving ancient sources only Ptolemy and Aristides Quintilianus seem unambiguously to match to the planets musical phenomena more elaborate than single pitches.

Hence, ancient doctrines of musical ethos and celestial harmony were in orthodox versions separated by an incongruence of musical means. The doctrines of musical ethos

¹⁴ Ibid., III:32,42

¹⁵ Cicero: *The Dream of Scipio in Republic* VI,18

¹⁶ Pliny the Elder: *Natural History* II,84

¹⁷ Plutarch: *On the Generation of the Soul in Timaeus* 1028-30

¹⁸ Nichomachus of Gerasa: *Enchiridion*, ch. 3

¹⁹ Theon of Smyrna: *Oeuvres*, pp. 226-30,

²⁰ Ptolemy: *Harmonics* III

²¹ Aristides Quintilianus: *On Music* III

²² Macrobius: *Commentary of the Dream of Scipio* II, 1-4.

referred to scalar systems of various sorts, while the doctrines of celestial harmony generally referred to individual pitches and the intervals between them. This technical divergence of musical ethics and cosmology may at first seem trivial, but it bore with it the implication that ethos or ethical effect was unavailable to individual planets.

Assigning pitches rather than modes to the planets, in other words, dissociated the planets and their influence from the primary affective structures of human music. In effect it excluded the musical cosmos from direct and specific operative roles in the psychological effects of sub-lunar music. These concepts developed throughout the early and medieval periods and formed the backdrop for the development of the role of music within Jewish mystical circles.

2/ Philo Judaeus c.30 BCE – 45 CE:

Music at the Nexus of the Jewish and Hellenistic Worlds

Philo was the head of the Jewish community in Alexandria and spent his life attempting a reconciliation of his ancestral faith with Hellenistic philosophy - Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic. His exegetical methods had considerable influence on later philosophers, Jewish, Pagan, Christian and Islamic. In Philo's writings, we begin to sense the potential power that music can have upon man and upon the universe. The following three extracts reflect an early Jewish perspective on music from a mystical perspective.

The first extract comes from a long series of expositions of problematic passages in Genesis. Philo is commenting on Genesis 15.9: "Take for me a heifer three years old and a she-goat three years old and a ram three years old and a turtle-dove and a dove." (The instructions are to Abraham as part of his covenant with God.) Philo points out earlier in his Answer that three is the full and perfect number, and that the ox, goat, and ram stand for the elements of earth, water, and air. His interpretation is that the Law is "gnostic and describes the various forms of knowledge, Since the sacrificial act is to be interpreted as conjecture and opportune reasoning". Therefore the five creatures represent the whole known cosmos, which is being revealed to Abraham in this mystical experience.

The Heavenly Singing

from Questions and Answers on Genesis

111, 3 But to the birds, such as the dove and the turtle-dove, the whole heaven is equally appropriated, being divided into the circuits of the planets and the fixed stars. And so (Scripture) assigns the dove to

the planets, for this is a tame and domesticated creature, and the planets also are rather familiar to us, as though contiguous to terrestrial places, and sympathetic. But the turtle-dove (is related) to the fixed stars, for this animal is something of a lover of solitude, and avoids meeting and mixing with the multitude. (So too) is the inerrant sphere distant (from us) and at the ends of the world, at the very extremes of nature. And both orders of the two birds are likened to the heavenly forces, wherefore, as the Socratic Plato says, it is likely that "Heaven is a flying chariot" because of its very swift revolution which surpasses in speed even the birds in their course. Moreover, the aforesaid birds are singers, and the prophet is alluding to the music which is perfected in heaven and is produced by the harmony of the movement of the stars. For it is an indication of human skill that all harmonic melody is formed by the voices of animals and living organs through the mechanism of the intelligence. But the heavenly singing does not extend or reach as far as the Creator's earth, as do the rays of the sun, because of His providential care for the human race. For it rouses to madness those who hear it, and produces in the soul an indescribable and unrestrained pleasure. It causes them to despise food and drink and to die an untimely death through hunger in their desire for the song. For did not the singing of the Sirens, as Homer says, so violently summon listeners that they forgot their country, their home, their friends and necessary foods? And would not that most perfect and most harmonious and truly heavenly music, when it strikes the organ of hearing, compel them to go mad and to be frenzied?

Philo's words on the danger of hearing celestial music are supplemented in an aside to his treatise *On Dreams*, where he is discussing the four wells dug by Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 21.25, 26.19-23) as symbolic of the four constituents of the universe: earth, water, air, heaven. To these he compares the four constituents of man: body, the senses, reason or speech (*logos*), and mind or intellect (*nous*), calling the latter, like the heavens, incomprehensible. Earthly music is an indication of human skill through the mechanism of the intellect. Yet this harmony does not carry with it the dangers of celestial music which provokes absolute abandon of all basic physical needs.

From on dreams

I, IV, 35 For it is in the heaven and in the mind that capacity resides to set forth in solemn strains hymns of praise and blessing in honor of the Father who is the author of our being. For man is the recipient of a privilege which gives him distinction beyond other living creatures, that, namely, of worshipping Him that IS; while the heaven is ever melodious, producing, as the heavenly bodies go through their movements, the full and perfect harmony. If the sound of it ever reached our ears, there would be produced irrepressible yearnings, frantic longings, wild ceaseless passionate desires, compelling to abstain even from necessary food, for no longer should we take our nourishment from meat and drink through the throat after the fashion of mortals, but, as beings awaiting immortality, from inspired strains of perfect melody coming to us through our ears. To such strains it is said that Moses was listening, when, having laid aside his body, for forty days and as many nights he touched neither bread nor water at all (Exodus 24.18). It seems, then, that the heaven, the original archetype of all musical instruments, was tuned with consummate skill for no other purpose than that the hymns sung in honor of the Universal Father may have a musical accompaniment.

Moses is described as a Perfect Man, attuned with the entire created order. His ability to listen to the celestial music was akin to revelation itself and provoked a physical response. Elevated to a higher realm, his revelation was the foundation of human religious musical composition. Hymns of praise and blessing in harmony with heavenly music in honor of the Universal Father.

from On the Virtues

XI, 72. Having discoursed thus suitably to his subjects and the heir of his headship (Joshua), he proceeded to hymn God in a song in which he rendered the final thanksgiving of his bodily life for the rare and extraordinary gifts which he had been blest from his birth to his old age. 73. He gathered together a divine company, that is the elements of the universe and the chiefest parts of the cosmos, namely earth and heaven, earth the hearth of mortals and heaven the house of immortals. In the midst of these he composed hymns in every mode and interval, in order that men and ministering angels might hear, 74. men as learners that he might teach them a similarly grateful attitude, and the angels as critics to watch how, judged by their own technique, he made not a single false note. The angels would also be strengthened in their faith if a man clothed in his mortal body could have a power of song like the sun, the moon, and the sacred choir of the other stars, and could attune his soul to the divine instrument, namely the heaven and the whole cosmos. 75 Thus in his post amid the ethereal choristers the Hierophant blended with the choral hymns of thankfulness to God his own true emotions of good will to the Nation. He reproved them for their past sins, gave them warnings and corrections for the present, and advice for the future based upon good hopes which were bound to be fulfilled. XII, 76. When he ended his songs, a blend we may call them of religion and humanity, he began to pass over from mortal existence to life immortal, and gradually became conscious of the dissolution of the elements of which he was composed. The body, which had grown about him like an oyster shell, was being stripped away, while his soul was laid bare and yearned for its natural removal hence.

Music and song have a critical role in the passing down of tradition, as well as in facilitating the passage from mortal existence to life immortal.

Philo's cautionary words towards music point us to a mystical Jewish conception of music's potential role in affecting the human and divine realms. This paved the way for future mystics to continue to explore, albeit with caution and reverence, future uses and conceptions of music.

3/ The Five Functions of Music in the Middle Ages

Let us now examine the basic function of music within its historical, theological, and philosophical context in the Middle Ages. According to Moshe Idel in his article "Music and Kabbalah"²³, the purpose of music throughout the Middle Ages may historically be subdivided into five primary categories:

1/ Music, along with physics, astronomy and math, was commonly perceived as a primary subject for 'knowing' the world. As an integral part of period philosophy, music was central to 'knowing' God. Hence, music was more of a philosophical subject of study, than one of pure esthetics.

2/ Music was commonly perceived as therapeutic²⁴. This reference is to actually listening to music in order to heal the ill, rather than the intellectual exercise referred to above. Once again, common in the Middle Ages, this approach was primarily therapeutic, and only secondarily esthetic.

3/ Music is often found in early Jewish mystical writings, in association with the *merkavah* or *heychalut* literature. Music was seen as a vehicle for raising the soul to the 'Seat of God's Glory', or to the perception of the Chariot. As Altman specifically states, "there can be no perception of the *merkavah* without song"²⁵.

²³ *Hakabalah vehamusikah*, in *hayahadut vehaomanut* (pp275-289), David Kasuto, Bar Ilan University press, 1989.

²⁴ Adler, *Hebrew writings concerning Music in Manuscripts and printed books from Geonic times up to 1800* (Munich 1975), pp147, 169, 202. See also Maimonides *Shmoneh Prakim* Ch 5.

²⁵ K-E Grozinger "Singen und ekstatische Sprache in der fruhen Judischen Mystik" *Journal of Study of Judaism* Vol. XI (1981) p. 72.

Hundreds of years after the *merkavah* literature stopped being a central part of Jewish theology, R. Abraham Abulafia in the 14th century once again made music central to mystical technique in prophetic Kabbalah. Music was used to achieve ecstasy, or unity between the mystic and God, largely through the repetition of the letters and names of God. Specific vowels became analogous with higher tones (*cholan*) or lower tones (*chirik*) according to their placement above or below the letters. Hence the development of musically 'mathematical' principles, in association with the alphabet and vowels. However, for Abulafia and his followers, the purpose of music was clearly to achieve ecstasy, and the esthetic content was purely secondary. The use of music in prophetic Kabbalah is similar to that of Islamic and Indian mystics, who would also use alphabet-oriented mantras. Abulafia equated each of the vowels with specific *sephirot*, beginning with the *Kamatz* representing *keter*, down through the *sephirotic* scale through to actual letters representing the 'lowest' sphere *malchut*, that of materialistic existence.

4/ While the theology of Abraham Abulafia focused upon the methods to achieve prophetic ecstasy, and music was one of his techniques, the primary purpose of kabbalistic movements was to achieve harmony between the celestial spheres (*sephirot*), which had been shattered by the sin of Primordial Man. This theosophy of repair uses music as a central vehicle with which to bring together the *sephirot* of *tiferet* with *malchut*, and *chochmah* with *binah*^{26, 27}. Practical mystical applications were specifically

²⁶ *Hakabalah vehamusikah*, p279.

²⁷ This theoretical and theosophical practice was only to be documented in practical Kabbalah in the renaissance period: - see M. Idels' *The theurgic sources of Jewish texts from the renaissance to chassidut*, Yuval Vol. IV

influenced by the kabbalists of Tsfat: R. Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz, R. Moshe Cordovero, and R. Isaac Luria, with such songs as Luria's *Lecha Dodi*.

5/ Granted that music was recognized as a means whereby certain celestial rifts could be healed, influenced or at least addressed, some kabbalists in the late 14th century posited another purpose to their use of music: that being to be protected from the forces of evil, and to minimize the influence of the aspect of judgment. Music as a preventative too was an innovation, or at least a re-appropriation of practical Kabbalah.

Chapter III

Early Mystical Approaches to Music and the Kabbalah

*The Angels on high create new songs daily, and with the power of the new song they
renew each day the miracle of creation*

Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz

1/ Angelology

Angels were a central theme in the writings discovered in the caves at Qumran. Through them, we can begin to form an idea of how they were conceived, and the role that they played in the theology of that time.

