

VISUAL T'FILAH

Historical Antecedents and Guide to Best Practices

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination, 2010

Abstract

Visual T'filah consists of using projection technologies to integrate liturgy and art in Jewish prayer services for the purpose of enhancing and deepening prayer experiences. This thesis consists of two main sections intended to advance an holistic conception of Visual T'filah.

The first section explores relevant historical antecedents to Visual T'filah, including ancient synagogue mosaics and frescos, and illuminated manuscripts. This section also examines the development of synagogue services as well as discussing technological developments relevant to containing and displaying sacred texts, including stone tablets, scrolls, books, and screens.

The second section is a detailed guide to be used by interested communities wishing to explore the implementation of Visual T'filah in services on an experimental, periodic, or regular basis. In this section the benefits of using Visual T'filah are explored as well as suggested methods for introducing Visual T'filah to a community of worshippers.

Technological logistics are explained and discussed including which computer programs to use, where to place the projector and screen, as well as how to choose the correct projector. Additionally, methods for finding and selecting appropriate imagery are explained.

The thesis concludes with an exploration of possible implementations of Visual T'filah in the future, including the use of technologies still in development. In summary, the thesis conveys that Visual T'filah may be the natural next phase of Jewish worship and must be explored through proper experimentation and thoughtful implementation.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the following people for their support and encouragement, without whom this thesis would never have seen the light of day:

Rabbi Richard Levy
Student Rabbi Lydia Medwin
Rabbi Michele Medwin
Steve Medwin
Rachel Medwin
Rabbi Billy Dreskin
Dr. Dvora Weisberg

A number of people have been supportive of Visual T'filah and its development, the lessons from which appear in the Guide to Best Practices:

Rabbi Hara Person
Rabbi Zoë Klein
Rabbi Rick Kellner
Randy Schwab
Rabbi Mark Miller
Rabbi Paul Kipnes
Cantor Doug Cotler

Table of Contents:

Introduction	1
Part 1: The Historical Antecedents of Visual T'filah	3
The Development of Synagogue Services	3
The Technology of Sacred Text Containers	10
The Value of Art in Jewish Prayer	22
The Second Commandment and Other Objections to Art	28
Synagogue Art and Illuminated Manuscripts in Relation to Visual T'filah	33
Ancient Synagogue Art in Worship Spaces	35
Illuminated Manuscripts	41
What makes it "Jewish"?	46
Conclusion	51
Part II: The Guide of Best Practices	53
Defining Visual T'filah - New Terms	53
The Benefits of Visual T'filah	54
Introducing Visual T'filah to your community	58
Creating Visual T'filah	61
Technological Logistics	77
Moving Forward	83
Bibliography	87
Image Sources	89

Introduction

Visual T'filah is a way to enhance prayer and assist worshipers in finding new or deeper meaning in prayers. It utilizes contemporary technology, including but not limited to digital projectors and screens, to display liturgy for the community intermingled with art and other visual imagery.

Visual T'filah is the natural result of independent yet interrelated developments which can be traced throughout Jewish history:

- The nature of Jewish communal prayer has undergone many transitions, depending upon the prevailing conditions and technological possibilities.
- Judaism has regularly adopted new technologies for use as sacred text containers,¹ each offering benefits over the previously used medium.
- Art has consistently been an important aspect of Jewish worship, as can be seen in synagogue and liturgical art.

Visual T'filah ("VT") is not just "a PowerPoint service"; it is reaching back into our history and tradition, drawing forth elements that were sacrificed when new technologies for sacred text containers were adopted and the prevailing conditions demanded change. VT allows the reintroduction of important values of prayer such as integrating art and visual awe as well as liturgical creativity and dynamic prayer experiences.

¹ Any medium or technology which is used to contain and display sacred text, *e.g.*, stone tablets, scrolls, books. The concept and phrase "sacred text container" was coined by the author.

Once understood in this way, it is clear that Visual T'filah is a natural next phase in the development of Jewish worship and, due to the occasionally ambivalent relationship of Judaism to worship-related art, consideration must be given so that it is implemented thoughtfully and intentionally. Through the experience of the author and a number of synagogues who have also been willing to adopt this new style of prayer early on, a series of guidelines and best practices can be created to assist communities wishing to embrace this growing innovation in Jewish worship.

Note:

The very structure and layout of this thesis is an example of using the tools of contemporary technology to enhance and more creatively deliver content. Whereas a traditional thesis consists mainly of text, this thesis will incorporate images and other desktop publishing techniques. For example, a variety of text boxes are dispersed throughout the body of the thesis, and the borders/design of the boxes indicate the function and content of the boxes.

A dashed border (.....) indicates commentary relevant or applicable to contemporary times, often involving technology or the use of Visual T'filah. Similarly, a solid border (_____) indicates relevant notes or quotes from a variety of thinkers that offer an additional perspective on the topic under discussion without existing within the body of text itself.

Part 1: The Historical Antecedents of Visual T'filah

Visual T'filah, and the technology supporting it, enables the *siddur* to be removed from the hands of the worshipers by placing the liturgy in a communally viewable location. Since this may feel different for a generation of worshippers used to having books in their hands, before adopting or embracing a new technology which alters the logistical aspects of a service, it is important to understand its place in the historical development of synagogue prayer. Not only has the liturgy itself evolved over time, so too have the text containers and the dynamics of the service been dramatically influenced by prevailing conditions and technological innovations.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYNAGOGUE SERVICES

The roots of the synagogue service known today grew out of the destruction of the Second Temple, and were nurtured by the rabbinic leadership. At each stage of development there were often conflicting considerations that had to be balanced. Immediately following the destruction of the Temple, those contradictory desires included maintaining a connection to the Temple rituals, thereby continuing the chain of tradition and authenticity, and establishing a prayer service that met the contemporary spiritual needs of the community.

Rabbinical interpretations guided the transition from Temple rituals to synagogue practices. For example, according to the rabbis, the biblical command “You shall serve Adonai your

God”² (Exodus 23:25) refers to the Temple service in which the sacrificial ritual was performed during mornings and afternoons. By reciting synagogue prayers at these same times, Jews fulfilled their duty to “serve Adonai.”³ There were also a number of prayers recited in the Temple that were included in synagogue services.⁴

The term for “serve” in this biblical passage above comes from the root *’vd* (עבד). A related word, *avoda* (עבודה) “worship,” is still used to describe synagogue services today.

Synagogue services and prayer practices continued to develop during this time. “By the turn of the first century of the Common Era the essence of the synagogue service was already in a coherent and recognizable state. The general order and contents of the synagogue prayers had already become a tradition, albeit an oral one. But there was no authoritative formulation, and even the order of the prayers was still in a fluid state. Great variety was the rule.”⁵ This flexibility allowed a wealth of liturgy to flourish, easing the transition and ushering in an innovative style of prayer.

While this value was important, it had to be balanced with communal norms and liturgical consistency. The Sanhedrin, under the leadership of Rabban Gamliel II, sought to do so by determining a basic structure and language of the synagogue service.⁶ After examining and comparing parallel versions of prayers, this rabbinic body declared their preferred phrasing.

² Biblical translations are adapted from Jewish Publication Society unless otherwise noted.

³ Millgram, 107.

⁴ Spero, 60.

⁵ Millgram, 86.

⁶ Millgram, 87.

Additionally, the eighteen prayers of the *amida* were given their official order, and the individual prayers within were given their general formulations.⁷

“Except for some verbal changes and amplifications, the regulations as adopted by Rabbi Gamliel and his colleagues have remained essentially the same to this day.”⁸

Despite codifying particular liturgical regulations, the rabbis also valued the ability of prayer to remain dynamic and meaningful to worshipers. It was understood that the most effective way of ensuring that texts, teachings, and prayers retained their flexibility to grow and develop organically over time was to maintain their status as an oral tradition.⁹ The rabbis had to ensure that liturgy remained as fluid and adaptable as possible; this meant worship had to remain an oral tradition in order to balance the limits they placed on prayer.

A *Talmudic* passage demonstrates this rabbinic principle at work:

“R. Judah bar Nahmani, the interpreter of R. Simeon b. Laqish, expounded: matters that are to be memorized you have not got the right to state in writing, and those that are to be in writing you have not got the right to state from memory.”¹⁰ (Gittin 60b)

While this statement was in the context of a discussion regarding the oral and written Torah, it also directly applied to prayer. This perspective was stated even more clearly and decisively in the *Tosefta*:

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Millgram, 88.

¹⁰ Translation from Jacob Neusner, “The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary”
©2005 Hendrickson Publishers. Electronic text hypertexted and prepared by OakTree Software, Inc. Version 1.1
(as found in Accordance 8.1.3)

“They who write down benedictions commit as grave a sin as those who burn the Torah.”¹¹

(Tosefta Shabbbat 13:4)

The comparison can be drawn between destroying the Torah through fire and destroying the liturgy through fixing it in writing. To preserve the effectiveness and impact of prayer, it had to remain dynamic (*i.e.*, oral).

Thus, for many centuries, synagogue liturgy was strictly transmitted orally. Service leaders recited the prayers from memory and were joined by members of the community who also knew the prayers. Those who were not as knowledgeable followed the leader according to their ability, and occasionally joined those who did not know the prayers by saying “Amen” after each blessing.¹²

During this time, prayer blossomed into a wide variety of expressions and local customs as the Jewish community continued to disperse. Each community developed a particular set of preferred prayers and additions that were not necessarily identical with the practices of other communities. The value of maintaining liturgical relevancy to individuals and communities began to overtake the value of liturgical unity and consistency, once again. This imbalance was brought to a head in the late 9th century when a community in Spain sent a letter of request to Rabbi Amram Gaon asking for an official guide to worship. The ban on committing liturgy to writing that had been followed for centuries was lifted.¹³ His response

¹¹ as found in Millgram, 369.

¹² Millgram, 368.

¹³ Millgram, 370.

was the first sanctioned and authoritative written form of Jewish liturgy since synagogues were born. His letter was subsequently copied and served as the official guide for Jewish communal worship. This first *siddur*, listing the specific **order** of the prayers and their content, was used by Jewish prayer leaders throughout the Jewish community.

The term *siddur* סידור, used for the prayer book, is literally translated as “order.”

Worship services continued as they had in the past with the leader reciting the prayers, now from a written text rather than memory, with the community following according to their ability and others responding “Amen.” Although once the ban on writing down liturgy was lifted and a guide for prayer leaders circulated, it was only logical that a guide for the worshipers would also be created. Roughly a century later, Rabbi Saadia Gaon created the first *siddur* intended for use by members of the community. “Worship ceased to be the monopoly of those who knew the prayers by heart and became ‘the heritage of the congregation of Jacob.’”¹⁴

The *siddur* created by Rabbi Saadia Gaon is still essentially the standard for today.¹⁵

In his introduction to the *siddur*, Saadia justified his work because the liturgy was suffering from “neglect, additions, and omissions.”¹⁶ The value of preserving the liturgical heritage became more important than maintaining fluidity and creative additions. However, despite

¹⁴ Millgram, 385.

¹⁵ Millgram, 386.

¹⁶ as quoted in Millgram, 370.

this limitation, the *siddur* continued to be “a living organism, sensitive to the religious needs of each generation.”¹⁷ Even though it was not permitted to alter the liturgical structure developed by the rabbis of the Talmud, “significant additions were made, reflecting the changing historic and intellectual climates of the passing centuries.”¹⁸ Synagogue prayer and the use of the *siddur* continued to find a balance between liturgical tradition and spiritual innovation.

The option for each member of the community to have their own *siddur* was a significant innovation, although hand-written manuscripts were still quite costly and could only be afforded by affluent worshippers. It was not uncommon for a synagogue to still only possess one *siddur* for the service leader.¹⁹ With the advent of the printing press, synagogue services were radically transformed. The printing press sharply reduced the cost of books, and eventually all members of the congregation were able to hold their own *siddur*.²⁰ This model, in which not only the leader, but each participant as well, had direct access to the liturgy is still the practice today.

Once the printing press led to the establishment of the practice of each worshipper holding a printed *siddur*, liturgical creativity continued within the pages and layout of the *siddur*. The development of the printed *siddur* will be further examined in the following section. While the *siddur* has undergone dramatic growth since the early days of printing, the style of

¹⁷ Millgram, 391.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Millgram 542.

²⁰ *ibid.*

worship, in which members of the community each hold a *siddur*, has remained relatively constant.

Visual T'filah represents the potential next phase of Jewish synagogue worship. Visual T'filah continues important traditions such as each member of the community having visual access to the liturgy, but also emulates the period when the service leader was responsible for bringing the liturgy to the people at each service. Furthermore, the flexibility offered by dynamic digital content hearkens back to the time when creative interpretations and additions to the liturgy allowed for a sense of relevance and engagement among the worshipers, without sacrificing the traditional structure of the service or being bound by the fixed nature of the printed *siddur*.