The Dead Sea Scrolls go into detail about their appointments in the heavenly hierarchy, as we shall explore later on, as well as to spell out the precise names of particular angels. We have for example:

The Prince of Light, who rules the spirit of the righteous and guides them in the right paths: "All the children of righteousness are ruled by the Prince of Light and walk in the ways of light" (*Manual of Discipline*, col. 3)²⁸

- *The Angel of truth* who aids the Sons of Light in discerning good and evil;

- *Gabriel*, meaning “God is mighty;” interpreter of dreams and visions, and harbinger of glad tidings;
- *Michael*, meaning ““who is like God?” the great prince who protects the House of Israel;
- *Raphael*, meaning, “God heals,” who carries angelic treatments for the sick;
- *Sariel*, meaning, “God is my Prince,” another defender of the holy flock.

Several of these angels are mentioned in one striking passage from the *War Scroll*:

They shall write on the shields of their towers: on the first, Michael, on the second, Gabriel, on the third, Sand, and on the fourth, Raphael. Michael and Gabriel shall stand on the right, and Sand and Raphael on the left (*War Scroll*, col.9)²⁹

Clearly, the protection of the angels in time of battle was greatly sought after by the desert community of Qumran. The revelation of these angels, their names and their very existence, was an integral part of ancient mysticism, Essene-style. Echoes of this angelic emphasis are still prevalent today in such prayers as *Shalom Alechem*, and the bedtime *Shema*.

²⁸ Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, p.73.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.134.

Angelology and the *Kedushah*

All the work of the angels is performed with song

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav

At the turn of the millennium, Jewish liturgy was being formed and was strongly influenced by mystical themes that were circulating at that time. In the second and third centuries, Jewish mystics as well as gnostics and heretics used to perform hymns and songs while bowing their heads between the knees to improve concentration. Together with other ascetic practices, the singing of hymns of an incantatory nature was aimed at encouraging mystical ascent of the soul to its Divine home, signifying redemption. The numerous prayers and hymns included in the *hechalot* tracts were considered to be compositions received through inspiration and repeating or reflecting the hymns sung by angels in praise of God. One of the oldest *hekhalot* books that has reached us, *Hekhalot rabati*, is composed for the most part of *Kedushah* hymns,³⁰ "strange fantasy-pieces of varying length, each ending with the trishagion from Isaiah, VI:3 "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts". The hymns lack any real thought-content, but occasionally they are "suffused with a passionate fantasy carried on top of a surging wave of words."³¹ The main subject of these books is the angels, their song, and their praise of God.

Various fundamental *Zoharic* concepts provided an impetus for the enhancement of the musical significance of certain prayers and hymns such as the *Kedushah* and *Nishmat Kol Chai*. One of the predominant themes in this hymnody is the singing of the *Kedushah*,

³⁰ Cf. P Bloch, in *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 37 (1893): 73.

the trishagion. The singing of the *Kedushah*, the highest point for both angels and for Israel, at a later period led to the crystallization of the important themes of the resonance between the micro- and the macrocosms, culminating in the parallel singing of the *Kedushah* by the angels and Israel. This connection also found its way into the general Jewish liturgy and influenced the development of liturgical music. This continues to be true in our day, where we glimpse at remnants of ancient mystical practices and beliefs.

In the mystics' zeal to disseminate their ideas, it is not surprising that they had great influence on the liturgy. Even in the statutory prayers there are passages where the abundance of the vocabulary bears no relationship to the content, and where, by contrast to other passages, the angels play a significant role. This is clearest in the *Kedushah*, the favorite prayer of the members of these circles, who saw themselves as divinely charged to cultivate and disseminate it, and who expected God's grateful recognition in return. The *Kedushah de yotser* has all the earmarks of this group, to which it owes its acceptance into the weekday Morning Service. Likewise, the variety of formulas introducing the *Kedushah* of the *Amida* and connecting its biblical verses arose only thanks to their activity. Above all the idea of the "crown" placed on the head of God simultaneously by the heavenly hosts and by Israel is authentically mystical.

The idea that the *Kedushah* achieves its full effectiveness only when it is sung on high³¹, or that the angels participate in every *Kedushah* recited on earth by the people of Israel³²,

³¹ Elbogen, I. *Jewish Liturgy, a Comprehensive History*, p287.

³² *Zohar Vayechi*, I 230B-232A.

³³ *Zohar Terumah*, II 131B-132A

contributed a great deal to the importance of this prayer on the Sabbath and festivals, and is reflected in numerous sophisticated musical renderings. Both the context and the structure of the *Kedushah* (and its many variants) were conducive to the development of an interesting antiphonal rendering: the depiction of the situation is sung by the cantor, and the angels' response by the congregation. The same applies to the *Song of the Sea* and *Nishmat Kol Chai*³⁴. The proclamation of God as ruler takes place repeatedly in the every daily service. The Talmud in fact insists that each blessing, even if only of a single line, must include reference to the divine name and to God's kingdom, constituting these as some sort of minimal base for a formal act of worship³⁵. The most dramatic of all references to divine kingship in the regular weekly liturgy is the introduction to the *Kedushah* – or *sanctus*, to use the Latin term familiar to Christians and to lovers of Western sacred music – as it is recited by Sephardic Jews in the *Musaf* service on Sabbaths, New Moons, and Festivals. The liturgy reads as follows:

A crown they give unto You, YHWH our God, angels enthroned above and Your people Israel gathered below. All of them together thrice proclaim Your holiness, as has been spoken by Your prophet's word: "They call out to one another, saying: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts! The whole earth is filled with His glory!"³⁶

Throughout the *Kedushah*³⁷ both cantor and congregation stand upright with feet together in the manner of the angels (Ezekiel 1:7) and symbolically rise to their toes as though to join in the heavenly chorus in striving to break loose from the bonds of the earth, and

³⁴ *Zohar Vayikahel* II 205A-B.

³⁵ *Berachot* 12a

³⁶ This version of the *Kedushah* was recited daily in the Babylonian rite as preserved in *Siddur Rav Amram*. It is the opening used for *Kedushah* in all services. Only later, as the Babylonian tradition evolved into the Sephardic rite, was it restricted to Sabbath and festival use.

³⁷ M. Weinfeld suggested that the association between *Kedushah* themes and praise for the gift of light from the *Kedushah de-yotzer* may be found as early as Qumran, i.e. second century B.C.E. See "The traces of *Kedushat Yotzer* and *Psukei de-Zimrah* in the Qumran Literature and in Ben Sira," *Tarbiz* 45 (1976): 15-26.

unite the earthly service with that of the angels³⁸. Regarding the threefold repetition of *kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*, according to *Targum Yonatan* God is 'Holy' with relation to the physical world, 'Holy' with relation to the spiritual world, and 'Holy' with relation to the world to come, while the Zohar understands 'the whole world is filled with his glory' to mean that Man can bring God's holiness to the earth by fulfilling the Torah's commandments.

The language of these prayers immediately calls to mind the close connection between these sections of the synagogue liturgy and the world of *merkavah* mysticism. The texts associated with the term *ma'aseh merkavah*, "the work of the chariot," describe ascents to the heavenly chambers (*hechalot*, hence the other term often applied to this literature), visions of the divine chariot or throne, encounters with angelic beings, and a great host of divine names, prayer fragments, and hymns that accompany these phenomena. The body of *merkavah* literature constitutes one of the earliest portions of what is now called Jewish mysticism. It is replete with references to the passages from Isaiah and Ezekiel that form the backbone of the synagogue's *Kedushah* rite in all its many forms.

³⁸ This custom is already mentioned in such medieval sources as *Sefer ha-Manhig*, Laws of prayer 52 and *Arugat ha-Bosem*, vol. 1, p. 215.

2/ Merkavah Mysticism

With the focus of *Merkavah* mysticism on the chariot-throne, it is little wonder that angels should occupy the minds and writings of the people of those times. The Essenes by precise classification, as described in the Dead Sea Scrolls, precisely classified the angels as follows:

Ministering Angels, whose purpose is simply to attend to the Almighty and to meet human need. Be it physical health, clothing and shelter, or peace of mind, they exist to offer aid and succor to the Sons of Light:

Angels of wondrous strength minister unto Thee, and they walk at the side of the meek and of them that are eager for right-doing, and of all the 'lost and lorn that stand in need of mercy lifting them out of the pit, when their feet are mired (*Psalms* Scroll, col. 5)³⁹

Angels of Sanctification, who stand as "witnesses" in the affirmation of divine covenants and ordinances, and who serve to set apart those human beings called to holy service, especially the priestly class:

The Lord bless you from His holy abode and crown you in majesty of the Holy Beings, and renew for you the covenant of everlasting priesthood, and give you a place in the holy habitation (*Blessings*, col. 3)⁴⁰

Angels of the Presence, who manifest the supernatural emanations of the Almighty to the Sons of Light. Literally, they are called Angels of the Face, for they stand before the face of God:

³⁹ Theodor H Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, p 164.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 97.

For Thou will bring Thy glorious salvation to all the people of Thy Council, to those who share a common 'lot with the Angels of the presence. Among them shall be no mediator to invoke Thy Name and no messenger to make reply; for they shall reply according to Thy glorious word and shall be Thy princes in the company of the Angels (*Psalms Scroll* col. 6)⁴¹

- *Cherubim*, the only angels said to have wings, whose only stated purpose is to mark the place of the chariot-throne — designating its precise location.
- A hierarchy of seven archangels, who oversee the work of all the other angels.

These angels were the subject of the author of the scroll called *The Song of Sabbath Sacrifices*.

The voyager into the upper realms hears angels chanting powerfully worded, repetitive, “numinous” hymns. The heavenly traveler himself has to keep in mind prayers, chants, incantations, and adjurations of various sorts that will protect him from the terrible dangers inherent in his voyage. An intense and highly dramatic calling out of prayers and names of God and angels, in which both human and angelic voices take part, may be said to lie at the very heart of the *merkavah* experience. One scholar has characterized the prayer motif in the *merkavah* sources as follows:

“The worship of the angels in the heavenly palaces is the prototype of worship that the *yordey mirkavah* are imitating. The ceremony that the angels perform before the throne of glory, including immersion, the offering of praises, the singing of hymns, recitation of prayers, binding of crowns, and mention of the Name, is conceived as the basic ritual structure that the *yordey mirkavah* want to learn and imitate.”⁴²

⁴¹ Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, p.208.

⁴² Elior, “Mysticism, Magic, Angelology,” p5.

3/ The Song of Sabbath Sacrifices: Mimesis

We do not know precisely who was the author of *The Song of Sabbath Sacrifices* or when he lived, but the document he composed, discovered both at the caves of Qumran and the rocky plateau called Masada, is perhaps the great "missing link" in understanding the evolution of Kabbalah. Here we have a transitional text, which stands between the early mysticism of the apocryphal literature and the later flowering of the mystical tradition in medieval times. The author of *The Song of Sabbath Sacrifices* gives us a series of liturgical hymns, in the mouths of the angels on high, which accompany the weekly burnt offering in the Jerusalem Temple on the Sabbath. Each Sabbath sacrifice had its own special significance and its own name, transmitting the teachings of the Qumran sect.⁴³

Kabbalah teaches that everything below has a counterpart above. The earthly reality is really just a reflection of the heavenly reality. It is the Hebraic equivalent of the ancient Greek concept, expounded by Plato, called mimesis, where the upper realms are influenced and reflective of our actions within the lower realm. Things on the earth are but a copy of things in the realm of the ideal. The craftsman, wrote Plato, fashions a copy of the ideal object, located somewhere in the realm of the eternal. The earthly copy is always at least "one remove" from the perfect image, in the ideal realm.

⁴³ See Lawrence H. Schiffman, "Merkavah Speculation at Qumran," in Alexander Altman, *Mystics, Philosophers, and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1982, pp. 15-47.