Just as the innovations of the past (*e.g.*, writing down the first *siddur*, illuminating manuscripts, and the printing press) allowed for the continued growth and development of synagogue services, so too can the technologies of today permit us to remain engaged with Jewish prayer and carry it forward to a new generation.

THE TECHNOLOGY OF SACRED TEXT CONTAINERS

“Technology” is a concept often understood today to mean electronics and new inventions. However, when applied more broadly, technology is the use of something invented at a particular time for the advancement of a given practice. In this context, Judaism has consistently adopted contemporary technologies and adapted them for use in containing and displaying sacred text.



One characteristic of these sacred text containers is that the sacredness of the text influences the perceived sacredness of the containers. The level of sacredness bestowed upon a container, however, may be mitigated by the exclusivity of the medium and the availability of the form. For example, a Torah scroll is one of the most sacred objects in contemporary Jewish practice as evidenced by the tradition of fasting for 40 days if a Torah scroll is dropped. However, the same text is contained in a Tanach, but the same response is not evoked if dropped. (Typically, kissing a sacred book that has fallen is sufficient.) This may be, in part, due to the fact that no other texts (except for *megillot*) are contained in scroll form

²¹ "Cyber Judaism." Reform Judaism, Summer 2009, 34-40.

today, and also due to the relative rarity and expense of Torah scrolls. Printed books, on the other hand, are more affordable and exist in greater numbers in most communities. The printed book is also used today to contain a range of material, from the sacred to the profane. While the text itself is paramount, it is clear that the sacred quality of the text plays a role in the perceived sacredness of the text container, as well.

Even though Jews are considered the “People of the Book,” the Children of Israel were a people long before the invention of books.

Each sacred text container used by Jews represents the most appropriate use of technology available at the time and provides a number of benefits to users. When a new technology is introduced, it offers new possibilities and advantages over the previous technology. It is also the case that a newer technology can present challenges when compared to the previous medium or require a new system or method of use. When the benefits of “upgrading” outweigh the real or perceived detriments of adopting the new technology, it is embraced.

For example, when comparing candles to electric lights, one can see that there are clear benefits to electrically powered lights. They can be lit without the need for fire or matches, and there is no melting wax or candles to replace. On the other hand, one is dependent upon the power grid to deliver electricity; this is a potential drawback. Furthermore, using electrical lights requires an entirely new way of illuminating one’s home. Ultimately, the benefits of electrical power “outweighed” the drawbacks and the new methods necessary, so the technology was almost universally embraced.

Stone Tablets

Our tradition teaches that Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with two stone tablets carved with the laws. “Adonai said to Moses, ‘Come up to Me on the mountain and wait there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the teachings and commandments which I have inscribed to instruct them.’” (Exodus 24:12) So, “God gave Moses the two tablets of the Pact, stone tablets inscribed with the finger of God.” (Exodus 31:18)

Formed from one of the most durable natural materials, and often a metaphor or epithet²² for God,²³ stone represents longevity and permanence. This was a natural choice for a text container, and represented a technology widely used at the time.

On the other hand, stone offers a number of challenges. Despite its durability and resistance to fire, stone can be broken: “As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the [golden] calf and the dancing, he became enraged; and he hurled the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain.” (Exodus 32:19) Additionally, stone is an extremely heavy material and not necessarily the best choice for a people wandering in the wilderness. In fact, a special carrying structure was created for the transportation of the stone tablets: “He took the Pact (*i.e.*, tablets) and placed it in the ark; he fixed the poles to the ark, placed the cover on top of the ark, and brought the ark inside the Tabernacle.” (Exodus 40:20-21).

²² Intended here to be a name which functions as a description of a characteristic, rather than a name used with a negative connotation.

²³ *E.g.*, “Adonai is my rock and my redeemer” “ה' צורי וגואלי”, (Psalm 19:15 and used in liturgy)

Scrolls

The next great text container is one which is still used ceremonially in synagogue worship today: the scroll. The technology of the scroll offered considerable benefits over stone tablets. In addition to being more easily transported, a vast amount of text could be contained in one scroll and maintained in a precise order. Scrolls are mentioned in the Tanach in a number of instances,²⁴ such as “When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching written for him on a scroll by the levitical priests.” (Deuteronomy 17:18).

Initially scrolls were assembled from papyrus. Used as early as the fourth millennium BCE,²⁵ papyrus is a flat reed which grew readily in Egypt and the surrounding region. Dried and pressed into flat strips, papyrus represented a new writing technology that was affordable, lightweight, and portable. “The nature of papyrus is such that it lends itself particularly to making long strips attached to spindles at the ends.”²⁶ The characteristics of the material dictated its form.

Papyrus, however, was not without its detriments. “It was fragile and susceptible to both moisture and excessive dryness. Unless the papyrus was of good quality, the writing surface was irregular, and the range of media that could be used was also limited.”²⁷ It was

²⁴ 2Kings 22:8, Isaiah 34:4, Job 31:35-36, Jeremiah 36, Ezekiel 2:8-9, Psalms 40:8, Zechariah 5:1

²⁵ Robb, 16.

²⁶ Robb, 25.

²⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papyrus> (accessed on 1/19/2010)

subsequently discovered that animal skins, in the form of parchment, were much more desirable text containers and so parchment superseded papyrus by the fourth century CE.²⁸ Despite being more expensive²⁹, parchment offered solutions to the challenges of papyrus. It was more durable and flexible, and could be immediately utilized in the existing structure of the scroll.

Books

“The transition [from scrolls to books] probably began in the seventh century and proceeded gradually, since no distinct mention of a codex has yet been discovered in the Talmud and Midrash.”³⁰ Also known as a folio, codex, or manuscript, the book offered a number of improvements over the scroll. Perhaps the greatest challenge of the scroll (as one who has attempted to lead *Simchat Torah* services with only one Torah can attest) is the difficulty of quickly moving from the final section of text to the first and vice versa. Books provide this benefit as well as being easier to index and offer much greater accessibility to replace one section or sheet. Books also allow for writing on both sides of a page, and are much more conducive to storage in great quantities³¹ since they can be stacked or shelved more easily.

²⁸ Robb, 16.

²⁹ The cost of feeding and raising an animal for its skin is greater than harvesting reeds.

³⁰ Jacobs, Joseph. "Manuscripts." Jewish Encyclopedia (1906), <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=164&letter=M>. (accessed February 5, 2010).

³¹ Robb, 16.

On the other hand, scrolls offered scribes and illustrators practically unlimited lateral movement and space, and the page of a book was limited in its proportions.³² The way in which text and images were conveyed together needed to be redeveloped.³³ The size of a column or piece of art in a scroll was flexible and could be determined by the scribe or artist. The scroll simply needed to be rolled open enough to display the text or imagery. On the other hand, books provide a fixed width on which to write or draw. Rather than working with a truly variable width document, the scribe had to confine himself to the borders of the medium. However, since the sum of the benefits of the form of the book outweighed this challenge, books grew to replace scrolls as more commonly used text containers.

Printed Books

The advent of the printing press did not significantly alter the form of the book, only the ease by which it could be obtained by the public. Handwritten and illustrated books were highly sought after but could only be afforded by a relative minority.³⁴ The printing press democratized the medium and allowed the text to be shared with many more readers.

Another benefit of the printing press was the ability to improve the “design and format”³⁵ of books, including the *siddur*. “Important prayers were usually printed in bold type, and the prayers of the monthly service of the Consecration of the Moon, which were read by

³² Robb, 27.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Narkiss, 39.

³⁵ Millgram, 544.

moonlight, were generally printed in giant letters.”³⁶ Rather than the form of the book changing, it was the text itself that could be manipulated to suit the needs of the reader.

It was also easier to manipulate the size of the book. A publisher from the late sixteenth century wrote in an introduction to his *siddur*: “Seeing that Jews constantly travel from country to country, from city to city, and from place to place with merchandise and for other purposes, it occurred to me to publish a small prayer book to lighten their burden and to enable everyone to have it handy.”³⁷ The printing press increased the versatility and utilitarian value of books, while maintaining their basic form.

Today there are a number of “smartphone apps” that contain the full text of the *siddur* and allow it to be portable in ways never before imagined.

On the other hand, a great loss was suffered in the artistry of books. “Before the printing press was invented it was customary to adorn the manuscript *siddur* with beautiful illuminations.”³⁸ This highly valued yet time-consuming art form could not mitigate the benefits found with the speed of production using a printing press. Simplistic and “crude” woodcuts were preferred for illustrations by the printers, rather than the hand-painted embellishments of illuminated manuscripts.³⁹ The efficiency of the printing press and the primacy of the text itself overshadowed the benefit of incorporating detailed art in books.

³⁶ Millgram, 544.

³⁷ As quoted in Millgram, 545.

³⁸ Millgram, 548.

³⁹ *ibid.*

The development that did occur with the *siddur* during this time was with the layout and content of the pages. In the tradition of a Talmud page, commentary and explanatory notes were included in the margins or as footnotes.⁴⁰ As printing technology developed, the inclusion of more detailed artistic and representational images began appearing on the pages of the *siddur*. This can be seen in contemporary *siddurim* such as those created by Wilshire Boulevard Temple⁴¹ which display its collection of Jewish ritual items and *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*⁴² created by the congregation of the same name. As color printing became more feasible, some *siddurim* began including richly colored imagery for the purpose of beautifying the *siddur* and enhancing prayer. One example of such a *siddur* is *Mikdash M'at*⁴³ created by Lori Justice-Shocket.



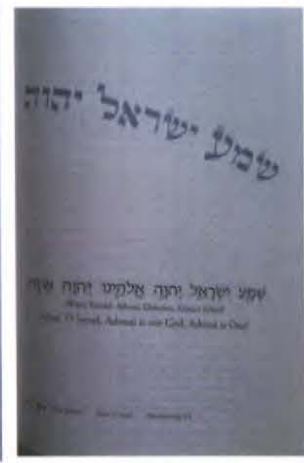
Siddur Kol Yaakov



Siddur Sha'ar Zahav



Mikdash M'at



Mishkan T'filah

⁴⁰ One example is: *Siddur Kol Yaakov*. New York: Sentry Press, 1839.

⁴¹ No further publication information is available.

⁴² *Siddur Sha'ar Zahav*. Michael Tyler and Leslie Kane. San Francisco: Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, 2009.

⁴³ *Mikdash M'at*. Lori Justice-Shocket. Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, Inc, 2004.

It is important to note that even though today the technology is available to include full color imagery in printed *siddurim*, not all publishers choose to do so. The most recent *siddur* printed for the Reform Movement, *Mishkan T'filah*,⁴⁴ utilizes black print with blue lettering to accent certain words. This prayerbook maintains flexibility by including thorough notes, as well as providing a selection of creative interpretations for each prayer. These readings strive to maintain the balance between offering the ability to create varied and engaging worship through alternating reading selections each service, with the reality of the fixed nature of the printed *siddur*.

Screens

While screens have been used for displaying films since the late 19th century, their primary purpose was to display images. Even in the case of silent films, the text was intended to help viewers understand the images more clearly, not the inverse, as is the case with liturgical art. For some time, overhead projectors were used with screens to display liturgy.



Early screen use in prayer, 1971

With the advent of computers, the role of the text container became separated from, albeit connected to, the text displayer. Prior to this, tablets, scrolls, and books functioned as the means to contain the text, as well as the means to view and access the text. Computers, on the other hand, allow text to exist as digital information which can be stored in a variety of

⁴⁴ *Mishkan T'filah*, Elyse D. Frishman, New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2007.

media, such as hard drives, flash drives, and even disks. This also allows the text to be transmitted electronically and duplicated instantly.

However, one cannot read text from a memory storage device; it must be displayed. Often the hard drive is a part of a larger system which contains a monitor or screen. However, just as the text can exist purely in a container (*e.g.*, flash drive), there are displays that exist independent of containers. A digital projector is an example of this. It is the most commonly used text displayer for VT, but can be connected to a variety of devices (*e.g.*, computer, iPhone, DVD player). Separating the text container from the text display offers a great deal of flexibility and creativity, but also necessitates a particular set of equipment and knowledge.

This potential limitation is also accompanied by a few other potential drawbacks. Computers themselves can breakdown or “crash” causing them to be unusable. Additionally, they are dependent upon electricity to function. Furthermore, even if everything seems to be functioning normally, there are unexpected and unforeseen technological challenges that can arise. However, despite these potential limitations, the screen and computer, when used effectively, can counteract many of the previous handicaps or challenges faced when upgrading technologies.

Another advantage is access. Even though the projector or computer may be subject to breaking or damage from moisture, like stone or papyrus, the text can be copied and transmitted an infinite number of times to any location around the world connected to the

internet. Not only can the material be easily indexed and accessed at any point in a document, like a book, but now text can be hyperlinked to any number of related texts and documents. Additionally, the storage space necessary to contain a collection of texts is consistently growing smaller and more affordable.

However, perhaps the most important benefit of screens is the endlessly dynamic possibilities they offer for displaying text. A screen can frame a page of text, similar to a book, but it can also be “scrolled” in any direction limitlessly, combining the benefits of scrolls and books. Furthermore, as the technology develops, screens will not even be limited to their two-dimensional planes.⁴⁵ Perhaps most important, however, is that screens allow the reintegration of art and text, and open never before imagined possibilities. In addition to hand-drawn art, like illuminated manuscripts, screens can display beautiful photographic imagery and even dynamic video content.

Each technology used for containing and displaying sacred text provided a number of benefits, while the adoption of newer technologies often provided a number of new benefits along with drawbacks as compared to the previous technology. Stone tablets offered a sense of durability and longevity, despite their potential for breaking. And while computers themselves can also break, if a text is appropriately backed-up in a number of locations, it need not be re-written if one container were to break. While stone is a substance which reminds us of a characteristic of God, the ability to infinitely copy and transmit text digitally approaches perhaps the most appropriate parallel to the intangible and infinite characteristics

⁴⁵ The use of 3D screen technologies has recently gained a resurgence of attention and interest.

of the divine. (Our metaphors from God come from our knowledge of and experience with the world, and as new technologies are developed they may influence and contribute to our understanding of God.)

Whereas scrolls were more portable and easier to organize and store than tablets, digital technology offers even greater portability and accessibility. The entire text of the *siddur* and the *Tanach* can be stored and searched on a personal smartphone, and carried in one's pocket. Even the beautiful art and imagery that was once associated with illuminated manuscripts, but sacrificed for the speed and affordability of printed books, can once again be included with text while also benefiting from the possibilities of digital storage and transmission.

By embracing screens (and computers) as the newest technology for containing and displaying sacred text, the words of our tradition and liturgy can truly be illuminated and enlightened as never before.

Brief note on the use of modern technology in worship settings:

Some people find themselves resisting the use of technology in services on a visceral level. It should be noted, however, that modern technology is already regularly used in worship in such forms as microphones, electric lighting, and even climate control systems. These individuals may be responding more to the perceived change in their worship practices, which should only be carried forward thoughtfully and with communal input and support. Suggested methods for engaging worshippers are included in the Guide to Best Practices.

THE VALUE OF ART IN JEWISH PRAYER

While art was practically eliminated from *siddurim* with the advent of the printing press, even though it has made a limited resurgence through modern color printing technologies, it is still not widely integrated with prayer today. However, art has been a regular aspect of Jewish worship throughout history, and its impact on the experience of worshipers is almost immeasurable.

“Art lost its basic creative drive the moment it was separated from worship.”

-Ingmar Bergman⁴⁶

Prayer bridges the distance between the abstract and the concrete. Liturgy is written and contained within the physical world, but connects us to ideas and emotions that cannot necessarily be expressed in words. Our relationship with God and our deepest selves can be initiated through the words of prayer, but the goal is most certainly beyond the liturgical formulations. “Religious rites and symbols convey to the worshiper tangible ideas that would otherwise remain mere abstractions; they awaken emotions that might otherwise remain dormant; and they tend to rouse in the worshiper feelings of holiness.”⁴⁷

Art functions in a similar way. While contained within, and often representing, the physical world, art has the ability to evoke the deepest expressions of emotion, and draw forth

⁴⁶ as found in Gold, 329.

⁴⁷ Millgram, 333.

unexpected sensations. “As art enters the life of our worship it offers us a way to take those raw and powerful feelings - love, fear, despair, hope, longing - and refine them, make them accessible, and offer them up to God.”⁴⁸ If prayer is a path to connect with God, ourselves, and the community in which we worship, then art can also carry us down that path. We “become more sensitive to the holy when surrounded by visual beauty.”⁴⁹

“Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time.” - Thomas Merton⁵⁰

However, art in the context of worship cannot simply act as a meaningless decoration. “Art must find its way back to the center, where it can inform all of our actions and expressions of worship.”⁵¹ Art must reach our souls in form of *beauty* and inspire a sense of awe. “In experiencing beauty, man catches a glimpse of God’s ‘garments’ and is inspired to love Him. A higher level of worship is reached when one is able to combine the religious with the aesthetic, to interpret holiness with beauty.”⁵² Art must be for the sake of experiencing the awesomeness of God, not for the sake of art itself.

Visual T’filah and the technology supporting it offer us new ways of bringing art, beauty, and visual awe into our worship services. Embracing the intentional reintroduction of art in prayer and letting our creativity guide us can bring Jewish prayer to new heights while

⁴⁸ Gold, 329.

⁴⁹ Spero, 65.

⁵⁰ Thomas Merton, *A Thomas Merton Reader* (New York, 1962), p. 426. (as found in Gold, pg. 328)

⁵¹ Gold, 328-9.

⁵² Spero, 66.

connecting with ancient roots. “Ultimately, the reintegration of art and religion will depend not on the great artist, nor on the brilliant rabbi, but on each of us and our willingness to come before our community and before God with a whole heart.”⁵³ This openness to a rich prayer experience can allow us to experience the awe and beauty felt by our fellow Jews as they set foot into ancient synagogues richly ornamented by mosaics and frescos, beheld finely crafted illuminated manuscripts, or gazed into the glowing light of stained glass windows.

THE MISHKAN

Art has been an important aspect of Jewish prayer from the very beginning of Jewish communal prayer, when the Israelites first became a people in the wilderness and God called to them from the mountain.

The detailed description of the *mishkan* in the Torah shows, if not historically then symbolically, the importance of beauty in a worship space. The work of the *mishkan* was guided by the hands of skilled artists appointed by God:

Adonai spoke to Moses: See, I have singled out by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft; to make designs for work in gold, silver, and copper, to cut stones for setting and to carve wood — to work in every kind of craft. Moreover, I have assigned to him Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have also granted skill to all who are skillful, that they may make everything that I have commanded you. (Exodus 31:1-6)

⁵³ Gold, 332.

They gathered gifts from the community of “gold, silver, and copper; blue, purple, and crimson yarns, fine linen, goats’ hair; tanned ram skins, dolphin skins, and acacia wood.” (Exodus 25:3-5)

And many of the elements, the ark, the table, the lamp stand, and the planks of the Tabernacle were all overlain “with pure gold; [in some cases] inside and out.” (Exodus 25:11, 24, 31, 26:29) The shimmer of the gold must have been an inspiring sight. Even the screens for the entrance of the tent and the gate of the enclosure were made of “blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, done in embroidery.” (Exodus 26:36, 27:16)

These colorful and artistic elements were clearly intended to evoke a sense of awe and reverence, rather than simply being functional components. “Here and there one can detect elements which seem to be purely decorative... Thus, for example, the *menora* (lamp stand) made out of ‘one piece of pure beaten gold’ (Exodus 25:31), its shape, the symmetry of its stem and six branches and ‘the cups like almond blossoms, knops and flowers’ (Exodus 25:33) seems to have been designed for aesthetic value.”⁵⁴

Rashi supports this perspective through his comments on the goblets in Exodus 25:31.

“They are sort of cups made of glass, long and narrow, which are called *maderins* [in Old French], long, slender glass goblets. These, however, were made of gold, and they protruded from every branch according to the number prescribed by the text. They were [placed] on

⁵⁴ Spero, 65.

[the menorah] only for beauty.”⁵⁵ While the ark and tabernacle were intended to be used for specific ritual functions during worship, their adornment created an intentional atmosphere of beauty and grandeur.

The *mishkan* and its various ritual objects, most notably the *menorah*, appear as recurring motifs in subsequent worship-related art and imagery, including ancient synagogue mosaics and illuminated manuscripts, as well as some contemporary examples. In fact, it has been argued that “the [*mishkan*] in the wilderness was a model for the *idea* of the synagogue which began to percolate long before the Temple came into existence.”⁵⁶ The artistic beauty of the *mishkan* has continually been a source of inspiration, for prayer, for prayer-related art, and a reminder of the general importance of beauty in a worship space.

"The voice of God is *in* beauty" (Psalms 29:4)⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Translation from http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/9886/showrashi/true.

⁵⁶ Spero, 61.

⁵⁷ As translated by Spero, 65.

An important principle in Jewish tradition is called *hiddur mitzvah*, the beautification of commandments and rituals. This concept has its roots in the Torah, and has been explained and expanded since. “The verse states: ‘This is my God and I shall *exalt* Him’ (Exodus 15:2). [The word *exalt* נָאֵם comes from the root נָאָה meaning beauty.] The Sages explained that the fulfillment of the term exalt is brought about by beautifying the performance of mitzvot. That is, any mitzvah which is performed for the sake of God should be fulfilled in the most aesthetically attractive manner possible.”⁵⁸ Visual T’filah allows for ways of beautifying worship that are uniquely modern, while being consistent with Jewish tradition.

While a community or rabbi might decide the decorative elements of a synagogue, there were also ways for individuals themselves to practice *hiddur mitzvah*. “Embellishing biblical, ritual, legal or even secular Hebrew books and manuscripts was one of the most important ways in which the Jew could express his devotion to the written word.”⁵⁹ Decorating our sacred texts is an important aspect of Jewish religious expression and practice.

⁵⁸ Kitov, Eliyahu. *The Book of Our Heritage. Vol 1*, Tishrey-Shevat. Feldheim Publishers, Jerusalem/NY, 1997.

⁵⁹ Narkiss, 13.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT AND OTHER OBJECTIONS TO ART

It is perhaps not a coincidence that the story of the golden calf appears in the Torah directly following the instructions for building the *mishkan* and immediately preceding the description of its construction. It may serve as a warning to those who mistake the beauty of an object for divinity. The worshippers of the golden calf worshipped the calf itself, rather than, as was intended with the *mishkan*, using its beauty as a tool to direct one's thoughts and prayers to God.

Perhaps this is why critics of art in prayer often cite the second commandment as the prohibition of utilizing images in a worship setting:

“You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.” (Exodus 20:4-5)

However, Jewish tradition views these verses as linked and therefore there is no prohibition against including artistic imagery in the service of God, rather it is the serving of the images or idols themselves that is prohibited.⁶⁰ “No fear of idolatry can be detected in the detailed instructions given by God to Moses on how to build the Tabernacle and its implements,

⁶⁰ Some Muslims interpret this law more strictly, prohibiting any form of image, and often decorate worship spaces with elaborate calligraphy. “The Jews in Muslim countries refrained from depicting human figures in sacred books because of Muslims’ prohibition against such illustrations. Since this prohibition was based on the biblical Second Commandment, the Jews could not let themselves appear less observant than their Muslim compatriots. (Narkiss, 15)

including the specification to adorn the ark with two winged cherubim, between whom God dwelt (Exodus 25:18-22). This evidence would indicate that, from early days, the law of the Israelites prohibited idol worship, but not all forms of artistic representation.”⁶¹ Indeed, the artists of the *mishkan* can be considered as doing some of the holiest work because their artistic efforts were for the sake of God and in helping their fellow Israelites direct their prayers towards God.

A later text in the Mishnah (*Avodah Zarah* 3:4) further demonstrates the distinction between objects of beauty and objects of worship. Rabban Gamliel was taking a bath in a bathhouse which held a statue of Aphrodite. A non-Jewish philosopher raised the question whether this was in violation of the prohibition against idolatry. He replied “I never came into her domain. She came into mine. They don’t say, ‘Let’s make a bathhouse as an ornament for Aphrodite.’ But they say, ‘Let’s make Aphrodite as an ornament for the bathhouse.’” His bathing was not an act of worshiping Aphrodite; rather the bathhouse was beautified with the statue. The text continues explaining, “That which one treats as a god is prohibited, but that which one treats not as a god is permitted.” The responsibility, as explained in the text, is upon the individual to distinguish between artistic elements and the divine. This approach not only honors and places trust in each individual, but is rather practical; it is impossible, and significantly undesirable, to eliminate all objects of beauty that could be worshipped, in prayer settings and in public spaces.

⁶¹ Narkiss, 13.

On the other hand, a traditional Jewish principle is placing fences around particular actions to prevent accidental transgressions. Amid a thorough list of actions which should be avoided on Shabbat for their potential to cause sin, we are instructed to avoid looking at the captions of pictures and busts on Shabbat. (*Bavli Shabbat* 149A) The text continues by stating the busts themselves should be avoided, not only on Shabbat but during the week as well, to distance oneself from the prohibition of “turning to idols.” (Leviticus 19:4)

The truth is that throughout history Jews have had an ambivalent relationship with art in connection to prayer. Despite the significant amount of evidence⁶² which suggests that art has been an inextricable aspect of prayer, there were also periods of time when the use of art was minimized.⁶³ Even in situations where it was clear no violation of the second commandment was taking place, rabbinic authorities had their reservations.