It is an incredible phenomenon that Greek and Hebrew philosophies, which appear on so many levels to be at odds with each other, come together in the realm of Kabbalah. The angelic host in *The Song of Sabbath Sacrifices* serves in a spiritual Temple, of which the earthly shrine is merely a copy. Scripture itself queries, through the words of King Solomon: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). *Merkavah* mysticism, even at this early stage, solves the dilemma by positing a heavenly Temple in the realm of perfection, at which minister the angels — supernatural counterparts of the Jerusalemite priests of flesh and blood. It is they whose songs are recorded in the *Song of Sabbath Sacrifices*.

The document goes on to describe the actual utterance of the angels, their "song":

While they are soaring aloft, a murmur of angel voices is heard, and the lifting of their wings is accompanied by a clamor of joyous song. It is the murmur of angels blessing the Chariot-like Throne above the firmament of the cherubim, while they themselves, from below the place where the Glory dwells, go acclaiming in joyous song the splendor of that radiant expanse.⁴⁴

It is a vivid picture of the unseen realm of the divine presence. It is nearly the same vision seen by the prophet Ezekiel, centuries earlier, describing a heavenly chariot, carrying the exalted throne of God. Ezekiel describes four angelic beings; yet, his Focus is on God and His throne. But the Dead Sea text fills in the blanks about the angels:

Whenever the wheels of that Chariot are in motion, angels of sanctification dart to and fro all around it, between its glorious wheels. Like fiery apparitions, they are most holy sparks, looking like streams of fire, in the likeness of burnished metal or of lustrous ware; clothed in luminous garments, an array of wondrous colors, diffuse with brightness; live angelic spirits, constantly coming and going beside the glorious wonderful Chariot.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Theodor H Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures*, p 289.

The emphasis here is on the visual senses — on light and fire, designating the presence of living spirits. Moreover, the writer of this scroll appears to be describing something that he has actually witnessed — a purely supernatural apparition. Next, the writer describes in detail what he hears, audibly:

Amid all the noise of their progress, a murmured intonation of blessings is heard, and whenever they come round, they shout their holy hallelujahs. When the angels soar aloft, they soar in wondrous unison; and when they alight, they stay standing. Then the sound of the paean is hushed, and the murmur of angelic benedictions pervades all the amps of those godly beings. From the midst of their contingent, they utter praise. As in holy worship, each of their ranks breaks forth into joyous song, one after another.⁴⁶

Their very words have power, and seem to fall in groups of seven, each set emphasizing a central theme: nobility; sublime truth, and mystical prowess. We read: “Finally, with seven words of His mystical holiness, the seventh archangel blesses, in the name of His holiness, all the saintly beings among those who have laid foundations for true knowledge.”⁴⁷

In the end, everything comes back to “true knowledge,” and a foundation of truth, uprightness, and exemplary character.

⁴⁵ Ibid..

⁴⁶ Ibid..

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 291.

4/ Apocalyptic foundations of the Liturgy: War in Heaven and Earth

Another important aspect of mysticism has always been a near obsession with apocalypticism — the “end of the world” and the tumultuous warfare prophesied during the final generation. While the current generation is less preoccupied with the apocalypse, references to the messianic era are often taken as references to the apocalypse. Though there are ample apocalyptic sects and cults, current Jewish emphasis on the apocalypse is minimal. Rather the messianic era is perceived as coming when the people of Israel bring it about through their meritorious conduct, while the apocalypse is the concomitant result of the people of Israel straying beyond redemption.

Nevertheless, the messianic ‘end of days’ is a subject replete with dramatic references that also make for central elements of the daily and High Holiday liturgy. The conflict between the powers of light and the powers of darkness resonate through such common myths contained in the good angel and evil angel depicted in *shalom alechem*, through to the many *kavanot* (often beginning with *Yehi Ratson*⁴⁸) found throughout a traditional prayer book. References to *techiat hametim* (the resurrection of the dead), *tsemach David avadecha*, or *meshiach tsidkecha* (messianic times or the messiah as an individual), and the many high holiday prayers speaking of the day of judgment are pointing us toward the culmination of the battle between good and evil. Such intense liturgy generally provides the richest of materials for composition and for Cantorial evocation of intense emotions (specifically fear and awe throughout the ‘days of awe’).

⁴⁸ Many examples such as: Artscroll *Machzor Rosh Hashanah* p.437.

Consider the single Dead Sea scroll devoted entirely to battle, called the *War Between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness*, or simply, the *War Scroll* Essentially, it is an account of seven great battles at the end of the days between the powers of good and evil. The foes are formidable, and are spearheaded by the wicked Kittim, a mysterious and warlike tribe who come up against the Holy Land:

The king of the Kittim shall enter into Egypt, and in his time he shall set out in great wrath to wage war against the kings of the north, that his fury may destroy and cut off the horn of Israel (*War Scroll* col. 1)⁴⁹

We have here another version of the Battle of Armageddon, set on the physical plane of future history It is all to be part of the dreaded "pangs of the Messiah," the time of testing and tribulation for the holy flock prior to final judgment. The entire cosmic contest is to last for some forty years, which could be a symbolic number signifying a long and torturous period. Furthermore, both humans and angels wage the combat. The first stage of the war lasts six years. It is a time when all of the Sons of Light engage the Kittim in mortal combat. The War scroll declares:

The sons of Levi, Judah, and Benjamin, the exiles in the desert, shall battle against them when the exiled sons of light return from the desert of the peoples to camp in the desert of Jerusalem (*War Scroll*, col. 1)⁵⁰.

The 'desert of the peoples' probably refers to the many cities in Judea and beyond where small Essene communities were scattered. The 'desert of Jerusalem' may then refer to the wastelands of Qumran itself, which as the headquarters of the sect is the source from which all instructions and enlightenment come.

⁴⁹ Ibid., P. 125.

The warfare depicted in the war scroll is more spiritual than physical, hence implying that every type of conflict on earth has its counterpart on the supernatural plane. According to the scrolls, outcomes are determined in equal measure by uprightness, holy conduct, and action, the end of which is not as in most wars, carnage, but dominion and authority to rule the world.

The spiritual war that each individual must fight is enshrined within our High Holiday liturgy. The trumpet blasts of the war resound throughout the Shofar services, and the *kavanot* preceding traditional shofar services beg angelic and Godly assistance in the conquering of the Satanic enemy⁵¹.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.125.

⁵¹ Artscroll Machzor Rosh Hashanah p.437.

Chapter IV

Medieval Mystical Approaches to Music and the Kabbalah

1/ The functions of Song as Transcendent Knowledge According to Isaac Ben Solomon Ibn Sahula (1244 – after 1284)

Although music as such has never played as large a part in Jewish speculative thought as it has, for example, in Greek, the period of Babylonian exile left an indelible stamp on the Hebrew scriptures as they were revised and compiled into the form they have today. The Babylonians were obsessed with number and its relationship on the one hand to astrology, on the other to music. Consequently when the learned Jews responsible for the “Priestly” source of scriptural material returned from exile, they took pains to adjust all the numbers in the sacred books so as to accord with the symbolism they had learnt in Babylon⁵². Probably the same knowledge lies behind the Kabbalistic books as well: the *Sefer Yezirah* (Book of Formation) and the *Zohar*. But since the basis of Kabbalistic numerology is not tone but the numerical values of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the medieval Kabbalists use music more in a metaphorical way, as a general acknowledgment of the principle of universal harmony within and between the levels of being.

This is a part of the philosophical heritage common to Muslims, Jews and Christians alike, for which, if an outward line of transmission is sought, the obvious meeting-place

is medieval Spain, under the rule of the Muslims and of certain Christian kings such ~ Alfonso the Wise. In this tolerant atmosphere the three "Peoples of the Book" exchanged their knowledge, exoteric and esoteric. Ibn Sahula lived in Guadalajara at this high point of Sephardic culture, active as a poet, commentator and Kabbalist. Much of this strange text is enigmatic, and it therefore seems best to give a literal translation rather than an interpretative one. It is partially a commentary on a passage from the *Zohar* III, 18b-19a, which it paraphrases in sections 8-12. But whereas in the *Zohar* the emphasis is on the community of angels and men, here it is on the personal experience of song as something which can be realized by the soul at various levels, the highest of them being that attained by Solomon and reflected in his Song of Songs. "Song" is here a metaphor for transcendent knowledge, though this does not discount the possibility that the experience of such knowledge may actually take musical form.⁵³

Song as Transcendent Knowledge

1. It was right for the Sage to have called it the "Song of Songs and not another name, because of the knowledge of song which was known to the nation at that time, and the Levites used to sing it in the Temple during service. As it is said, "And thou shalt sing in the name of the Lord your God"; and in the Kabbalah, "What service is there which is in the name of God? You have to say singing."

2/ And this Song was a most awesome, great and marvelous thing because through the melody of the song that is in the mouth and in the instrument, the soul awakens and the Holy Spirit shines in it. And it goes higher and attains supreme understanding, which it could not reach before.

3/ And this excellent Song is a voice coming out of the mouth of singers in fear, awe and holiness. It goes up and down, lengthens and shortens, as if it is inspired by a song of the higher ministers [angels]. And while it moves by degrees which are known and

⁵² Ernest Mclellan, *Meditations Through the Quran*, pp. 125-61, The Holy Mountain."

⁵³ Source: *Commentary, on the Song of Songs*, translated by Shimon Malin from Israel Adler, *Hebrew Writings concerning Music*, Munich, Henle, 1975, pp. 172-4. This publication is part of the RISM series of bibliographies.

understood by the drawing of the points [of notation] in those phrases which the pleasant voices [sing], these phrases are ordered in correspondence with the spiritual virtues, as⁵⁴ is explained in the teaching of music⁵⁴.

4/ And thus said our Rabbis of blessed memory, "Rabbi Yochanan said, three things calm the heart, an instrument, a voice, and a throat, as it is written [II Kings, 3.15] 'But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played,' which means three things; an instrument, a voice, and a throat this is a melody.

5/ certain of the holy singers knew this wisdom better than others. As they said, "Agras, son of Levi, had a chapter in singing," which means to say more than the chapters of the singers who were his friends. And this shows that they had books which were written about the receiving (Kabbalah) of the song, arranged like the chapters of the Mishna.

6/ And all of this designed to awaken the soul to its (higher) level and arrive at its power of understanding. And then the Holy Spirit awakens and shines, and desires it with great desire, fondness, and much love. And then it reaches a still higher level, power, and *gevurah*

7/ And to King Solomon — may he rest in peace it was given to know this song~, more than any in his generation. As they of blessed memory said: "Nine angels who sing by night sing down on all those who can sing; and when men begin singing, the high ones add to it, that they may know and understand and reach what Heaven and Earth do not reach. By singing, they add power." (Mishna Yoma, chs 3,4.)

8/ (Rabbi Nehemia said:) "Happy is he to whom it is given to know this song, because whoever knows this song knows things of Torah and wisdom, and will listen and investigate, and will gain power and *gevurah* about what has been and what will be"

9/ And what Solomon knew, as Rabbi Shimon said, David used to know too; (and he made) many songs extollings of God, and hinted in them about future happenings; and he added power and *gevurah* in the Holy Spirit. To Solomon was given more about this song, as it is said, "I have made myself men and women singers" (Kohelet 2.9, Ecclesiastes 2.8); which means "I acquired knowledge of one of those supreme songs and (those which are beneath them)." He means the Song of Songs, which means a song of those ministers of above; a song which includes all things in the Torah, and wisdom and power and *gevurah* and about what was and what will be (lacuna).

10/ And Eleazar said: "This is how those singers were until Levi was born." But when Levi was born he/they burst into song; when Moses was born and Aron was anointed and Levites sanctified, the song was completed, and the singers used to stand in ranks, and because they came from the tribe of Levi, the singers of below were all

⁵⁴ This may be a reference a system such as Ptolemy's Harmonics III,5, in which the faculties and powers of the soul are aligned with musical intervals.

sanctified and stood in their places. They were all one, facing one another, connected as one; and the worlds are one, and one King rules over them. Solomon came and made a book from the song of those singers, and fulfilled the wisdom thereof.

11/ And Rabbi Jehuda said: "Why were the singers below called Levites (accompaniers)? Because they accompany and join as one with the higher ones, and whoever hears, he accompanies too, and his soul becomes attached to what is on high."

12/ And we have adduced the commentary of the Rabbis of blessed memory on the fact that the Sage gave this book of songs the name of Song of Songs, and it will be solved as follows: a song which is given as an adumbration of the higher songs, chosen by God to be sung in the Holy Temple of King Solomon; the Lord of Hosts (Elohai Sabaot) is his name, and including in his mercy all kinds of completing parts, he makes peace in his heavens.

13/ And our Rabbis of blessed memory said: Solomon's Song of Songs, a song which the Blessed One recites every day". And one should study these sayings, because a great principle is included in them, and we have received something about which we will not lie. : "Because every Solomon which is in the Song of Songs is holy, save one".

2/ Abraham Abulafia and the Practical Applications of Kabbalah and Music

Melody is the outpouring of the soul. Words interrupt the stream of emotions. The songs of the souls at the time that they are swaying in the high regions, drink from the well of the Almighty God, consist of tones only, dismantled words.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Ladi

The school of practical mysticism, of prophetic kabbalalim, founded by Abraham Abulafia develops special ways of progress to spiritualization and prophetic revelation. In his attempt to find a way of freeing the soul from ordinary perception, Abulafia developed his theory of the mystical combination of Hebrew letters (*Chochmat hatseruf*). This sort of intellectual exercise of pure thought, by means of which the devotee is said to express the rhythm of cosmic life, was compared by Abulafia himself to musical composition, exerting an influence on the soul as music does. In his *Gan Naul*⁵⁵ (Closed Garden) Abulafia writes:

"Know that the combination of letters can be compared to the listening to music, for the ear hears and the sounds are combined in accordance with the (required) form of a melody, or the syllables (of speech). The proof can be found in the combination formed by the *kinnor* and the *nevel* (two types of biblical lyres) whose associated voices cause the listener's ear to perceive a variety of emotional meanings. And the strings touched by the right and left hand bring through their vibration sweet sensation to the ear. And from the ear this sensation travels to the heart, and from the heart to the spleen, and enjoyment is continually renewed through the recurrence of tunes. It is impossible to produce such delight except through the combination of sounds, and the same is true of the combination of letters"

Thus we learn that the combination of letters creates enjoyment in the soul just as musical harmony does, because of the unveiling of secrets confined in such combinations. This

⁵⁵ *Shir Hashirim* 4:12

kinship between the meaning of letter combinations and musical harmony, as well as their effect on the soul, is seemingly not restricted to pure theoretical speculation but extends to practice. Abulafia himself lays down certain rules concerning the use of particular intonations and vowel pitches in the performance of certain forms of recitation. A disciple of Abulafia compares the pleasant voice of the recitant to the pleasant sound of the *kinnor*, stating that both exert the same influence on the soul. Another disciple offers a concrete example concerning the overwhelming power of a good melody. After having stated that King David and the Levites received their musical art through divine inspiration, an indication that their melodies were indeed those sung by the angels, he refers to the art of the cantor. When a cantor is good looking, has a pleasant voice, is eloquent of speech and his melodies are harmonious, he causes enjoyment in the souls of worshipers. Since the souls are spiritual and emanate from the Holy Name, the Holy Name shares in this enjoyment. It is to him (the Cantor) that the verse "He who rejoices God and Men" refers.

Music, in this theory, is conceived not only as a metaphor of the techniques of letter combination, or as a means leading to prophetic revelation, but also as a direct tool for attaining prophetic power. In dealing with this topic, Abulafia and his disciples referred to such biblical verses as : "And there, as you come to the city, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute and lyre before them prophesying" (I Samuel, X:5); or "But now bring me a minstrel. And when the minstrel played, the power of the Lord came upon him" (II Kings, IV:15). These examples illustrate how, thanks to music, prophecy is achieved and the intellect, which is

the receptacle of prophecy, is prepared. Moreover, in the writings of this school, it seems that this secret power of music is not considered as a lost science that was only relevant to the distant past. It may be noted that the verses quoted as well as some other biblical references are frequently used in the *Zohar* to illuminate another favorite topic, the connections between divine inspiration, music, happiness and salvation. It is said in the *Zohar* that at the end of days, which is a time for laughter, the people of Israel shall sing, and when the firmament shall move, all the bands of angels shall rejoice and engage in song and praise.

With the equation of musical notes to letters, combination or 'harmony' is created by either playing multiple instruments, or multiple notes upon the same instrument⁵⁶.

Harmony or combination 'gladdens the heart' by means of the 'hidden things which are found in the transposition of the letters', in which case the joy comes from the uncovering of secrets. Finally, like music, combination is an activity that takes place outside of the soul, and hence influences the soul's inner journey.

The parallel between music and combination is further repeated in Abulafia's *Sefer Hāheseq*, and in his anonymous student's work *Sha'are Tzedek*, where he writes:

...the letters transpose, change, conjoin, separate, and jump about ...until its melodic sound is made to be like the *kinnor*, putting in motion his soul to the fineness of the melody and its variation. Then the true pronunciation of the letter is revealed to him... which functions by means of the variation of melody, in a motion working in his soul. Just as music affects the proper balance of the body, so this has an effect on the soul by the power of the name⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ The theory of combination appears in Abulafia's epistle known as *has-Seder ham-mithappek* 30a-31a, and also in the commentary of *Sefer Yetsirah* by Eliezer of Worms (Premisla, 1883), fol 5b-d.

⁵⁷ G. Scholem, *Sha'are Tzedek, a kabbalistic pamphlet by a pupil of R. Abraham Abulafia*, (1923-4): p127-139.

The pronunciation of various combinations of letters affects only the soul, whereas music is perceptible in both soul and body. Abulafia's student in *Sha'are Tzedek* allows for some esthetic influence (pleasure) in the sensation of uttering the letters of the Name, however this is secondary.

The comparison by which the mystical experience is made analogous to the hearing of music (a recurring motif in mystical literature) serves to describe the actual occurrence in terms of a non-verbal medium. This medium makes it possible to compare the sensation at the moment of the experience with something recognizable in everyday experience. Abulafia however takes the analogy of music as serving to describe the mechanism of the coming about of prophecy itself. In his *Maftach hara'ayon* (p64b), Abulafia compares the cavities and holes of the human body to those of the *kinnor* and other instruments. For Abulafia, just as an instrument may sound when air flows through or over its cavities, so too the *Shechinah*, blowing through the human body gives rise to prophecy. Hence man can attempt to initiate a prophetic setting through the repetition of God's name, and becoming the instrument upon which God may then play. In the *Mechiltah*, Exodus 18 prophets are described as those "who were like an instrument full of speech", while R. Judah the Hasid describes the Glory as a *nevel* upon which God plays in order to arouse the prophet to prophecy.⁵⁸ Later Hassidism adopted the concept of the musician becoming the instrument, and of the *shofar* which produces sound when one blows into it with the prophet who prophesies only when God dwells within him.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Y. Dan, *Studies in Ashkenazi-Hasidic literature*, (Ramat Gan 1975), p.179

In the medieval period, music was held to function in two roles: firstly, through its mediation, prophecy descended directly to the individual, moreover, it was within the capacity of music to prepare the intellect, the prophecy receiving instrument, and thus to facilitate reception. Medieval authors considered music to be an integral part of their theoretical education. Isaac ben Jacob ha-Kohen maintained that the science of music was known to those who served in the temple as well as to the prophets who employed it in order to receive the Holy Spirit⁶⁰. Ibn Sahula aptly states the subject in three points: firstly, there is a connection between the science of music (though it is now lost), and prophecy. Secondly, the singing of the Levites and of the prophets was connected to the name of God, and finally, the somewhat ambiguous use of the term *nequddah* (literally point or dot) seems to indicate a connection between the song of the Levites and vowel points. Apparently the 'lost science' of music was 'preserved' in the circle of Abulafia, who was closely associated with one of the disciples of Isaac ha-Kohen, namely Moses ben Simeon of Burgos.

In striking contrast to the philosophers and kabbalists, Abulafia says little about the theoretical aspects of the connection between music and prophecy, but rather addresses the practical applications of music and the pronunciation of the Name:

The proof that song indicates the degree of prophecy is that it is the way of song to make the heart happy by means of tunes, as it is said, 'and when the minstrel played, the power of the Lord came upon him', (II Kings 3:15), for prophecy does not dwell in him (unless there is) joy (see TB, Shabbat 30b).⁶¹

⁶⁰ J. Weiss, "I'ia passiva in early Hassidim", JJS, 11 (1960): 140-145

⁶⁰ R Isaac, *Sefer ha'emunot*, Shem Tov ben Shem Tov, (Ferrara, 1556), fol 94a published by G. Scholem in *Maaddae hayachadut*, II (1927), p277.

⁶¹ Such references abound throughout scripture, Talmud and later literature. II Kings 3:15 became the scriptural support of all those who connected prophecy to music: see also I Samuel 10:5.

For the author of *Sod heyesodot* in the late 13th century or early 14th century, music and song could transcend the body to the extent of conveying the soul to heaven, and achieve union with God.

(the singers" ... were so absorbed in song that before they finished half the psalm (psalm 45:1), God rejoiced at hearing the song from their mouths, as is His way. The tune rose upwards, they achieved union, and their souls ascended to heaven⁶².

According to Abulafia, our existence, and the existence of the universe can be seen to be regulated by the pulse of celestial music. The medieval kabbalists explored this connection in their writings and practices. It would appear that music, like death, allows us to transcend our earthly existence, if for only a few moments.

⁶² D.B. Macdonal, "*Al ghazzali on music and ecstasy*", specifically addresses death due to religious excitement caused by singing. JRAS (1901): p.708, n. 3.

3/ Gikatilla's "Gates of Music" and the Role of the Levitical Singers

The tenth gate: the musical service in the Temple, vocal and instrumental, in order to draw hearts towards Blessed God, and to lift the souls to the supreme world, the spiritual world⁶³.

The *Tikunei Zohar* mentions three things that music affects: the Torah, the *Shechinah* (the divine glory), and the *geulah* (redemption). These three things in turn, are parallel to the mind, heart and body respectively. First, the Torah represents the mind just as music has the power to open one's mind and improves one's wisdom. Second, the *Shechinah* represents the heart, as does the *Beit haMikdash*. The Levitical singers and prophets used music so that the *Shechinah* would descend upon them. Finally, the *geula* (redemption) represents the liver, which then represents the body. The Jewish people were redeemed with music when God took them out of Egypt (Exodus 14:32) "then Moses and the children of Israel chose to sing this song to God". Rashi draws from the use of 'will sing' as opposed to 'sang', that in messianic times the righteous Jews who died will be brought back to life and will sing again.

Some contrast should perhaps be made between the role of the 'songs of the Levites' in the reduction of the aspect of judgment (*midat hadin*), which is a ritual that is no longer available to us since the destruction of the Temple, in contrast with the efficacy of our own songs in reducing possible harm. In kabbalistic literature, the Levites tend to

represent either the aspects of *Din* or *Gevurah* (heroism, rigor or power), which are upon the left-hand side of the *sephirot*, and whose songs are intended to reduce the rigor of the judgment. The balance between song and judgment are portrayed in the person of King David, who personified both the traits of poet and songster, as well as heroic king.