For example, Maimonides did not prohibit the decoration of synagogue walls with imagery, but when he found himself praying in front of a decorated wall, he would close his eyes to prevent distraction.⁶⁴ (Perhaps Rambam was distracted because the particular decorations were not immediately connected to the prayer he was reciting. If Rambam were to experience Visual T’filah, in which the images change to support and enhance each specific prayer, he might have had a different experience.) Interestingly, R. Meir of Rothenberg disapproved of including images within a *siddur* because they can distract the worshiper

⁶² Examples of art in relationship with Jewish worship will be discussed in the subsequent section.

⁶³ From the forward written by Cecil Roth in Narkiss.

⁶⁴ Elbogen, 356.

from prayer, not because of a violation of the second commandment.⁶⁵ (In part his permission was connected to the fact that the images consisted only of paint and had no actual form. All the more so is this true with Visual T'filah, since the images are pure light.) It is not uncommon to see worshippers caught up in intense prayer to have their eyes closed to eliminate **all** distractions, which can come from a variety of sources, including other worshippers. (The blessing of the sense of sight is that it can easily be shut off when we desire, by closing our eyes, unlike sound, smell, etc. over which we have limited control to eliminate sensory input.)

In some cases, “individual rabbis even prohibited the painting of the walls with leaves, flowers, and trees. But the examples of such decorations were too numerous and too well known, so that even where new ornamentation was declared prohibited, the old was tolerated.”⁶⁶ It becomes clear that even though art in worship settings or liturgical texts was not roundly prohibited, it can be a matter of personal prayer preference.

While the majority of participants in Visual T'filah appreciate and value their prayer experience, there are occasionally members of the community who find it too distracting.

As time progressed, a de facto compromise seemed to emerge from the ambivalence. While artistic depictions of flora and fauna were permitted, even encouraged, representations of the

⁶⁵ Narkiss, 15,30 and Millgram, 629. Originally from: Isaac Ze'ev Cahana, *Responsa of Maharam*. Jerusalem, 1960. vol. 2, no. 56, p. 50.

⁶⁶ Elbogen, 356.

human form were avoided.⁶⁷ In some cases, such as illuminated manuscripts from Southern Germany and Italy in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, only human figures that were distorted in some way, such as human bodies with animal heads, were allowed.⁶⁸ This trend was also seen in a variety of ceremonial objects from eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe which contain human figures that are slightly mutilated in some way.⁶⁹ It was believed that “an imperfect image is an invalid image” and this allowed religious concerns to affect the art without prohibiting it entirely.⁷⁰

Even in contemporary times the practice of avoiding human imagery is continued. For example, Marc Chagall, an artist famous for his creative depictions of humans, eliminated all such imagery in the stained glass windows he designed for the Hadassah Hospital chapel in Jerusalem.⁷¹ Despite repeated rulings that art and images are permitted in worship settings, there remains an inexplicable hesitation for some. This resistance has been greatly mitigated by the exclusion of human figures from these artistic representations.

In Visual T’filah practices today, there is also a significant reluctance to include images of people. In some cases it can be appropriate; however, for the most part, the artistic content is limited to natural scenes and abstract imagery. Even depictions of specific animals are seen

⁶⁷ Elbogen, 356.

⁶⁸ Narkiss, 15.

⁶⁹ Freudenheim, 10.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*

by some as too distracting from prayer. Visual T'filah strives to find a balance in traditional Jewish artistic practices and contemporary sensibilities.

In a Visual T'filah for the High Holidays at Temple Isaiah, Los Angeles, images of *b'nei mitzvah* students from the community reading from Torah were shown during the *v'ahavta*.

The following sections will discuss in more depth the various artistic elements found in Jewish prayer settings, including: ancient synagogue mosaics and frescos, as well as illuminated manuscripts.

SYNAGOGUE ART AND ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS IN RELATION TO VISUAL T'FILAH

Visual T'filah utilizes a screen (or screens) that is large enough for the community to effectively see and read the liturgy. When images are projected onto a large screen, they have the ability to affect the tone and shape the feeling of the prayer space. The screen essentially becomes a wall in the prayer space, and the art or imagery becomes the ambient decorations. In this way, Visual T'filah can be appropriately compared to the art that once adorned the walls and floors of ancient synagogues. (Additionally, some of the art in synagogues consists of text, prayers and biblical passages, which is directly parallel to Visual T'filah.)

This reasoning can also be applied to stained glass, perhaps even more appropriately. One inspiring aspect of stained glass is the way in which the light illuminates the imagery,⁷² casting a variety of colored light. When projecting the liturgy using a digital projector, even if using a large monitor, it is colored light that illuminates the imagery reaching the eyes of the worshipers. Beyond painted walls, this colored light carries more energy and vibrancy, and may have a greater effect on worshipers.

Rarely does the content of Visual T'filah consist solely of imagery or text; rather, often it is a combination of the two. In this way, illuminated manuscripts offer an important historical precedent to Visual T'filah. Whether embellishing the text or illustrating a ritual, the art of integrating and intertwining text and imagery is inherent in illuminated manuscripts as well as in Visual T'filah.

By studying these historical antecedents, precursors, and precedents to Visual T'filah, not only does Visual T'filah emerge as an appropriate successor to these forms of art and worship, but also the principles and designs of the past can serve to inspire the creation of Visual T'filah today.

⁷² Freudenheim, 14.

Windows in Synagogues.

The Talmud states that synagogues are required to have windows: “Said R. Hiyya bar Abba, ‘A person should always recite the Prayer in a room in which there are windows.’” (Bavli Brachot 31A) This precept was reiterated in the Zohar, which further specified that the room needed at least twelve windows. The *Shulchan Aruch* also supports this requirement through its own recommendation.⁷³ Indeed this is an important precept and a number of ancient synagogue ruins reveal this practice to be long-standing.⁷⁴

There are a number of interpretations as to the meaning behind this requirement. Rabbi Kook suggests that it is to remind Jews during prayer to consider the outside world, rather than just their own needs.⁷⁵ Rambam maintains that the precept was intended to enhance personal devotion.⁷⁶ Many contemporary Jews find a great connection to prayer when in relationship to the natural world. Requiring windows in prayer settings may be a recognition that prayer is enhanced when considering the beautiful world created by God.

Visual T’filah offers the ability to create a digital or virtual window, bringing scenes from all over the Earth, rather than just the immediate physical surroundings of a synagogue. While a screen will never replace actual windows, seeing and considering scenes from around the world can significantly enhance one’s prayer.

⁷³ Elbogen, 355.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Millgram, 337.

⁷⁶ Elbogen, 355. (Since it was for personal devotion, Rambam explains, windows are not necessary in communal prayer settings, like synagogues.)

ANCIENT SYNAGOGUE ART IN WORSHIP SPACES

In recent times a number of ancient synagogues have been discovered and explored, shedding light onto the practices of Jews beginning as early as the 3rd century, if not earlier. A variety of imagery was unearthed, giving a more complete picture of the presence of art in ancient worship spaces. It becomes clear that artistic imagery was a regular aspect of synagogue decorations.

One artistic focal point of synagogues, which began during the Talmudic period, is the ark containing the Torah scroll(s). Having previously been stored in a side room behind a curtain, when moved to the center of the eastern wall, the ark became a blank slate for visual enhancements. The Torah scrolls were adorned and displayed in a vertical standing position, while the ark itself was often decorated with images such as lions, symbolizing the tribe of Judah, as well as the tablets of the Ten Commandments.⁷⁷

In addition to these centerpieces, other forms of art and decoration existed all over ancient synagogues, including: walls, floors, columns, friezes, door jambs, gables, and more.⁷⁸ Archeological discoveries, such as the synagogues at Dura-Europos and Beit Alpha, indicate that it was characteristic for ancient synagogues to be thoroughly decorated. This art must have created a particular atmosphere for prayer and denoted the special nature of the synagogue.

⁷⁷ Millgram, 338.

⁷⁸ Elbogen, 356.

A wide variety of imagery can be found in ancient synagogues including imagery associated with specifically Jewish themes, general nature themes, and imagery with more complex symbolic value. The Judaic themed content is often connected to biblical imagery, scenes, and plants. It was common to see “characteristic[ally] Jewish ornaments like the seven-branched lampstand, vine leaves and grapes, pomegranates, palm leaves and branches, goblets and oil vessels, pentagrams and hexagrams.”⁷⁹ In many cases, the Judaic imagery depicts or alludes to religious elements from the *mishkan* as well as the Temple, including the Ten Commandments, eternal flames, and *menorot*.⁸⁰ Since they were divinely-commanded and artistically-inspired worship spaces, which were also the precursors to the synagogue, it is logical to find motifs from the *mishkan* and the Temple in synagogue art.



The Temple in Atlanta, GA

Today, the sanctuary of The Temple in Atlanta has an ark inspired by the *mishkan*, adorned in gold, holding the Torah scrolls.

In Beit Alpha (6th century CE), one panel actually depicts the decorative objects found in this synagogue itself, which include “two lions guarding the ark and two seven-branched lampstands with their lamps lit...a ram’s horn and an incense shovel, a palm branch, and a

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Spero, 60.

citron.”⁸¹ These objects were inspired by the biblical narrative and were not only used in the synagogue, but were also deemed important and beautiful enough to be the subject of the art, as well.

Biblical scenes are another common Judaic theme. The synagogue at Dura-Europos (3rd century CE) “had its entire wall covered with frescoes of biblical episodes.”⁸² Rather than being displayed in chronological order, these scenes “portray episodes from the lives of the patriarchs, prophets, and kings.”⁸³ This highlights the meaning and value conveyed in selected stories, rather than simply being an ordered retelling or purely decorative. The mosaics of Beit Alpha took a similar yet distinct approach. In the nave of Beit Alpha the *Akeidah* (the binding of Isaac) is depicted in five key scenes, with biblical text serving as inscriptions to clarify the meaning and content of each section.⁸⁴



Beit Alpha - Mosaic Floor

⁸¹ Elbogen, 348.

⁸² Narkiss, 14.

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Elbogen, 348.

Today, the sanctuary of Wilshire Boulevard Temple is surrounded by biblical scenes depicted by Hollywood set designers.



The synagogue at Dura-Europos also contained frescoes and mosaics with much more symbolic meaning, including zodiac symbols, and geometric figures.⁸⁵ The Zodiac is often misunderstood by contemporary Jews to be a non-Jewish representation of astrological influences, when in fact it was commonly used at the time as a calendar. In Beit Alpha, the Zodiac was found with a symbol and Hebrew name for each sign, along with the four seasons, depicted as young women, each with the Hebrew name of the season.⁸⁶ Since Jewish holidays are frequently connected to agricultural cycles, it is understandable that the representation of a calendar was an important Jewish artistic element of early synagogues. (The use of seemingly non-Jewish symbols will be discussed further in a subsequent section.)

In fact, an ancient synagogue in the Galilee was unearthed to reveal, among many other artistic depictions, a harvest scene: “A man stands with a staff in his raised right hand and a heavy grape cluster in his left; a man and a woman are sitting with a grape cluster suspended

⁸⁵ Millgram, 341.

⁸⁶ Elbogen, 348.

between them.”⁸⁷ It is clear that the subject matter of synagogue art included meaningful and relevant imagery connected to the experience of the worshipers and the natural world.

The mosaics of Bet Alpha (6th century CE) reveal that living creatures were also common motifs in the decoration of synagogues, such as birds, animals, and even human figures. A description by a French scholar explains: “The floor was completely covered with mosaics” including “birds, quadrupeds, flowers, and fruits,” “water, fish, and aquatic birds,” “a pure landscape with palm trees shading a dish [with] two peacocks,” as well as “various animals, lions, hyenas, roosters, partridges, guinea-fowl, ducks, fish, trees, and fruit baskets; also, the bust of a young man with long hair with a bent stick on his shoulder, the bust of a woman with a helmet bearing a spear, and more.”⁸⁸

Nearly 600 years later, this motif was still commonly used. “Ephraim b. Joseph (twelfth century) permitted the painting of synagogues with animal figures like birds and horses. The windows of the synagogue of Cologne were then adorned with stained-glass paintings of lions and snakes, and that of Meissen with trees and birds. Lions, especially, are represented at all times in synagogue decoration in the most varied forms, whether in painting, embroidery, or plastic.”⁸⁹ Depicting animals and other natural elements in a worship space may have highlighted the role of God as the creator, allowing worshippers to be inspired by the diversity of life and the power of nature.

⁸⁷ Elbogen, 345.