...I heard *ploni* who knew a melody against rigor (*Gevurah*) related to the poem and melody against judgment. It was the creation bestowed by the Levitical singers in order to reduce death, and from this David called 'pleasant of song and heroic in strength'.⁶⁴

The most thorough exposition on the role of Levitical song is that of the author of the *Zohar*, purportedly R. Moshe di Leon, and in his essays⁶⁵. The *Zohar* specifically emphasizes the importance of the 'raising of the voice', and notes the purpose of Levitical singing as influencing the aspect of judgment and not being relevant to man (as a practical application). In this light we therefore once again perceive the impact of theology on music at the apparent cost of esthetics. However there is a fundamental difference between the role explicated in post expulsion literature and that discussed in the *Zohar*. In the latter, the purpose of Levitical song is to replace judgment with benevolence (*din* with *chesed*), while in the former, the purpose is to create positive change in the celestial spheres. Any side effects of benefit to the material world are of purely secondary import, and a largely irrelevant bi-product in this latter view.

Levitical song while considered to function as prayer or sacrifice (*avodah*), was according to the kabbalists of the late 14th century, specifically intended to neutralize

⁶³ R Isaac, *Sefer ha'emunot*, Shem Tov ben Shem Tov, (Ferrara, 1556), fol. 94a published by G. Scholem in *Maaddae hayachadut*, II (1927), p277.

⁶⁴ Anonymous handwritten manuscript, Paris circa 859 CE., quoted by Moshe Idel, "Evil thoughts on G-d", p.358-359.

⁶⁵ G. Scholem, "Eine unbekannte mystische Schrift des Moses de Leon", *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Vol LXXI (1927) pp. 109-123.

negative influences. This was first found in a clear written form in '*Sha'are orah ne'emar*' of R Joseph Gikatilla, who quotes earlier traditions comparing 'melodies' (*zmirot*) with joyful music or songs (*rinah veshirah*). Hence psalms that were sung were perceived as prayer, and the musical element was to clear the path for their ascendance unto the heavenly spheres. Joseph Gikatilla's etymological equation of song with shortening the route (or the opposition in front) of prayer returns amongst many other later kabbalists such as Abraham Isaac Sperling:

The reason why a chazzan is called *shatz* or *shaliach tsibbur*, is because it is written that there are between the earth and the heavens *shats* (390 in gematria, which is also equal to *shamayim* or heavens) layers, and hence the chazzan is called *shats*, as due to the songs and praises that the songster sings in a pleasant voice of joy and revelation, the layers separate and divide before the airs of the *shats*.⁶⁶

The chazzan can mediate between the earthly realm, the musical realm, and the heavenly spheres. Accordingly, it would appear that Joseph Gikatilla's perspective is a more pragmatic 'practical Kabbalah' which in opposition to the historical perspective makes room for esthetics and daily worship, rather than the purely Levitical esoteric perspective.

The purpose of music in this mystical theology is to prepare the vessel for prophecy, and/or to influence the celestial spheres. There is a twofold association between prophecy and music in prophetic Kabbalah, firstly: music served as an analogy for the technique giving rise to prophecy and the prophetic experience, and secondly: music was an important part of the technique itself as practiced by Abulafia and his students.

⁶⁶ Abraham Isaac Sperling, '*Ta'amei haminhagim umekorey hadinim*', p 53

4/ Music in the Zohar: Humanity's Central Role

"If the whole universe is an enormous complicated machine", writes G. Sholem, "then man is the machinist who keeps the wheels going by applying a few drops of oil here and there, and at the right time." This beautiful simile, placing the kabbalist in the center of the world's dramatic stage, is directly related to some of the most important roles assigned to music in the kabbalistic writings. But first, let us see how man is animated by a spirit emanating from God, which implies that the divine spirit causes man to sound in perfect harmony. A Talmudic legend, often quoted in the Zohar, recounts that David's *kinnor* suspended over his bed plays of its own accord when the north wind travels through it. A symbolical commentary on this legend compares this *kinnor* to the human body. And just as with the *kinnor*, the divine spirit (that is the north wind) travels through the orifices of the body and makes it resound and sing. This legend also has resonance's of the prayer *Asher Yatsar* recognizing God's personal involvement in the function of every organ of the body. Hence a man animated by the divine spirit is like a vehicle for the divine melody and message received by emanation. Commenting on the same legend, Judah Moscato (d. 1590) transposes the content into the concept of resonance between David's soul (his *kinnor*) and the north wind (the divine spirit), concluding that just as the *kinnor* player has to master his art to obtain perfect harmony, the spiritual *kinnor* (the human soul) has to abide by the laws of harmony and music. An almost similar concept is found in some Muslim mystical writings. In his work *The Lightning Flashes Concerning the Refutation of those who Declare Listening to Music Forbidden*, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1121) describes the mystical meaning of the

instruments used in the ceremony of *dhikr*. Speaking of the flute, he writes, "its nine holes correspond to the nine orifices of the human body, and that the air which penetrates the flute to make its sound is comparable to the divine light into the reed of human existence".

But man is not just a passive receptacle or vehicle, he is a protagonist capable of influencing his proper destiny and that of the universe through prayers and the singing of hymns. One of the prevailing topics of kabbalistic literature is that God's predilection for Israel's prayers, the chanting of the Torah aloud and with a pleasant voice, and the singing of hymns and prayers. The Zohar is full of references of this kind: On the night of Exodus God orders the angels to stop singing because Israel is singing on earth; the angels stop and listen to them. At midnight when the Holy One Blessed be He enters the garden of Eden to delight with the righteous ones, the choir of angels, the trees of Eden, and heaven and earth sing his praises⁶⁷, while the north wind knocks and awakens the leaders of chant who burst into song⁶⁸. But at this time, God hears the voices of those who are studying the Torah on earth, and this sound is more beautiful to him than the singing of the angels. Hence, the extreme importance of singing and studying the Torah with a beautiful voice at midnight. This concept was probably influential in the development of midnight vigils (*tikkun chatzot*), as well as the nocturnal singing of various associations (e.g. "Watchers of Dawn) and the singing of *Bakashot* in more oriental communities.

⁶⁷ Zohar *Ve'eleh Toldot Yitzchak*, I 135A

The superiority of Israel's singing returns us to the concept of communal or parallel singing of the angels. These latter may only join in when Israel has sung, but, on the other hand, the power of this singing achieves its highest expression only when both choirs intone simultaneously the praise of God. So, whenever Israel gathers to sing hymns the angels do the same in the celestial realm. This embodies particular importance in the performance of the *Kedushah*. This kind of resonance between micro and macrocosms makes human music respond to heavenly music and vice versa. Taking the simile of man as a machinist of the world further, we can now define some of the aims which can be achieved by his influential power. There is first the basic concept that considers the earthly community of Israel as formed according to the archetype of the mystical community called Shechinah. Hence everything that is done by individuals of all communities in the mundane sphere is magically reflected in the upper region; or to use the idea often employed in this respect, the impulse from below calls forth that from above. This influential force or impulse can be used in the struggle against the devil and diabolical powers and in the restoration of the primordial harmony that was destroyed with Adam's fall. Two main notions are connected with this purpose: the *kavannah*, the mystical intention or act of concentration, directly linked with the inner cosmic process, and the *tikkun* – the restitution or reintegration with the primal harmony which was destroyed with Adam's fall, bringing about the advent of diabolical forces. It becomes one of the tasks of the illuminate to fight against the evil which intervenes with all its might to perturb the harmony he is seeking. Hymns, certain psalms and the sound of the

⁶⁸ *Zohar Bereshit*, I 40A-B

shofar (ram's horn) serve as magical weapons to counteract the forces of evil or even annihilate them.

These force dwell in the depths of the great abyss; they assume their power in the darkness of night, particularly at the first watch. This realm of darkness is considered at one with the *sefirah* of stern judgment and punishment. Their power expires with daylight, which corresponds to the *sefirah* of love or mercy of God. Their music consists mainly of discordant notes, wailing, sobbing and lamenting and the blowing of horns, all of which cause horror, discord in the world and stern judgment. In the Zohar, they are called 'Masters of Sobbing', or 'Masters of Wailing'. According to one passage they even succeed in silencing the marvelous choir of the angels. When God's chariot-throne (*merkavah*) moves, a sound of singing, pleasant to the ear and delightful to the heart is heard, and thousands of myriads of angels intone songs. To the left stand two hundred thousand Masters of Sobbing. Then the Master of Judgment appears and stand among them and the singing ceases. The blowing of the shofar and the singing emanates from the right's silence, the left side's wailing and the stern judgment turns into mercy.

The musical praxis or ideas concerning music at the time of the composition of the Zohar is displayed in the story of Jabal. Jabal was the 'father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle, and grow rich', whereas his brother Jubal was the 'father of all who handle horn and pipe, who play different kind of melodies'⁶⁹. The text makes the important distinction between worldly vulgar music, and music for divine worship. It is possible

⁶⁹ *Tikkunei HaZohar, Tikkunah Shitin vetishah* (#29) 119a

that the origin for this distinction can be found in the idea that everything that existed potentially before the creation of man became actual with his creation, including songs and praises⁷⁰. Music created contemporaneously with the world, which is for divine worship, is distinguished from music created by man (since Jubal), which is associated with worldly vanities. The distinction is possibly based on the frequently repeated idea that music derives from the north, that is the left, the side of judgment (Gevurah), while speech derives from the right side of mercy (Tiferet). However, there is another conception of the source of song. In an exegetical treatment of the verse: "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever" (Psalm 89:2) the question is raised whether song derives from the side of mercy, that is the right side, and the answer is that it is included in the right hand aspect of the left side⁷¹.

The realm of darkness of the '*sitra achra*' (other or evil side), symbolizing the imperfection due to the Fall, is like nocturnal darkness and like the darkness of Israel's diaspora. They all symbolize imperfection and joylessness. Midnight singing causes the angels to weep and to be invaded by a feeling of deep sorrow, then God shakes those above and those below. Only thanks to those who study Torah at night does the Holy One Blessed Be He enjoy any gratification, and the souls of the righteous take pleasure in listening to that singing. The devotee is also provided with some 'concrete' weapons in his struggle against the *sitra achra*. One of them is *shir pega'im* – the song against evil spirits (Psalm 91). This psalm is effective in driving off the demons and its use is still common practice at funerals, since the one who has died is said to be particularly

⁷⁰ *Zohar I Vayira*, 96a-b

vulnerable before the funeral. As the forces of evil are ineffective on the Sabbath, and their power returns only after it is over, the *havdalah* service is designed to drive them into the desert and nullify their influence over Israel.

One of the most formidable weapons is undoubtedly the *shofar* that constitutes the major musical topic to emerge from the Zohar. Almost fifty passages deal with this instrument, its form, the material from which it is prepared, the sound it emits and its various functions. On the occasion of the New Year and the Day of Atonement, the power of stern judgment and punishment reigns, and Satan is very active. The sound of the shofar, composed of fire, air, and water intermingled, ascends to the Throne of Judgment, strikes it, and causes an upper voice to be produced. These sounds arouse the compassion of God, which neutralizes the power of judgment and punishment. At the same time the sound of the shofar, rising with extreme strength, confuses Satan and defeats the demons. Just as the compassion aroused in human fear provokes compassion in the upper realms, the sound of the lower shofar provokes the sound of the upper shofar; they meet and intermingle. The shofar also appears as a symbol of the world to come; as bringing the people of Israel to God and as a major force in redemption and the end of days. There can be no doubt that these various views of the shofar had great influence on subsequent generations and are still current today.

The number four is the nexus of four realms: the realm of the universe, the human realm, the musical realm, and the realm of Jewish praxis. The four worlds of action, formation,

⁷¹ *Zohar I Vayechi* 230b-230a

creation and emanation may also be likened to four categories of the human spirit:

nefesh, the physical spirit placed in the liver and blood, *ruach*, a higher spirit placed in the heart, *neshamah* or soul which represents the mind, and *chaya*, life spirit, or *yechidah*, individuality, which are together outside the body, and subsume the source of life. These four subdivisions may also be likened to the four primary scales and the four principle octaves used in most vocal and instrumental music, the intentional application of which was used to influence both human souls and the *sephirot*. The four scales may in turn be compared with different forms of musical expression, from 'menagen', playing simple music, to 'meranen' which is more emotionally charged, through 'shar' singing to the highest 'mezamer'.

Matityahu Glazerson in his *Music and Kabbalah*⁷² compares the four shofar blasts of *Rosh Hashanah* with the state of the human soul: Firstly, *Tekiah* represents the original state of man before the primal sin. Secondly, *shevarim* represents the soul immediately after the first sin, symbolized by the broken continuity of three short blasts. Thirdly, *Teruah* represents the shattering of the soul upon realization of its sin, and its ramifications. Finally, the *tekiah gedolah* symbolizes the long process of straightening out the soul. Such hermeneutic metaphors are commonly used in attempting to come to some understanding of mystical theology, philosophy or practice.

One of the functions of the shofar and the singing is to help to create harmony between the different powers of the upper region and between the mundane sphere. Isaac Arama

⁷² Glazerson, Matityahu. *Music and Kabbalah*, Jason Aronson Inc. Northvale, New Jersey (1997), p83

in his book the Binding of Isaac emphasizes the musical meaning of this universal harmony, saying that the perfection of the world results from the tuning of the different strings of the minor instruments (microcosmos) in perfect consonance with the strings of the large instruments (macrocosmos); harmonic proportion between the instruments is established through observance of the laws of the Torah, their non-observance corrupts this proportion and causes degeneration of the world. It is therefore the task of man to concentrate his whole inner purpose toward the reintegration of the original harmony and the primordial spiritual nature of all creation. This in fact means salvation. In a commentary on the first biblical word *bereshit*, we read in the Zohar that God created the word in song (meaning harmony) because the word *bereshit* suggests *shir taev* which represents the same letters although in a different order. *Shir taev* means song of desire, expressing the longing of the whole universe to glorify God, and of heaven and earth to sing praise of the Holy One blessed be He. It is said that *shir taev* corresponds to the song of Solomon, the best of all songs, which shall be heard when Samael, chief of demons, and all his hordes disappear from the world, that is to say at the end of days. Then, all the beasts of the chariot throne will bestir themselves in singing aloud, and all the winged creature will whistle tunes, welcoming in gladness and melody the daughter (the mystical archetype of the community of Israel) on her way to receive the wedding sanctification from the bridegroom. They will sing the *Kedushah*, then David will be awoken by the *kinnor* that plays itself and will sing ten kinds of melodies of which the first is *ashrei* (the first word of the psalms), which is equivalent to *bereshit*.

5/ Music's Role in Affecting Cosmic harmony

"When I weld my spirit to God, I let my mouth say what it will, for then all my words are bound to their root in Heaven."

The Baal Shem Tov

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto in his *Adir Bamarom* (p.40), maintains that the planets are moved by musical waves: "All those things above are carried out by music, and all the luminaries, when they go out from their source, are motivated by music". Each planet has its music, while according to the *Zohar* (Exodus, *Shlach*), "the constellations themselves create music". Furthermore, in the *Zohar* (Exodus, *Vayakhel*), the music of the sun is "so wonderful, that if the ears of man were not blocked, he would be capable of hearing this music. He would not however be able to exist, for his soul would leave his body". This could also be another analogy for the raising of the souls of the people of Israel at Mount Sinai upon hearing the first two commandments, whereby the voice of God, and the music of the sun / light, raise the souls to ultimate union.

From even a superficial examination of kabbalistic literature the impression emerges that music is everything and in everything and by everything, to use the beautiful formulation of one of the greatest Arab mystics .Ibn al Arabi. A favorite topic of the *Zohar* is the music of the angels. In the process of creating the world, God made the angels out of his own breath, some of whom sing His Glory day and night. They are organized in different classes and choirs according to their degrees and according to the hours and watches of day and night. Among the diverse classifications, there is one dividing the

choir of angels into three bands. The first is assigned to sing together with Israel during the day, the second is said to join Israel in the singing of the *Kedushah*; this band is subdivided into three choirs that intone alternatively and in different renditions the word 'holy', which is repeated three times. Each choir has its own leader. As to the third band, it is constituted of the upper maidens, it is the highest of all the choirs and to it falls the task of establishing blissful union and harmony between the *sefirah* of *malchut* (kingdom of God) and that of *tiferet* (beauty). The *sefirah malchut* also represents the husband being unified with the bride Shechinah or *tiferet*. According to Tishbi in *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, the Shechinah functions as the guardian angel of Israel, and remains in exile with the people of Israel until the messianic era will repair the breach between the bride *Shechinah/Tiferet* and the groom *malchut*. The harmony sought between the marital partners can only be achieved when there is harmony reflected on earth. It is somewhat ironic that there are rabbinic injunctions forbidding music except on the Sabbath or at weddings until the people of Israel have redeemed themselves, and the mourning for Jerusalem and the exile is over.

The third band is not the only female choir in the upper regions; such choirs and even soloists dwell in the female *hechalot* (chambers). In Yocheved's chamber thousands and myriads of women sing the song of the sea three times a day; they go up to "then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron took a timbrel in her hand" (Exodus XV:20); from there on Yocheved sings alone. The righteous ones on the Garden of Eden listed to their song and some angels join in their singing. In another chamber Deborah with the women's choir intone the song that Deborah sang in this world.

The song of the angels in the three watches of the night, as against the three prayers of the Jews, is a favorite theme, repeatedly described in various versions. I. Tishby writes "Their main task In their song the angels seek to unite with their Lord, but the proximity of the *sitra achra* (demonic or satanic powers) interfere with this aim and they have to be driven away by trickery"⁷³.

Not only the angels sing; the stars, the spheres, the *merkavah* (chariot throne) and the beasts, the trees in the Garden of Eden and their perfumed, indeed the whole universe sings before God. The great power of this song, and the fact that the people of Israel sing below in parallel with the divine music, makes the Jews' singing exercise and influence both on the supernal song and on the divine world itself. No one on earth could hear the supernal music except for Moses and Joshua. As to the latter it is said that he heard the pleasant melody of the sun in the middle of a battle and was seriously disturbed, which is why he said: "Sun stand thou still at Gideon ..." (Joshua, X:12), meaning 'stop singing'. Moscato (d. 1590) quotes this tradition to prove that not only Pythagoras was capable of hearing the music of the spheres⁷⁴.

The music of the spheres and planets has led to several speculations of which we should like to mention that included in *Midrash ha-chochmah* by Judah Ben Shelomo ha-Cohen ibn Mitka (mid 13th century). In his Speculation on psalm 150 he establishes parallelism between the nine classical instruments mentioned there and the nine spheres or planets:

⁷³ *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, Part I, pp.449-450

the *tof* (frame drum) corresponds to Jupiter; *machol* (taken as dance) to Mars, since this latter is considered baneful, its association with dance indicates the latter's negative aspect and imperfection. The *minim* (stringed instrument) corresponds to Venus; the *uggav* (wind instrument) to the sun; the *tsiltselei shama* (sounding cymbals) to Mercury; the *tsiltselei teruah* (loud clashing cymbals) to the Moon. The other instruments and their correspondences are missing.

Commenting on Psalm 150, a passage of the *Zohar* declares that all these praises with diverse instruments are as nothing as compared to what is said in the last verse of psalm 150 which also closes the book: "Let everything that breathes praise the Lord, Praise the Lord."

Music is also integrally connected to happiness; the author of the *Zohar* maintains that at the end of days that is "a time for laughter", the people of Israel shall sing⁷⁵, and when the firmament shall move, all the bands of angels shall rejoice and engage in song and praise⁷⁶.

⁷⁴ Judah Moscoto, *Nefutsot Yehudah* item #530

⁷⁵ *Midrash hene'elam*, *Vayare* I 114a

⁷⁶ *Zohar I Vayakhel* 221a

Chapter V

Kabbalah in the Liturgy

1/ The Synagogue Service

Liturgy, in a sense functions as a tacit recognition of the normative daily nature of mysticism. Despite periods of extreme popularity and periods when mystical thought was 'out of fashion', the liturgy of the synagogue is replete with mystical references. Some references are quite specific, as in the *Kedushah*, *Shir hayichud*, *shir hakavod*, various *kavanot* and *yichudim*, *nishmat kol chai*, *El Adon*, *lecha dodi* the *kaddish* and so on.

Shir ha-Kavod / Shir ha-Yichud

Shir ha-Yichud and *Shir hakavod* were written by an anonymous Hasidic author probably in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries respectively, and popularly attributed to Judah ben Samuel he-Hassid and his father Samuel ben Kalonymous he-Hassid of Speyer ⁷⁷. *Shir hayichud* is a series of poems recited on weekdays. Still sung on a weekly basis in the Sabbath liturgy of the traditional Ashkenazie synagogue, *Shir Hakavod* is usually presented by a pre-*Bar mitvah* child, perhaps in a somewhat ironic statement that we are all children in the light of such mystical concepts, and also to represent the child/us as

⁷⁷ *Shir hakavod* is attributed to Jehuda he-Hasid as early as Sefer Yuhasin by Abraham Zacuto (1452-1515).

likened unto the cherubim. The cherubim which are on either side of the ark, are also the delimitation of God's chosen boundaries within the earthly realm, and according to Eleazar of worms, our role in the singing of *Shir ha-Yichud* and *Shir hakavod*, is once again to approach the paradoxical nature of God's *Tsimtsum* versus His omnipresence and to expand God's presence from the ark and self appointed exile.

Along with such liturgy as *Lecha Dodi* and the *hechalot piyut El Adon*, *Shir ha-kavod* once again presents us with the wedding imagery of the Shabbath or the *Schechinah* as a bride. God's enthronement, *shabbat* and marriage become interconnected, and as with the mitzvah of rejoicing with the bride and groom so too here God's glory is extolled through poetic imagery and music. In *Sidra Raba devereshit* the importance of the wedding ceremony and the enthronement ceremony become intertwined.

Shir ha-Yichud and *Shir hakavod* are amongst the earliest documents that inform us as to the Pietistic struggle with philosophical principles, and their theology affirming the Divine transcendence and immanence. Within the context of the all too recent crusades of 1086 and 1148 C.E. the pietistic love of God was expressed '*al mavet ahuvecha*', unto dying for God's name. Eleazar ben Judah of Worms speaks of the pietistic conception of martyrdom with erotic fervor, emphasizing the possibility of becoming one with the Infinite, where the diminishing of the self to nothing paradoxically allows one to become everything, just as the midrash speaks of each letter beginning with the dot of the *Yud*, which is also the beginning of *YHWH* and hence everything.

The author of this boldly anthropomorphic hymn, shocking in its highly pictorial depictions of a radiant, youthful, masculine God-figure, is deeply engaged, perhaps even infatuated, with images of the divine head and crown. After an apologetic introduction of some ten stanzas reassuring the reader repeatedly that what follows lies within the realm of the theologically permissible, the poet sets free his imagination to describe a figure who combines the lover of Song of Songs, the warrior of the ancient prophets, and the crowned God of the *merkavah* tradition. The following poetic translation is by Israel Zangwill, and is filled with extraordinarily rich allusions to biblical verses. It is often demands that we recall the context from which a particular phrase is chosen in order to comprehend the poet's intent.