⁸⁸ Elbogen, 351.

⁸⁹ Elbogen, 356.

Additionally, it is not uncommon to find Hebrew prayers and biblical verses⁹⁰ on the walls of synagogues (contemporary examples can be found in Poland, Tsfat, and Los Angeles). These prayers may have served a functional purpose, but were most certainly decorative, since they have been found surrounded by paintings of birds and animals.⁹¹ It is the juxtaposition of liturgy and art that can inspire some of the deepest prayer.

ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS

This juxtaposition is also found more specifically in illuminated manuscripts. The art of illuminated manuscripts is intended for a far greater purpose than mere illustration. “Illumination, the ‘causing of words to be resplendent,’ can be a creative process only when the written word is held in such high regard... that its form is appropriately made more illustrious.”⁹² Adding art to liturgy was seen as a process of elevating the liturgy to an even holier level. “Impressive and striking as the embellishment [or illumination] of the word may be, it is the significance of the word that its decoration is intended to emphasize and make clear.”⁹³ The intention of liturgical art is to focus our thoughts even more on the words of the prayers, not to distract from them.

⁹⁰ Elbogen, 356.

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² Robb, 15.

⁹³ Robb, 20.

The simplest form of illumination consists of enlarging and decorating the first word of the page. Often with geometric patterns, although also found with vines or animals, this form of illumination focused on

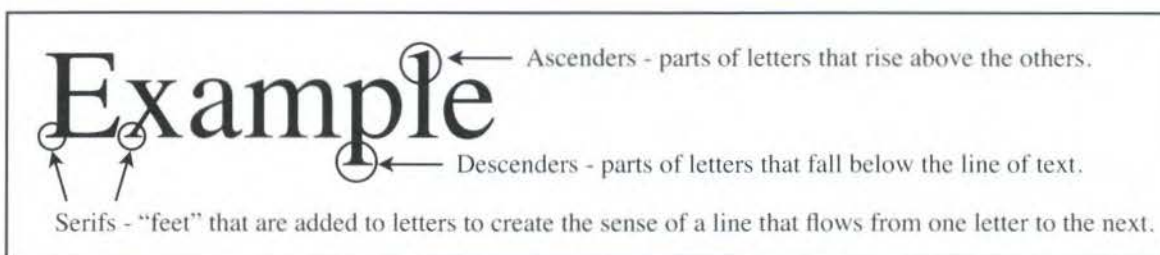


Hamilton Siddur



Rylands Spanish Haggadah

embellishing the words themselves. The graphical elements of the letters, such as serifs, ascenders, and descenders,⁹⁴ were often used to create patterns or designs on the page.



Another form of using the text itself as a decorative element can be found in micrography, or micro-calligraphy. These, often full-page designs, seem to emphasize the aesthetic effect of the page as a whole, rather than the pure functionality of reading the text. This style highlights the “conception of the book page as a homogeneous unit involving both script and

⁹⁴ Narkiss, 20.

illustration, in the formal organization of which color could play an important part.”⁹⁵ The text and the art existed as one unified work, each aspect of which complemented the other.



Damascus Keter



The Second Leningrad Bible

Other illuminated elements include many of the motifs found in synagogue sanctuary art, and can depict full scenes and a variety of complex designs. One example of this is a full page design “composed of the Tabernacle implements” such as the “seven-branched *menorah*, with its traditional knops, flowers, and candles...stylized leaf-like cherubim...incense altar, the jar of manna, the laver and its stand, Aaron’s flowering rod, and other vessels...framed by what seems to be the fence around the Tabernacle.”⁹⁶ It is possible that manuscripts such as these were used as models or guiding designs for “later synagogal floor mosaics.”⁹⁷



Another common motif, shared between synagogue art and illuminated manuscripts, is the depiction of biblical scenes or characters. These include “cherubim guarding the Tree of

⁹⁵ Robb, 44.

⁹⁶ Narkiss, 19.

⁹⁷ Narkiss, 20.

Life; Solomon's molten sea; Moses' copper serpent; Samuel beheading Agag; the food of the Righteous in Paradise - Leviathan, the Behemoth, and the mythical bird Bar Yokhani (also known as ziz)."⁹⁸ Other examples include, "Abraham being led by angels to the Land of Canaan; Jacob blessing Ephraim and Manasseh; and Job, seated naked on the dung heap, being visited by his three friends."⁹⁹ In fact, Bibles seem to be the most commonly illuminated text, most likely because of their inspirational quality and the way in which the topics and stories lend themselves to illustrations.

Another common subject of illuminations are Jewish customs and rituals.¹⁰⁰ Often associated with Passover and contained within illuminated *haggadot*, one can see the practice of *b'dikat hametz* (searching for leavening before the start of Passover), the *seder* itself, including "the lifting and drinking of the four ritual cups of wine...the ritual washing of the hands...the hiding and finding of the afikoman...and the opening of the door to the prophet Elijah,"¹⁰¹ as well as depictions of various *seder* symbols, including *matzah*, and *marror*.¹⁰² These illustrations may have acted as a visual guide or reminder for the performance of the rituals.

⁹⁸ Narkiss, 28.

⁹⁹ Narkiss, 29.

¹⁰⁰ Narkiss, 16.

¹⁰¹ Narkiss, 34.

¹⁰² Narkiss, 27.



First Cincinnati Haggadah



Darmstadt Haggadah

In a Sukkot Visual T'filah for Temple Judea in Tarzana, an animated *lulav* and *etrog* were used to demonstrate the traditional directional shaking of the set.

In some cases, the use of imagery can be comical, such as a man pointing to his wife saying “bitter herb” or the representation of a mirror when we are commanded to see ourselves as having gone forth from Egypt.¹⁰³ Other examples of illustrated Jewish rituals or practices include representing a *beit midrash* (house of study), a *mikveh* (ritual bath) and “the *hazzan*

¹⁰³ Narkiss, 34.

standing covered with his *tallit* ('prayer shawl') in front of a marble pulpit, on which a large open book rests."¹⁰⁴ In these cases, the images can appear next to, or surrounded by non-ornamented text, or as a part of a full-page design.



Hamburg Miscellany

The scope and style of illumination varied depending upon the text being illuminated, the artist's preferences, as well as the existing cultural norms. Ranging from only decorating and embellishing initial words or text, to full-page illustrations of specific scenes or rituals, the artistry and beauty of these works was evident. Although the most common illuminated manuscripts are bibles, *haggadot* and *ketubot*,¹⁰⁵ enough *siddurim* and *machzorim* were illuminated to demonstrate that this was a valued and familiar practice.

WHAT MAKES IT "JEWISH"?

Perhaps one of the most constant defining realities throughout Jewish history is being surrounded by other cultures and influenced by their practices. While Jews often try to

¹⁰⁴ Narkiss, 32.

¹⁰⁵ Robb, 27. Narkiss, 20.

remain unique and distinct, these efforts may be because of the proclivity of Jews to adopt and adapt the customs and cultural elements of their neighbors. Early critics of Visual T'filah suggest that the practice is "too church-like" and therefore should be avoided. However, a brief historical survey will indicate that each of the aforementioned Jewish artistic practices were influenced by or adapted from non-Jewish neighbors. What is of particular interest is what distinctions or alterations were made in order to create a uniquely Jewish style.

Hebrew illuminated manuscripts, synagogue architecture, and especially the use of stained glass, were influenced by the practices of non-Jewish neighbors. "Throughout its history, the style of Hebrew illuminated manuscripts was basically dependent on contemporary schools of illumination in each region."¹⁰⁶ In some cases, this was passive and unintentional, however in other cases, Jewish artists "tried to conform to the latest fashion of contemporary styles."¹⁰⁷ In fact, the actual demand for "Jewish illuminated manuscripts (at least during the Renaissance) might have been an imitation of wealthy non-Jewish neighbors."¹⁰⁸

This was also the case with synagogue designs. "Thus it was in every age: Synagogues were built in the style prevailing in the country at that time."¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, "In respect to its architecture the synagogue has at no time reflected any uniquely Jewish style."¹¹⁰ In other

¹⁰⁶ Narkiss, 14.

¹⁰⁷ Narkiss, 15.

¹⁰⁸ Roth, Cecil (Foward in Narkiss)

¹⁰⁹ Elbogen, 355.

¹¹⁰ Millgram, 336.

words, “synagogue buildings have always used borrowed forms of architecture.”¹¹¹ An example of this is Temple Emanu-el, in New York City, which bears remarkable semblance to a cathedral. Perhaps this is why it was so important to include Jewish motifs in the art and decoration of synagogues.

There are a few particular elements of worship and liturgical art that serve to make them explicitly Jewish in nature. Fundamentally, the fact that the manuscripts are written in Hebrew and contain images of Jewish rituals sets them apart as specifically Jewish works.

Regarding Visual T’filah and its close relation to church practices, Rabbi Billy Dreskin writes, “once you’ve got Hebrew up there [on the screen], it becomes a Jewish experience.”¹¹²

One such distinction arises from the nature of Hebrew text itself. For instance, Latin-based illuminated manuscripts often enlarge and decorate the first letter of a word, which was capitalized. Since Hebrew has no capital letters, whole first words were illuminated.¹¹³ “Another element peculiar to Jewish illumination was the use of micrography (minute script) to form geometrical or floral designs surrounding a page of conventional script or to form a whole carpet page.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Freudenheim, 13.

¹¹² Dreskin, 9.

¹¹³ Narkiss, 15.

¹¹⁴ Narkiss, 16.

Another example can be found with “the south German School of Latin illumination, [which] shows no specifically Jewish characteristics save for the featureless human faces.”¹¹⁵ The reluctance to depict human figures or faces, is a common characteristic of Jewish worship art, as discussed previously. This might include, “covering human faces with crowns, wreaths, kerchiefs, or helmets; depicting them from behind; or replacing them with animal or bird heads.”¹¹⁶ “For example, although a naked Adam and Eve are viewed from the front, their heads are turned backward; the angel in the sacrifice of Isaac as a blank face; Pharaoh’s head is covered by a large crown; the Righteous in Paradise, all have crowned animal heads.”¹¹⁷

Similarly, and also ideological in nature, depictions of God were specifically avoided in Jewish works. “For instance, in Christian art, a picture of the creation of the world will include the image of the Creator; in a Jewish work, however, only the hand of God or rays will indicate the existence of the Supreme Power.”¹¹⁸ While the art itself was not considered a desecration of the prohibition against idolatry, it was forbidden to attempt to depict God in Jewish art.

The use of Hebrew text, and its particular characteristics, the inclusion of explicitly Jewish themes and motifs, as well as the avoidance of depictions of human faces and God, all contribute to the distinction of Jewish art as compared to their non-Jewish neighbors. While

¹¹⁵ Narkiss, 29.

¹¹⁶ Narkiss, 29.

¹¹⁷ Narkiss, 29.

¹¹⁸ Narkiss, 16.

there may be a number of similarities and parallels between Jewish and non-Jewish art, it is precisely the differences of style and content which should be acknowledged.

Occasionally, there are symbols in synagogues and manuscripts that seem to be foreign to Jewish tradition, such as the zodiac, medusa, centaur, and Helios (a sun god).¹¹⁹ In some cases, (e.g., the Zodiac) these images included Hebrew text and slightly altered symbols¹²⁰ to demonstrate their Jewish context and use. (Even as late as the 12th century, a *piyut* written by Abraham ibn Ezra which lists the characters of the Zodiac weeping for the destruction of Zion in ways characteristic of their signs.¹²¹) In other cases, the understanding of these symbols in connection to Jewish thought or practice might be unclear. It is important to recognize that “these images could have had multiple meanings, depending on the viewer and the type of activity or liturgy that took place within the building.”¹²² We must examine and attempt to understand “synagogue art in light of the liturgy performed within the building, thereby giving priority to a liturgical interpretation.”¹²³ While the meaning of these seemingly foreign symbols in their Jewish contexts may be lost to us, a parallel exists in the existence of symbols and artistic elements in synagogues today that may not be understood by future generations. Many non-Jewish symbols exist within synagogues today, and are signs of our integration into American culture. The best example of this is the presence of an American flag in most synagogues. In particular, the synagogue in Cincinnati at HUC shows

¹¹⁹ Elbogen, 345, 348.

¹²⁰ Narkiss, 33.

¹²¹ *Authorized Kinot for the Ninth of Av*, translated and edited by Rabbi Abraham Rosenfeld. C. Labworth and Co., London, 1970.

¹²² Magness, 3.