- 1 Sweet hymns shall be my chant and woven songs,
For thou art all for which my spirit longs –
To be within the shadow of Thy hand
And all Thy mystery to understand
- 5 The while Thy glory upon my tongue
My inmost heart with love of thee is wrung
So though Thy mighty marvels I proclaim
'Tis songs of love wherewith I greet Thy name
I have not seen Thee, yet I feel Thy praise
- 10 Nor known Thee, yet I image forth Thy ways.
For by Thy seers' and servants' mystic speech
Thou didst Thy sov'ran splendor darkly teach
And from the grandeur of Thy work they drew
The measure of Thy inner greatness, too
- 15 They told of Thee, but not as Thou must be,
Since from Thy work they tried to body Thee
To countless visions did their pictures run,
Behold through all the visions art Thou one.
In Thee old age and youth at once were drawn
- 20 The grey of eld, the flowing locks of dawn,
The ancient judge, the youthful warrior,
The man of battles, terrible in war,
The helmet of salvation on His head
And by His hand and arm the triumph led

- 25 His head all shining with the dew of light
His locks all dripping with the drops of night.
I glorify Him, for He joys in me,
My crown of beauty He shall ever be!
His head is like pur gold; His forehead's flame
- 30 Is graven glory of His holy name.
And with that lovely diadem 'tis graced
The coronal His people there have placed
His hair as on the head of youth is twined
In wealth of raven curls it flows behind
- 35 His circlet is the home of righteousness;
May He not love His highest rapture less!
And by His treasured people in His hand
A diadem His kingly brow did band
By Him they were uplifted, carried, crowned
- 40 Thus honored in as much as precious found.
His glory is on me as mine on Him,
And when I call He is not far or dim.
Ruddy in red apparel, bright he glows,
When He from treading Edom's winepress goes.
- 45 Phylacteried the vision Moses viewed
The day he gazed on God's similitude.
He loves His folk; the meek will glorify,
And, shrined in prayer, draw their rapt reply.
Truth is Thy primal word; at Thy behest
- 50 The generations pass -O aid our quest
For Thee, and set my host of songs on high
And let my psalmody come very nigh.
My praises as a coronal account
And let my prayer as Thine incense mount.
- 55 Deem precious unto Thee the poor man's song
As those that to Thine altar did belong.
Rise, O my blessing, to the Lord of birth,
The breeding, quickening, righteous force of earth.
Do Thou receive it with acceptance nod,
- 60 My choicest incense offered to my God.
And let my meditation grateful be,
For all my being is athirst for Thee.

Comments:

- 1 'Sweet hymns' (*anim zmirot*), Cf. 2 Samuel 23:1, where David is called 'na'im zmirot', which is traditionally understood as 'sweet singer'. The poet seeks to liken his song to those of David
- 2 'My spirit longs' Cf. Ps.42:2: "As the hart after streams of water, so does my soul long for You O God." The erotic character of the poem is already revealed in this opening line.
- 3 'All Their mystery', The word *raz* and *sod* may be seen as synonyms, both meaning secret. *Raz*, a post biblical term, is especially favored by early esoteric writers. But *sod* also means council or assembly (Cf. especially Ps. 89:8); this strophe could read, "to know the full secret revealed in your angelic council." If *sod* does refer to a secret council here, the whole stanza could reveal a picture of the author as a *merkavah* voyager, one who seeks to be protected by God's own hand as he learns the secrets of the heavenly council.
- 4 'Songs of love' This phrase is used in Ps. 45:1.
- 5 'I tell Their praise', A possible echo of Ps. 19:2:, "The heavens tell the glory of God." The heavens, and the angels within them, also tell it without having seen it.
- 13 'The dew of light', Here two verse are combined. Cant. 5:2: "The sound of my beloved knocking: open for me my sister-love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is filled with dew, my locks with drops of night" and Isa. 26:5:

“awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust, for Your dew is a dew of light and earth will cast forth the shades.”

From war, the author turns quickly to love, choosing one of the most passionate verses of Song of Songs. The lover is aroused and calls on his beloved to allow him to enter⁷⁸. That this sexual arousal should include a reference to dew with which God will resurrect the dead is also not surprising. This dew was present at Sinai and was used to revive Israel when they passed out in ecstasy due to the great fragrance with which the world was filled as God gave the Torah. “When God resurrects the dead, He shakes out His golden locks and the dew falls”⁷⁹.

- 24 ‘Enshrined in prayer’, Ps. 22:4 describes God as “You holy One, seated amid the praises of Israel.” This verse of enthronement immediately precedes the *Kedushah* verses in the daily morning liturgy’s final recitation of them, the *Kedushah de-sidra*.
- 26 ‘And set my hosts of song on high’, the antithesis of Amos 5:23: “Remove from upon Me your multitude of songs.”
- 26 And let my psalmody’, Ps. 119:169: “May my joyous sound come near to You.”
- 31 ‘Let my meditation grateful be’, Cf. Ps. 104:34: “May my meditation be pleasing to Him.”

⁷⁸ The sexual overtones are consistent with the many other places ‘head’ is understood as phallus, while crown or *atarah* depicts the corona of the penis, and is a term well known in *halachik* discussion of circumcision. On mystical use of this term in the *Zohar*, see E. Wolfson, “*Circumcision, Vision of God and textual interpretation*.”

⁷⁹ B. Shabbat 88b and *midrash Shir ha-Shirim* (ed. Gruenhuert) 5:2, p. 38a.

The combination of images that makes for this poem's power is particularly interesting. The full joining of the 'young God' imagery of Judaism, in both its erotic and warlike manifestations, to the already pictorial *merkavah* traditions creates a powerful and startling effect. There is a strikingly powerful masculinity here that is rare in post biblical and medieval descriptions of God before Kabbalah. One may claim a precedent for *Shir hakavod* in the attention *merkavah* sources pay to beauty as a feature of both God Himself and the angels. They are not at all hesitant to refer to the Yofi (beauty) of God as an all important element of His praise. Yet in *Shir hakavod*, the beauty described is a series of earthy and realistic descriptions that are based on scriptures, such as black curls, bloody clothes, and so forth. The erotic element of God as the Lover of Israel is prevalent in the period Hebrew poetry of Jews of Spain such as Ibn Gabriol and Halevi⁸⁰. There is also precedent in *payyetic* compositions, including those of tenth and eleventh century *Ashkenaz*, quite a number of which are woven around verses or phrases from the Cantic⁸¹.

⁸⁰ On the treatment of such religious love poems in Gabriol, see A. Mirsky, *Hapiyut* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), pp635ff.

⁸¹ Verses from the Cantic are used especially in *piyyutim* for *Pesach* and *Shavuot*. The Cantic is read in the synagogue on the seventh day of *Pesach*, but its motif of marriage is also much associated with *Shavuot*. See Z.M. Rabinowitz, *Piyyutey Rabbi Yannai*, vol. 2, 267-87.

2/ Liturgy in the Home

Home ritual is even more openly mystical for example in its references to reincarnation in the bedtime *Shema*, or many *Shabbat Zmirot*. Services such as *tikkun chatsot* and the *bakashot* were formulated based on mystical thought rather than the replacement of Temple practices (not that Temple practice could be thought in any way lacking in mystical overtones!).

The traditional Jew is surrounded with mysticism, from the earliest of morning rituals to the final word prior to sleep, and even to the journey that the soul is said to make during sleep. In the early morning the wrapping of the *tallit* and of *tefillin* may be accompanied with the prayer *leshem yichud*, were the words resound with transcendent overtones

For the sake of the unification of the Holy One Blessed is He, and His presence, in fear and love to unify the Name Yud Hei with Vav He imperfect unity, in the name of all Israel.⁸²

The first half of the Divine name formed by the Hebrew letters *Yud* and *Hei* symbolize the divine attribute of Judgment (*sefirah malchut*), while the second half formed of the letters *Vav* and *He*, symbolize the attribute of mercy (*sefirah - tiferet*). The blend of both attributes leads to God's desire goal of creation. As the act of creation in mystical thought is not considered to be a historically complete act, the wrapping of the *tallit* also represents a reminder of the ongoing nature of the creative act, and that should God truly withdraw from His creation, reality, as we know it would cease to exist.

⁸² Artscroll *Siddur* p.5.

The wrapping of the *teffilin* is a symbolic wedding ceremony, including words of the wedding ceremony *ve'erastich li leolam*, and the symbolic wrapping of the *tefillin* strap around the fingers in the manner of a groom putting the betrothal ring on his bride's finger. The *sefirah* of *Malchut* symbolically is unified through this act with the feminine aspect represented by *Shechinah* (*sefirah Tiferet*), which functions as the guardian angel of Israel⁸³.

⁸³ Tishbi *Zohar* I, 371-387

3/ Shabbat Zemirot

I cannot sit at the Shabbat table without a new song.

There is no festive Sabbath without a new song.

Tzadik of Kuzmir

The Sabbath which is the all too brief taste of *me'ein olam haba*, the 'world to come' is considered as the day when the exiled *Shechinah* is reunited with the rest of the *sefirot*, and the people of Israel function as the facilitators of the Divine wedding, from the welcoming of the bride with *Lecha Dodi* through to the *melava malka* or the ceremony after *havdalah* at the end of the Sabbath, which is meant to escort and console both the bride, and the people of Israel upon the separation from the groom for yet another week of the mundane. As with any wedding ceremony, the occasion of the Sabbath is celebrated with much singing and rejoicing, and the setting aside of any mourning whether personal or for the destruction of the temple.

The Sabbath home is considered the wedding home, and the Sabbath table as the table of the newly wed couple. Sabbath zmirot have therefore been one of the most popular forums for mystical expression, and the emulation of the unification of the *Shechinah* with *malchut* – both symbolic and physical. The evening meal is opened with the singing of *Shalom Alechem*, welcoming the angels into the home. The very universal use of *shalom alechem* and *Lecha dodi* just to name two of the most popular poems displays how mystical thought has become mainstream even amongst modern (and historical)

rationalist communities. *Atkinu seudato* is a brief paragraph composed by Rabbi Yitzchak Luria based on the Zohar, and begins with an exhortation to prepare for the spiritual experience of the Sabbath feast⁸⁴. The reference to *vechakal tapuchin kadishin*, or the 'field of Sacred apples' once again is a reference to the *Shechinah*. *Baruch Adonai Yom Yom* written by Rabbi Shimon HaGadol in tenth century Mainz, Germany, specifically refers to the various exiles throughout which the *Shechinah* has accompanied Israel, and is sung at the second Sabbath meal.

The meal richest in mystical compositions has traditionally been the *seudat shlishit* or the third Sabbath meal. The third meal is referred to as *ra'ava dera'avin* or the time of favors, when God is most kindly disposed toward Israel, and most sympathetic to Israel's efforts toward spiritual growth, and is frequently referred to in the Zohar as a time of 'awesome spiritual significance'⁸⁵. *Bnei Heichalah* is a composition referring to the righteous scholars who yearn for a glimpse of the *Shechinah's* splendor, yet recognizes the impure shells (*kelipin*), which are the evil husks that may surround the spark of good. One of the roles of the Sabbath *zemirot* is to facilitate humanity's attempts to expose the sparks of holiness within the husks, thereby also allowing the realization of personal spiritual growth.

⁸⁴ Artscroll *siddur* p. 588.

⁸⁵ *Aruch Hashulchan* 291:1

Chapter VI

Hasidism and Contemporary Voices

Hasidism

All of god's creations recite melody in the heavens and on earth and there are mansions in heaven which can be opened only through song.
(Zohar, Genesis: Chaye Sarah)

The Sabbatean upheaval proclaimed the end of a golden era for Kabbalistic practice. But the Kabbalah experienced a kind of Renaissance through Hasidism.⁸⁶ This movement was a reaction against the perceived pedantry of talmudism and the wild growth of ritual formalism. It arose among the ignorant and oppressed, who found no satisfaction in the prevailing religious life of the community, and who sought warmth of feeling instead of rigid formalism, and enthusiasm in place of dry casuistry. The founder of Hassidism was Israel Baal Shem, (d. 1761), who was a man filled with passionate faith and consumed with longing for the divine—not a pedant, but a man of near-raving enthusiasm, graced with the joy of the constant stream of revelation that flowed to him. What made Hasidism so popular was that it demanded nothing more than an open heart, a human soul ready to abandon itself in order to restore itself to a clarified state.

The origin of chassidic music may be traced to Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572) and the Kabbalist movement. The Kabbalists in Safed, Palestine, made singing their duty and considered it a condition of inspiration and devotion. Melody stood at the cradle of

Kabbalah and surrounded it with the mystic yearnings that have touched the hearts of its followers to this day. The Chassidic movement assigned to music a position of primary importance.

The Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760)⁷ founder of the Chassidic movement, arrived on the East European scene at a time when Jewish morale was extremely low. The long-awaited and hoped-for Messiah in the person of Shabbatai Zvi had proven false, and the Jews had been left despondent and totally disheartened. The Jewish community was divided, so to speak, into a caste system, the Torah scholars heading the list, the non-learned individuals at the bottom. The Baal Shem Tov realized that this system and the general moroseness of the Jewish community made Judaism unappealing and divided the community. A system had to be developed within whose framework the lowly unlearned as well as the scholar could be assured of worth and dignity. The movement that he founded, a movement appealing to the masses, was the answer. Music was one of the primary vehicles for transmitting these teachings to the broader Jewish community.

Israel Baal Shem renewed Luria's ecstatic system. The core of religion in his thinking is true love for God, together with intense faith and unshakable trust in the power of prayer. Thus, he could never have enough of prayers and hymns of praise. In his opinion, every true prayer has the power to influence the upper realms; it must not remain subjugated to the petitions and requests of the individual, but it must bring him closer to the Creator. One must eliminate his own individuality in his prayer; his soul has to tear itself free

⁸⁶ J.E. 6:220.

from its mundane abode and lift itself above the world of the tangible to the realm of divine grace. Thus prayer was for Hasidism the be-all and end-all; by engaging all of their coarse and natural strength, they sought to bring themselves to ecstasy, not scorning even the drinking of spirits as a means of achieving a trance-like state. Since they thought that ecstasy was indispensable to prayer, they were not particular about the traditional times of prayer or about holding communal services; they would assemble in special gatherings, and even in these they would pray individually when the moment of ecstasy arrived. They abandoned the prayer books of the Polish rite and introduced the prayers of Isaac Luria (*tikun ha'ari*), in a kind of break with their local liturgical tradition.⁸⁷

The Hassidic movement, founded in the middle 1700's, may be defined as the religion of Torah, performance of God's commandments, and song and melody. The ecstasy of melody is the key with which Hassidism strives to unlock the gates of heaven; It is, so to speak, the ladder to the throne of God.' "Through the unfathomable depths of space wander countless stars, luminous thoughts of God-blest instruments on which the Creator place's. They are all happy - for God desires a happy world." This is the creed of the Hassid. This is his religion. He shows his faith primarily through joy. Music, the natural concomitant of joy, fills the head with a holy ecstasy of unearthly happiness. The Besht' preached that the simple man, imbued with native faith and able to pray fervently and wholeheartedly with a sense of joy in his heart, was nearer and dearer to God than the learned but joyless formalist spending his whole life in the study of Talmud. The

⁸⁷ Schechter *Studies*, 1:46.

essence of faith, he taught, lies in the emotions, not the intellect. The more profound the emotions, the nearer man is to God.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Ladi, first formulated the Chabad⁸⁸ system of six different levels for the elevation of the soul. He strived for the same goal as the other branches of hassidism, namely the attaining of divine bliss. However Chabad had, and still has, a unique approach to that goal. Contending that it is impossible to leap immediately from extreme melancholy to extreme joy or for a human being to rise from the lowest to the highest state without proceeding through the whole scale of the intermediate sentiments of the soul, great stress and care was laid upon each progressive stage of development, as significant for the education of the soul and for the improvement of the spirit. Music plays a crucial role in this process

The various stages in this process of elevation according to Chabad philosophy are:

1. *Hishtapchut hanefesh*: the outpouring of the soul and its effort to rise out of the mire of sin, out of the *Klipah* / the evil shell.
2. *Hitorerut*: spiritual awakening.
3. *Hitpa'alut*: the stage in which the individual is possessed by his thoughts.
4. *Dveykut*: communion with God.
5. *Hitlahavut*: flaming ecstasy.

⁸⁸ The chassidim of Lubavitch are also known as Chabad. The name Chabad is an acronym of the sefirot Chochma Bina and Daat

6. *Hitpashtut hagashmiut*: the highest state, in which the soul completely casts, away its garment of flesh and becomes a disembodied spirit."

Many of the Chabad songs are analyzed according to these steps of elevation.

Every Chabad tune aims to voice either all, or some, of the stages of elevation of the soul.

There are specific tunes which express *Hitorerut*, *hitlahavut*, *hishtapchut hanefesh dvekut* and so on. The two stages of *Hitorerut* and *hitlahavut* are also called *rikud* (dance). The melodies voicing *dveykus* and *Hishtapchut* have the free un-rhythmical approach, and are sung slowly. The tunes for *hislahavut* and *hitorerut* are built on vigorous syncopated dancing rhythms.

According to its principles, Hasidism represents an absolute rebellion against the synagogue service, and no more convincing proof exists of the intolerable condition of the synagogue service than the fact that so many turned their backs on it — not out of lack of faith or out of skepticism, but out of a true longing for piety. This should have been taken as a serious warning that the liturgy was in need of revision. Hasidism strengthened the conservative tendency and faith in the written word, the ascetic spirit of renunciation, and the striving to compel the advent of the messianic age. Instead of changing the words, Hassidism expressed its rebellion in the way and timing of its liturgical performance. The expressive quality of music played a key role in articulating its reforms. These transformations through music continue to develop to this day.

Modernity

Mystical thought and its concomitant musical expression suffered another dramatic eclipse as rationalist or 'scientific' thought has swept modern times. While religious thought is no less popular, mysticism has only recently been 'rediscovered' and once again become increasingly mainstream. Musical compositions reflect this lull in musico mystical thought, and only recently have composers once again adapted mystical thought into their compositions. Groups such as Atsiluth, and composers such as Danny Maseng and Shlomo Carlebach have forged a new awareness of the power of mystical thought as expressed through music, and the unique ability of music to express intellectual concepts through an emotional medium.

Ironically while superstition has become unfashionable, modern day liturgy continue to retain mystical elements such as *Shalom Alechem* and *Lecha Dodi*, and composers who denied mystical theory continued to use these explicitly mystical texts as source material for their compositions. The Reform movement specifically rejected mystical thought, yet the *Gates of Prayer* continues to retain reference to Satan in the *Hashkiveynu*⁸⁹, as well as angelic references in *Shalom Alechem*⁹⁰ sefirotic references in *Lecha Dodi*⁹¹, in addition to numerous other mystically influence prayers. Yet the demands of the populace have brought back ever increasing interest in mystical thought, and this has primarily manifest itself in the synagogue through music. Phenomena such as the resurgence of attendance of over one thousand five hundred people of mixed ages and religious practice attending

⁸⁹ The New Union Prayer Book, P. 133

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.178.

congregation Bnei Yeshurun in Manhattan reflect this. Weekly these masses of New York Jews gather for a musico-mystical or ecstatic experience. Composers such as Debbie Friedman and Craig Taubman with his *Friday Night Live* program, have rejuvenated the musico-ecstatic experience throughout the Reform movement. While these composers and synagogues may not be specifically aiming at a mystical experience as conceived by historic kabbalists, they do however conform to the ecstatic elements of the Hassidic movement. Furthermore compositions such as Debbie Friedman's *Misheberach* have swept both the Reform and Conservative movements with what is effectively a mystical belief that through such a prayer God may be influenced and healing may be found.

One of the most notable composers of mystical music in our time is Shlomo Carlbach. Carlbach represents a modern neo-Hassidic movement, which reclaims the ecstatic element of historical Hassidic movements within a contemporary musical style.

In the last 35 years Shlomo had the distinction of being one of the few American Jewish composers whose songs were performed by Israeli artists on radio and television. The *Rabi Haroked*, the Dancing Rabbi, as he was affectionately known throughout Israel, composed such songs as *V'haer Eneinu*, *Od Yishama*, *Adir Hu*, *Uvau Ha'ovdim*, *Yisrael B'tach Bashem*, *Lmaan Achai V'rei* and hundreds of others. They became and remained part of the world Jewish song repertoire. His *Am Yisrael Chai* was the unofficial hymn of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry. His melodies served as the corner stone for music programs in the most right wing Orthodox seminaries as well as the most left wing congregational Hebrew schools. His songs were sung with exuberant joy in Camp Torah Vodaat and in the Reform movement's Camp Swig. Every wedding and Bar mitzvah band paid and continues to pay homage to Shlomo by playing sets of his melodies.

What was the secret of his success? Why did he succeed for so long while others failed after "short runs?" The answer I believe can be found in his uncanny ability to strike an immediate responsive chord in the ears of his listeners. Even a seemingly banal sounding melody became a hypnotic and mesmerizing chant. The simplicity of his melody line, the intensity of his performances, the charisma of his personality, served to create a worldwide musical following.⁹²

⁹¹ Ibid., p.123.

We may but speculate as to Carlbach's mystical intent throughout the compositional process, however the wide use of his music in ecstatic prayer brought 'mesmerizing chants' to become widely adopted even by more traditional Hassidic sects. Within these contexts, the melodies were used with specific mystical intent.

Yet Shlomo Carlbach is but one of the many Jewish composers influence by mystical thought in their compositions. Aminadav Aloni chose the poetry of Jacob Francis for his *Et Ezkerah Yom*. Jacob (Ya'akov) Ben David Francis (1615-1667) was best known as a satirical poet. He was born and lived in Mantua, received his grounding in Talmud from his father and continued his studies with Shemaiah de Medinah in Venice. Ya'akov and his younger brother were vehemently opposed to the Kabbalah. Ya'akov composed the poem *Et Ezkerah Yom* from the *Circle of Love* by unknown Sephardic poets, condemning the Kabbalah, and attempting to ridicule the aberrations of mysticism. The kabbalists of Mantua demanded the poem be immediately burned.

When I remember the day like a burning fire was the cheek of the women and bitterly she cried.
Her hand was holding his and her mouth was glued to the mouth of her dead husband. They
couldn't separate her from him, and in my desire for this woman I wished I were dead. And when
I thought about tasting her lips, I wished for the day of my death like the day of the Messiah⁹².

Despite the mocking satirical element, echoes of the widespread nature of mystical thought throughout the seventeenth century are clearly visible in the poet's need to write such satirical commentary. Furthermore, the relevance to this very day of both poetry and concepts is displayed in Aloni's choice to use this poem for his contemporary composition. Thus it is clear that while there may be a prominent trend to return to

⁹² Velvel Pasternak article on Shlomo Carlbach on line at Jewish Music.com

⁹³ Translation from original score of Aminadav Aloni's music, Translator unknown.

Kabbalah, this is not by any means unanimous. Although this is not the place to explore the nature of the opposition to mystical thought, such opposition deserves a thesis unto itself.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

Contemporary Jewish spirituality is lived in the tension between traditional texts and contemporary scientific and psychological truths. A nostalgic part of me cannot help but wish that we could hear with Pythagoras's ears the concrete nature of music's influence upon the cosmos as well as upon our ethical and spiritual lives. The tension that we dwell in exists in our conscious selves and is articulated in words and actions. Music, I believe, continues to speak to the unconscious realm. The mystical power of music is its ageless ability to transcend the intellectual realm and to evoke an emotional and spiritual response. In this way, many of the ideas articulated throughout the ages by mystics live on. Music in liturgy has played a critical role throughout history in articulating and transmitting fundamental kabbalistic teachings. Music is a historically powerful vehicle who's mystical roots continue to affect unseen worlds today.

*How do you pray to God? Is it possible to pray to the Shechinah with words alone?
Come, I will show you a new way to Adonai – not with words or sayings but with song.
We will sing, and Adonai on high will understand us.*

—Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav—

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