¹²³ *ibid.*

a stained glass window with an American flag and the 10 Commandments insignia worn by Jewish chaplains. Similarly, “ancient Jewish art must be understood within the context of the Greco-Roman world as well as from the perspective of the history of art.”¹²⁴

Jews in every generation interacted with and were influenced by their non-Jewish neighbors. Whether in content or form, the inclusion of artistic elements drawn from non-Jewish sources, are most clearly contained within a Jewish context and framework. So, too, today can we feel confident in adopting the technology of visual worship from our Christian neighbors, as long as we do so consciously and intentionally, while being certain to follow the tradition of using Jewish texts, concepts, and stylistic choices.

CONCLUSION

Tracing the historical development of prayer, sacred text containers, and the use of art in Jewish worship reveals that Visual T’filah is an appropriate and even natural next phase of Jewish communal prayer. Each aspect of this development including the technology used and the art itself, is intended for the purpose of connecting to and serving God. In any situation, if the aids to prayer are mistaken for the object of prayer itself, the dangers of idolatry arise. By drawing from our tradition, and intentionally crafting Visual T’filah for the purpose of enhancing and deepening prayer, this emerging era of Jewish prayer can provide

¹²⁴ Magness, 4.

new meaning to worshippers and engage a generation who have grown up with technology as a natural element of their lives.

The following section will provide detailed guidance for communities wishing to incorporate Visual T'filah into their prayer practices on an experimental, periodic, or regular basis.



Torah Service at the 2009 URJ Biennial
Steve Medwin - Grand Prize Winner

Part II: The Guide to Best Practices

Defining Visual T'filah - New Terms

Visual Kavanah - *Kavanot*, *iyunim* and creative readings are given before (or instead of) a prayer in order to direct one's prayers, provide deeper insight into a prayer, or assist the worshiper in finding new meaning. A visual *kavanah* is intended to do the same through images.

Images can be literal (e.g., star images for *maariv aravim*), narrative (e.g., parted seas for *mi chamocah*), or figurative (e.g., image of rustling branches overhead for *hashkiveinu*). In some cases, the images can be instructive, especially regarding ritual practice (e.g., shaking animation for *lulav* and *etrog*).

Visual Niggun - A *niggun* is a song without lyrics intended to help worshipers reach higher levels of prayer. Comparable to mantras or chants, *niggunim* contain no specific words to engage the logical mind. Similarly, a visual *niggun* is an image, series of images, or animation with no specific picture or recognizable element. Worshipers can focus on a visual *niggun* and let their prayers drift away or close their eyes without fearing they will “miss” something on the screen.

Visual Accompanist (VA) - The individual who advances the prayer slides cannot be thought of as merely a button pusher. The VA must keep a close eye on the flow of the service and have sharp familiarity with the necessary cues. He/she must be able to

anticipate when a slide needs to be changed, especially during a song or fast-paced chant. The VA must also be able to respond to any improvisational changes made by the service leaders, such as skipping prayers or pausing for an “off script” explanation.

Just as service leaders can also accompany themselves on a guitar or another instrument, one can lead a service and act as the VA. This can be beneficial in that it offers the service leader better control over this aspect of the service, although this might also be too overwhelming for some. In some cases, service leaders that use musical instruments and act as the VA appreciate the use of a foot pedal to advance the slides.

THE BENEFITS OF VISUAL T’FILAH

Visual T’filah offers a number of benefits to the community as a whole, as well as to individual worshippers. Ranging from logistical advantages to enhancing personal meaning, Visual T’filah can transform prayer experiences.

“I was deeply moved by the visual service this morning. At the end I was actually crying!” - SH

NO *SIDDUR* NECESSARY - One of the most immediate logistical benefits is negating the need for *siddurim*. While page numbers can be displayed during VT for those who find comfort and familiarity in the *siddur*, removing the *siddur* from the hands of worshippers has a number of benefits.

- “On the same page” - Members of the community who are unfamiliar with the *siddur* or who have difficulty following along no longer need to worry about flipping through the *siddur* trying to find their place. Additionally, page numbers no longer need to be announced.

- “Hands free” - Older members of the community, those with physical challenges, and even children have trouble

“It was good not to know how many pages were left in the service. With a traditional *siddur* you can count the number of pages left, but with the Visual T'filah you concentrate on the side in front of you.” - DF

holding a *siddur* for the length of a service. VT eliminates this burden. Additionally, freeing the hands of worshippers allows for a number of opportunities ranging from clapping, placing arms around one another, even playing musical instruments, such as shakers or drums. Communities wishing to experiment further with creative services are also able to incorporate activities such as yoga or movement into their worship.

RAISING OUR VOICES AND EYES - One, often unexpected, benefit of VT is the change of energy and singing when congregants lift their faces from the *siddur*. Rather than directing their singing downward, voices are lifted

and mix with others to create a richer sound. In the same regard, service leaders

“I enjoyed being able to look up toward the Bimah while praying. I felt more a part of the congregational prayer than usual.” - MS

looking out at the community no longer see the tops of people’s heads, but rather their faces and eyes.

In some cases, this can create an unusual effect for service leaders. While faces and eyes are lifted, they are not necessarily looking at the service leader, but at the screen above

or next to them. Part of this depends on the placement of the screen, which will be discussed in a subsequent section, but this is also a change that may take some acclimation by service leaders. On the other hand, when worshippers are looking up towards a screen, it is often much easier to change one's glance slightly to see the service leader, rather than needing to lift one's head entirely to switch between looking at the *siddur* and the service leader.

“These screens may just allow us to be more present as part of a worshipping community in ways we might not often be afforded.”

- Rabbi Billy Dreskin, Woodlands Community Temple, Greenburgh, New York

SAVE THE TREES AND YOUR BUDGET - Often communities print weekly booklets with current information and announcements, and during special events or services it is not uncommon for communities to use specially printed service booklets for the occasion. Because the inclination is to print extra copies, just in case, and because members rarely take home the booklets, unless they can be reused these booklets end up getting thrown away or sent directly to the recycling bin. VT eliminates the need for these single-use booklets, saving paper and expensive printing costs.

Even communities who have the resources and motivation to create a special service booklet for their own regular use must decide on readings (and even images) and “fix” them in the printed service. VT provides the ability to create a custom service for a community and adapt or modify the service based on feedback or the desire to offer a variety of creative elements each service. Digital technology allows for endlessly dynamic service content.

RENEW THE OLD - Perhaps the most important benefit of VT is the opportunity to engage with ancient prayers in new ways. Many members of the community do not understand Hebrew nor take the time to read translations during services. Finding meaning in words written centuries ago can be difficult without in-depth study or the necessary foundational knowledge. This is partially why service leaders will include *kavanot* and why the new Reform *siddur*, *Mishkan T'filah*, includes a variety of creative readings for practically each prayer.

Since roughly 65% of the population are visual learners¹²⁵, it may be more effective for worshippers to consider the meaning of prayers through images. The adage “a picture is worth a thousand words” aside, visual images offer the ability to frame abstract concepts in more approachable ways. This can provide a more engaging prayer experience to the majority of the population. “Worship has always been multi-media because human beings are multisensory creatures, not because of the existence of one or another human invention. We hear, see, touch smell, and taste.”¹²⁶

“The visuals behind the words added to the spiritual feeling as we prayed.” - MS

SETTING THE SCENE - Jewish tradition contains a number of visual cues to indicate holidays or special times. For example, many congregations exchange their “regular” Torah covers for specially decorated white covers for the High Holidays, and there are also varieties of decorations used on Sukkot to set the scene.

¹²⁵ Pearson Education Inc. (http://www.phschool.com/eteach/social_studies/2003_05/essay.html - accessed 2/7/2010)

¹²⁶ Schultze, 30.

“Visual worship offers us the ability to bring an additional dimension to any themes that we establish during a service (*e.g.*, Israel Shabbat, Holocaust Remembrance Shabbat, Volunteer Shabbat). Visual worship provides the ability to change the way our sanctuary looks to match a moment or an event taking place there.”¹²⁷

“We’re finding that congregants of all ages benefit from projected images. Kids think it’s cool. Older members appreciate not having to hold a prayerbook and often think the screens are easier to look at. High school students don’t come because of it, but once there, they react wonderfully to it.”

- Rabbi Billy Dreskin, Woodlands Community Temple, Greenburgh, New York

“Visual T’filah brings modernity into harmony with tradition, unifies a community, underscores a message, and renews energetic enthusiasm for prayer.”

- Rabbi Zoë Klein, Temple Isaiah, Los Angeles, California

INTRODUCING VISUAL T’FILAH TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Since VT has the potential to radically transform prayer practices, it may be seen as a threat by those who already find meaning and comfort with their modes of prayer. When introducing VT to a community for the first time, there are a number of factors to consider and a number of models to pursue.

IT’S EXPERIMENTAL - Until VT becomes a regular element of services it should be considered “experimental”. This is important to acknowledge as a service leader and even more

¹²⁷ Dreskin, 9.

important to convey to a worshipping community. With this approach, when challenges arise or technological difficulties appear, each individual involved can be more understanding. Similarly, if the text on a slide cannot be read clearly or if an animation or clip is too distracting, members of the community will feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. This allows them to feel a part of the process rather than, quietly or loudly, resisting it. Eliciting feedback from a community is a great way to engage congregants in discussions of prayer and liturgy, and a good way to measure the success or areas for improvement in a community's VT practice.

CHANGE COMES SLOWLY - While some communities, after experiencing VT, request that it become a regular aspect of their worship, this is not always the case. In many congregations, it is important to introduce change slowly. There are a variety of models that a community wishing to add VT to their practices might consider:

- “Standard, plus” - One method of introducing VT is to conduct a “standard” service (with all of the familiar melodies and prayers, possibly even including the *siddur*) while including visual *kavanot*. In this model, VT is added to an existing structure, rather than taking away from it. (The drawbacks to this method are avoiding the benefits described above for removing the *siddur* from worshippers' hands.)

- “Alternative” - Communities with enough resources can provide a concurrent alternative service using VT, potentially drawing in a new population. (The downside to this approach is that a number of people may not choose to attend a VT, but when it is their only option, they may find that it was a much better experience than they had anticipated.)

- “Special Occasions” - Rather than printing up special service booklets, and as a way to celebrate a holiday or special event, VT can provide an added level of excitement, engagement, and customization.

- “Occasional” - Another model is to add VT to a monthly or bi-monthly Shabbat service cycle. In the same way that Tot Shabbat for some communities is the third week of every month, VT might hold a similar place in the service rotation. This may be the best approach in that it can become a regular aspect of synagogue life, while offering those who may be resistant to change an opportunity to have advanced warning.

In each instance, it is ideal to publicize the use of VT at least a few weeks before the service. This allows people the possibility of being drawn in by the new type of service as well as alerting regular synagogue-goers that there will be something different happening at services.

INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY - “Using technology well in worship requires multiple perspectives.”¹²⁸ Creating a VT in house is a great opportunity for a ritual committee or an ad hoc task force to engage in the study of prayer and reflect on current worship practices in their community. By inviting the members of a small team to contribute or create visual imagery for the service, they not only feel a strong sense of ownership, but the service can be a genuine expression of the local community. (This is similar to historical time periods before the *siddur* when communities created their own custom services guided by the recommended framework.)

¹²⁸ Schultze, 14.

In this case, if possible, it is ideal to gather members of the community who are regular worshippers, adult learners, and those proficient in visual arts and technology (*e.g.*, photography, video, etc). It is even more beneficial, although challenging in the short term, to include members of the community who may have the greatest resistance to change. Often the most dramatic opponents, when they feel their opinions are being heard, become the most outspoken proponents.

Rabbi Paul Yedwab of Temple Israel, West Bloomfield, asked his congregants to send him their own images and video which answered the question:
“Where did you find God/spirituality in the world?”

CREATING VISUAL T’FILAH

COMPUTER PROGRAMS¹²⁹

There are two main considerations when choosing a program for Visual T’filah: 1) The way it manages Hebrew, and 2) The features which allow for creativity when designing and leading the service. It is also essential to ensure that the program runs on your computer system (*i.e.*, Mac or PC), although there are a number of options for running PC programs on an Apple computer (*e.g.*, BootCamp, Parallels, VMware Fusion).

¹²⁹ Descriptions and prices are accurate as of 2/14/2010.

Keynote (Mac) - (\$79 for iWork suite)

This is Apple's version of PowerPoint which comes as a part of the iWork suite including a word processing program (Pages) and spreadsheet program (Numbers). It is extremely powerful and versatile, and is highly recommended. It handles Hebrew well (except for a small bug¹³⁰ when animating Hebrew which can be overcome by grouping a Hebrew text box with another text box or an invisible shape/object). It provides many high quality transitions and animations which look professional and polished. The Visual Accompanist can easily skip slides or jump to different places during the service and bring up a black screen by pressing "b" or a white screen by pressing "w". Additionally, this is the most affordable option.

PowerPoint (Mac and PC) - (\$149 for Office: Home and Student edition; \$399 for standard)

This is commonly the default presentational software and comes as a part of Microsoft Office. It is extremely challenging, but not impossible, to use Hebrew with PowerPoint in a way which looks clean and legible. The animations and transitions can also look amateurish, or worse, more like a presentation than a worship service. PowerPoint also allows the VA to put up a black screen or white screen in the middle of a service using the "b" and "w" keys, respectively.

With both Keynote and PowerPoint, when the projected screen is set as a secondary monitor, a customizable presenter display is revealed on the host computer.

¹³⁰ This bug exists in Keynote '09 version 5.0.3 and early versions. Hopefully this bug will be addressed in subsequent versions.

There are a number of other programs that are intended for use in Church settings, that provide certain benefits and challenges. Often they come with, or provide easy access to, a wealth of digital resources including photographs and loop-able videos. However, many

Church Presentation Software: SongShowPlus (PC) - (\$299) ProPresenter (Mac) - (\$399) Harmony (Mac) - (\$199) Easy Worship (PC) - (\$399) Media Shout (PC) - (\$429) Sunday Plus (PC) - (\$349)
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backgrounds include crosses or other imagery that inexplicably feels “Christian”. These programs usually offer the ability to change backgrounds or words independently during the service (as opposed to Keynote or Powerpoint in which you create complete slides). However, one challenge with this practice is that many of the included backgrounds often make the text hard to read.

Perhaps the most important challenge to using these programs is their lack of Hebrew textual support. Being designed for church services, it is often difficult or impossible to include Hebrew text parallel to English, or to easily manipulate the Hebrew text. Nevertheless, even when using Keynote or PowerPoint, it is recommended to pre-format the text in a word processor that is designed to work with Hebrew (discussed below).

THE TEXT

In order to create a VT, it is important to have a source for *siddur* text and a word processor that will allow you to easily work with and edit the text. For PC users, the clear choice is DavkaWriter (www.davkawriter.com) which comes with a substantial text library, including the *siddur*. The Mac equivalent is Mellel (<http://www.redlers.com/mellel.html>) which also

comes with the necessary texts. The recommended option for Mac users is a word processing program called Nisus Writer (www.nisus.com) which offers an easy-to-use interface and intuitive text handling.

Nisus, however, does not come with *siddur* text, and there are more affordable versions of Davka and Mellel which do not

include the texts either. Fortunately, there are a number of websites which provide the text for free. In some

Sources for *Siddur* Text Online:

<http://www.onlinesiddur.com/>

<http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/sidurim/shaar-2.htm>

http://he.wikisource.org/wiki/סידור_נוסח_אשכנז

<http://siddur.arielbenjamin.com/texts>

cases, the text may be missing certain vowels, such as the *cholam chaser* (the “oh” vowel without the *vav*) but these can be added in the word processor. Additionally, the text online may be spaced in a peculiar way, but when copied and pasted into an appropriate word processor, the font can be changed to correct the problem. (A good *siddur* font is called “New Peninim.”)

Why is Hebrew so hard to work with?

Most English word processors use a text encoding system called ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) which contains 128 characters including Latin letters and standard punctuation symbols. When only working in English this system is sufficient. However, the characters for Hebrew letters are stored in a system called Unicode, which contains over 100,000 characters, including characters for a number of other non-Latin languages. To work well with Unicode, computer applications require more complex programming. Since this is often not needed by average users, it is usually not included. However, Nisus, Mellel, and Davka are written to specifically handle Hebrew (and other Unicode characters) well, including proper text flow from right to left.

1) How much text to include on each slide?

This is a contemporary *machloket* and ultimately comes down to personal preference and your use of technology. Rabbi Billy Dreskin suggests using no more than 8 lines of text, 4 in Hebrew and 4 in transliteration.¹³¹ This, admittedly, does not leave room for translation, but is practically guaranteed to be clearly legible on the screen.¹³²

Another approach, is to reduce the font size slightly and place the text in parallel columns. This allows for more text per slide (8-10 lines) and leaves room for a line of English translation at the bottom. Another benefit of having shorter lines of text is that individuals may find it easier to follow along, especially when including extra space between lines when appropriate.

One consideration in determining how much text to include per slide is technological in nature. A digital connection (*e.g.*, VGA) allows for more crisp text, while an analog connection (*e.g.*, RCA yellow plug) requires larger font size. (This will be discussed further in the section on technological logistics.)



8 Lines of Sequential Text



8-10 Lines of Parallel Text

¹³¹ Dreskin, 9.

¹³² For more samples of this style see: http://www.dreskin.us/html/more_on_visual_worship.html

2) Choosing a Font Size

When using a digital video connection, which is comparable to the crispness of a computer monitor, smaller fonts and more text are possible. (Nevertheless, care should be taken not to overdo the amount of text on each slide.) Recommended font sizes for digital connections are 42 pt. for English and 60-64 pt. for Hebrew. With analog connections, which function more similar to television screens, larger fonts are suggested: 46-48 pt. for English, and 70 pt. for Hebrew.

In addition to the type of connection, it is important to consider the size of the screen used in services and the size of the sanctuary. Since this can vary greatly, the best way to determine an appropriate font size (and the number of lines of text) for a particular setting is to create a few sample slides and experiment. Set up the system as it will be used during services and sit in the back row of the sanctuary.¹³³ As you advance through the samples, use your best judgment as to what size is appropriate.

Another approach is to measure the diagonal length of your computer screen, and for every inch of screen stand one foot away from your computer.¹³⁴ For example, if you are working on a 13 inch screen, stand 13 feet away from the computer while running the slides. If you can see the text clearly, chances are your community will, as well. Perhaps the simplest formula for determining an appropriate font size was suggested by Guy Kawasaki, author and

¹³³ Duarte, 152.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

former Apple Fellow: “A good rule of thumb for font size is to divide the oldest [congregant’s] age by two, and use that font size.”¹³⁵

If, after following these guides, the font needs to be so large that an insufficient amount of text can fit on the screen, you may want to explore using a larger screen or roping off the back couple of rows of the sanctuary so people don’t sit there. Also, remember that VT is still in the experimental stage. At some point a decision needs to be made about font size and most congregants will not be shy about sharing their experience, especially if they are unable to see the text clearly. It is also recommended to invite members of the congregation who may have difficulty seeing to sit closer to the front of the sanctuary.

3) Transliteration and Translation

Given the limited amount of text that can be included on each slide, the choice of what to include has great symbolic value. For example, Rabbi Dreskin does not include translations and refers worshippers to a *siddur* for the English.¹³⁶ The implied message is that it is important for congregants to be able to follow along and see the text clearly. The meaning of the prayer can be conveyed through the use of imagery or through using external resources (e.g., the *siddur*). On the other hand, Valley Beth Shalom, a Conservative synagogue in the San Fernando Valley, chose to have only Hebrew on some slides. In this case, the

¹³⁵ As cited in Duarte, pg. 152.

¹³⁶ Dreskin, 9.

assumption is that congregants will be able to follow along in the Hebrew, and translations are unnecessary or unimportant.

Another option which has been successful is shown above. Including at least one line of English at the bottom of the screen to convey the meaning of the prayer can be enough to inform or educate worshippers without taking up valuable screen real

What to include for each Prayer:

Hebrew - makes it a “Jewish experience,” but can be difficult to work with.

Transliteration - allows non-Hebrew readers to follow along, but implies or acknowledges that participants are not proficient in Hebrew.

Translation - not necessary to participate, but may add meaning for those who cannot translate the Hebrew on their own.

estate. Whatever one decides, it is important to recognize that these choices convey symbolic value as to what is important in prayer for a given community, as well as, shaping the experience for worshippers.

4) “Black Fire on White Fire”¹³⁷ - Font and Background Colors

Choosing an appropriate text color is extremely important for legibility. The default for printed or written documents is a white background with black letters, and this has been inappropriately used for projected works. The nature of screens and Visual T’filah requires a different approach. It is recommended that the default for VT is white letters on a black background.

¹³⁷ Midrash Tanhuma, Genesis 1

With printed documents and pigments, the combination of all colors is black (or dark brown), and the absence of color is white. It is easier to start with a white or light background and add to it a darker color of ink or paint. However with light and visual projections, it is the reverse. The combination of all colors is white, and the absence of color is black. It is more appropriate to begin with a black background, which results in nothing (or relatively little) being projected, and add to it white letters, which appear bright and clear.

If the background of a projected slide is white, the majority of light is being used to highlight the background, not the text, and this can even bleed over and make the text appear smaller. It is also hard on the eyes to look for long periods of time at such a bright screen. Conversely, when a background is black, the light is used only to highlight the letters and it is much easier to read and look at for longer periods of time. Additionally, a dark background creates a more formal feel.¹³⁸

The colors black and white offer the greatest contrast, which makes them easier to distinguish one from the other and thereby read the text clearly. However, it is also possible to accomplish similar results with darkly colored backgrounds and lightly colored text. Using colors effectively can add life to a service and influence the environment or setting for prayer. For example, using shades of green on *Tu B'shvat* can set a mood and distinguish the service from others.

¹³⁸ Duarte, 132.

ensure there is no infringement of copyright. This can also be the most time consuming approach, which is why media or VT committees are helpful in finding and selecting imagery.

The best way to collect images is to carry around a small digital camera, the newer of which provide images of a high enough quality (see the section below on Resolution for more information). The same can be done with digital recorders (*e.g.*, HD Flip), but it is recommended to use a tripod when recording video. An additional benefit of this approach is the effect on the individual: one begins to view the world through the lens of Visual T'filah, bringing the worship experience outside the walls of the synagogue, encouraging one to become conscious of prayers and their meaning in one's daily lives.

- Google Images (images.google.com) - Google provides searchable access to the wealth of imagery online; however great care should be given not to infringe copyright. Unless otherwise stated, one should assume that the images are protected by copyright and should not be used.

- Wikimedia (commons.wikimedia.org) - Similar to Wikipedia, the images at Wikimedia are uploaded by individuals and searchable. These images are generally available for use without violating copyright, and in some cases the contributors just request credit for the photograph.

- Social Media Photo Sharing Sites - (*e.g.*, flickr.com, picasaweb.google.com, photos.yahoo.com, webshots.com, smugmug.com, photobucket.com) - hosting a vast array of

amateur photographs, these sites are searchable and are a great way to share one's personal collection. Each site and contributor may have different permissions for reuse, so care should be given to determine the applicable restrictions.

- Stock Photo Sites - (e.g., istockphoto.com, shutterstock.com, gettyimages.com, fotosearch.com, corbisimages.com, dreamstime.com, bigstockphoto.com, us.fotolia.com, shutterstock.com) - These sites offer an enormous collection of professional, royalty-free images. Often subscriptions or fees are required for download and use, but this is the best option to ensure high quality images and guilt-free use.
- Clip Art - Programs like PowerPoint often come packaged with images and drawings. These should be used sparingly, if at all, unless the service is for small children. Clip art tends to be kitschy and not necessarily appropriate for a worship experience.

2) Image Resolution

Images that look acceptable when small and displayed on a computer screen can look pixelated¹³⁹ when projected full-screen. There are two basic criteria for determining whether an image will look good on a large screen (other than actually testing it yourself): 1) Image Size, and 2) File Size.

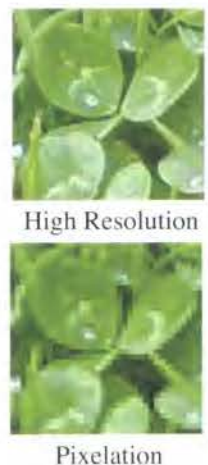


Image dimensions are usually listed in pixels (colored squares that make up

¹³⁹ Pixelation occurs when blocks or squares of colors can be seen in an image, rather than a smooth gradient of color.

the image, short for “picture element”). Generally, images that are smaller than 800x600 pixels should not be used full-screen.

File sizes are listed in kilobytes (KB) or megabytes (MB) and represent the amount of memory an image takes up on a hard drive. The larger the file size, the more likely that image will look clear when displayed full-screen. Images smaller than 50 KB should be avoided; At least 100 KB or more is recommended.

Most digital cameras are at least 5 megapixels, some much more, and this is more than sufficient for full-screen images. For example, a standard 7 megapixel camera creates images that are over 1 MB. Even the camera on an iPhone, which is 3 megapixels and takes images a little less than 200 KB, is sufficient.

The general rule is: the larger the better (within reason), but the best way to make certain images will look acceptable is to try projecting them in the sanctuary.

3) Choosing Images

It can be challenging, or result in extremely literal imagery, to look at a given prayer and try to think of appropriate images. Rather, this should be considered an opportunity to engage with the liturgy on a deeper level. Examining a prayer closely allows one to consider the meaning or focus one wishes to emphasize and represent through imagery.

On the other hand, not every prayer needs an image which is thematically or liturgically connected. In the same way that not every prayer in the service is introduced with a reading

or *kavanah*, some background images can simply be used because they are beautiful or inspiring. In fact, in some cases, if the meaning behind a selected image is abstractly related to the prayer, many worshippers may not understand the connection and may just view it as a beautiful background.

The best imagery to use has plain or simple areas over which the text can be placed. If an image is too “busy” it can make the text difficult to read. (See previous section on font color and contrast.) However, if a complex image is preferred, there are two simple strategies to help make the text more legible. 1) Add a drop-shadow to the letters. This should be used carefully, because if the shadow is too close to the text it can make it harder to read, and if it is too far from the text it can appear to double the text. Experiment with the distance and opacity settings to find something that looks acceptable. When in doubt, test it on the projection screen. 2) Fade the image or add a translucent background to the text. This will allow the image to still be visible, but provide greater contrast for the text.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

1) Animations and Transitions

Just because an animation or transition is possible doesn’t mean it should be used. Often the animations or transitions can be distracting, taking away from a prayerful moment as members of the community take notice. If an animation is cute, funny, or clever, it will draw thoughts towards itself, rather than the prayer. In general, “don’t animate your text unless it

adds value, meaning, or emotion to the content.”¹⁴⁰ The challenge is creating animations and transitions that help the flow of the service and look good, without being distracting.

“The best slides were the ones that I didn't see. They supported the praying but you still didn't pay attention to it.” - DF

2) Page Numbers

In congregations where some members may wish to hold a *siddur*, it is advisable to include the page number of the prayer. It should be placed in a way that will not detract from the images, and this is often in one of the lower corners. Make sure the page number is in *exactly* the same location on each page, otherwise it will appear to jump around as slides transition.

3) Prayer Titles

One may also consider including the title or name of each prayer on the slide. This provides a more formal and structured feel, and may be helpful to members of the community. This, too, should be done consistently regarding its location and font size.

This can also take the form of a menu bar down the side of the screen (similar to *Mishkan T'filah*) or across the bottom of the screen. This can give a sense of where in the service the

¹⁴⁰ Duarte, 145.

current prayer is and offer a way for members of the community to follow the progression of the service.

4) Multiple-Slide Indicators

Due to font size and screen restrictions, prayers may need to be extended over a few slides. It may be helpful to include indicators that the prayer continues on the next slide. One way of doing this, inspired by the home screen on the iPhone, is to have a number of dots for each slide contained in a single prayer. The dots can be highlighted to represent the number of the current slide. For example, on the second slide of four, the dots might appear like this:

• • • •

5) Know Your Audience

This is one of the most important concepts. One of the benefits of VT is that images can be selected based on the members of the community. A children's service should have different imagery than a holocaust remembrance service. Older members of the community typically enjoy nature imagery and slow transitions, while teenagers are more drawn to colorful and fast-paced slides.

It may be beneficial to talk to, or even work with, members of the population you will be serving. Additionally, following the service, it is helpful to ask for feedback, through conversations or via email. With enough insight and feedback, one can craft a VT

appropriately suited to the community. On the other hand, it is also important to remember that it is virtually impossible to create any service that is without critique by every member of the community.

TECHNOLOGICAL LOGISTICS

PROJECTOR AND SCREENS

1) Acquisition

If your community doesn't already own a projector or screen, and you are just interested in preliminary experimentation with VT, they can be rented from a number of companies. However, if you plan on having a few VT throughout the year, or using the equipment for other purposes (*e.g.*, movie night, board meetings, presentations) they are worth purchasing. You may consider the following aspects when researching the most appropriate projector and screen for your purposes.

2) Lumens

The brightness of projectors is measured in lumens; "One lumen is equal to one foot-candle worth of light per square foot."¹⁴¹ The range of lumens necessary for one's needs is determined by the amount of ambient light in the room and the distance of the projector from

¹⁴¹ Herring, 200.

the screen. Ambient light can come from windows (during the day) and the artificial lights in the room. For best results, the lights directly above the screen should be turned off, and the remaining lights should be dimmed. If this is not possible or if a VT is done during the day (and there are no shades on the windows), a higher level of lumens is recommended.

Smaller rooms with low ambient light can use projectors with 1,000 lumens or more and large bright spaces may require up to 4,000 lumens. It is never a problem to have a projector with more lumens than are required, and it is important to keep in mind that the brightness of projector bulbs will dim over time.

To more precisely calculate the number of lumens you will require, you can use online calculators (*e.g.*, <http://www.projectorpoint.co.uk/Projector-Brightness-Advice.htm>) or apply the following formula¹⁴²:

$$\text{Level of brightness desired (lumens per square foot)} \times \text{Size of Screen (ft}^2\text{)}$$

The Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers recommends 20 lumens per square foot for “excellent video playback” although this number can be as low as 10 lumens. Depending on the ambient light, the level of brightness desired should be increased 1-10 lumens per square foot to counteract the ambient light. (A light meter can give the precise amount to increase the figure.) For example, if one desired an average level brightness (15 lumens per square foot) and has an average level of ambient light (5 lumens per square foot) the total level of brightness desired is 20 lumens per square foot. If the screen being used is 8 x 10 feet (80 square feet), the total number of lumens required is at least 1,600 lumens. As

¹⁴² adapted from Herring, 200.

mentioned previously, it is better to use a projector that is greater than the amount you need, since the bulb will dim with use.

3) Screen Size and Placement

One commonly used formula to determine the appropriate size of the screen is to measure (or estimate) the distance from where the screen will be placed at the front of the sanctuary to the last row of seats. The vertical height of the screen should be at least one-seventh to one-sixth the distance.¹⁴³ For example, if the back row is 75 feet from the front, the screen's height should be roughly 10-12 feet tall. Also, the distance between the front row and the screen should be at least twice the height of the screen. It may be desirable to block off seats in the front or the rear of the sanctuary to encourage optimal viewing distances.

If the distances in a sanctuary are difficult to work with or if a sanctuary is especially large, it is worth considering using two screens and projectors. This is an expensive option, but can solve a number of distance and placement issues.

Screen placement can be a unique challenge depending upon the architecture and design of a sanctuary. Generally, screens should be placed alongside or above the *bimah*. Members of the community should be able to easily look at the screen and the service leader without straining their necks. "Anything over thirty degrees will cause neck pain."¹⁴⁴ Also, consider

¹⁴³ Boyer, 62.

¹⁴⁴ Schultze, 68.

that some communities may not feel comfortable if the screen blocks the ark or the *neir tamid*.

It is possible to project onto blank walls or even taut bedsheets, although screens are specifically designed to reflect back the light, causing the image to appear brighter and sharper. In fact, there is a variety of special screens available that reflect back a greater portion of light or dampen ambient light, although they can be very expensive.

One of the biggest challenges when considering where and at what height to place the screen is that when the community rises for certain prayers, their heads may obscure the bottom of the screen. As with everything else, a test-run with a few people observing the screen from their seats gives the best possible opportunity to avoid these problems.

4) Temporary or Permanent?

Those wishing to make VT a regular aspect of their worship practices should consider a permanent installation. However, prices can vary significantly depending on the ceiling height or the distance between the back of the sanctuary and the placement of the screens. The cost can also be considerably higher if incorporating a motorized system to raise the projector and/or screen out of view when not in use. An alternative worth considering is the installment of large flat panel monitors or TVs, rather than using a projector and screen. Whatever a community chooses to do, professional installers should be used to ensure the installation is done correctly and everything is aligned appropriately.

If offering VT on an experimental or periodic basis, it may be acceptable to set up a temporary solution. In this case a small table is appropriate to hold the projector, although in some cases a ladder may be necessary. (See point above about heads blocking the bottom of the screen.) When utilizing a temporary set-up, care should be given to ensure that it looks professional and safe. It is very important to tape down the cables so no one trips over them.¹⁴⁵

5) The Cables

Almost every projector has at least these two common inputs: VGA and RCA. VGA is the standard cable connecting computers to monitors and utilizes a digital signal. RCA (or “component” usually with yellow, red, and white plugs) is the standard cable for connecting TVs with DVD players or VCRs, and uses an analog signal. (There are a number of newer options, including DVI, HDMI, or composite video, all of which are acceptable if supported by the equipment.) When running VT from a computer, a digital signal (VGA or better) is preferred. Because this digital technology is used for computer monitors, the projected text will be crisp and legible. When using a DVD for VT or using analog video out from the computer, the text size must be increased to ensure readability.

¹⁴⁵ Dreskin, 9.

6) Monitor for Bimah

It is important that the service leaders are able to see what is displayed on the screen(s). This can be achieved simply by angling the screen(s) on the side of the *bimah* towards the leader. Unfortunately, this can result in the leader facing the screen more than the community, or awkwardly switching back and forth between the two. This can also be achieved simply if the service leader is acting as the Visual Accompanist and can see the actual computer running the VT. If these solutions are undesirable, a more professional, but complex, solution is to place a small monitor on the bimah in an inconspicuous location.

VISUAL ACCOMPANIST

If the individual responsible for advancing the slides during the service is not the service leader, there are a number of options. This role can be served by lay leaders, students, or other interested individuals. It is ideal, but not necessary, if this person is also involved in the creation of the VT or the set-up of the equipment. In this case, it may be more appropriate to consider them a “Digital Accompanist.”

The VA must have training or familiarity with the system and should be able to help in case of technological difficulties. It is also important for the VA to be familiar with the service and the cues, ideally rehearsing with the service leader and participants. This is especially important in services with musical accompaniment and complex cues.

The VA should also feel comfortable enough with the service in general, and familiar enough with the specific service he/she is running, in case the service leader skips a prayer intentionally or accidentally. This requires the specific knowledge of the computer program being used.

Some may view the VA as simply a “button pusher,” however this role is far more important than that. While they themselves may not be in the spotlight, their actions are seen by the whole community. The VA must remain focused on the service and in touch with the pace; when slides are advanced too soon or too late, it is not only noticeable, but extremely distracting. The Visual Accompanist is an important member of a service leading team and should be considered as such.

MOVING FORWARD

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Since Visual T’filah is still in its infancy there are a number of lessons to be learned and a number of questions to consider:

- In communities that embrace VT, how often is it appropriate to have a VT? Some communities are content with a VT every couple of months, while others demand more. Some communities have included VT in their monthly cycle of services, and others are

exploring the possibility of having a VT every Shabbat. Ultimately, it depends on the community, its leadership, and their capacity for change.

- If VT is done regularly, how much should the images be changed each service? Just because the imagery and content can be completely changed for every service, it may not be desirable. Communities and prayer leaders tend to find a balance between singing the same melodies each week and learning new tunes. Often prayer leaders have favorite creative readings which they repeat each week, and other prayer leaders pride themselves on finding or writing a new *iyyun* each week. The same consideration should be given to imagery. As with music and readings, a balance may be reached between familiar elements and new additions.

- Will VT transform Jewish prayer, just as the printing press did, or is it just a passing fad? In part, this question must take into account the prevailing cultural norms. Is our culture moving to a paper-less existence? There are some people who will never give up their paperbacks and others who avidly read books on their Kindle or eReader. If our society moves away from printing on paper, which seems to be the trend, using prayer books in services will seem antiquated to many. On the other hand, we have refused to let go of the scroll technology and read from it weekly.

OTHER SETTINGS AND USES

While synagogues seem to be the most likely institutions for VT, a number of other settings would benefit from its use. Summer camps, religious schools, and Hillels are examples of settings in which regular or occasional prayer takes place. Given the proper set-up, VT could help re-engage younger Jews with prayer. VT can also be used as a teaching tool. As smartboards find themselves in an increasing number of classrooms, VT can be a way of teaching about prayers as well as certain rituals. (An animation was created by the author for Sukkot to demonstrate the traditional directions of shaking the *lulav* and *etrog*).

Furthermore, Jewish institutions which don't regularly pray together for lack of *siddurim* or leadership, can use VT to easily create a prayer experience for their members and/or staff.

NEAR FUTURE

Given the proper resources and guidance, it is possible to create a simple web interface through which service leaders could easily design and compile VT for use in their community. This website could serve as a repository of custom designs and a trading post for the sharing of ideas and imagery. A community of interested parties can form around the creation and sharing of VT.

The recent announcement of Apple's iPad, as well as existing tablet technology, offer an interesting possibility for the future. For those who enjoy the freedom of flipping ahead in their *siddur* and do not mind holding something in their hands, a tablet could be synched with

the projected screen while allowing worshippers to click on hyperlinked words for definitions or alternative readings. This might also take a form similar to screens found in newer airplanes in which there a screen available on the back of each seat.

If cost was not an issue, it would also be interesting to explore VT in an IMAX theater. The breathtaking images normally shown on (relatively) small screens, would inspire awe and amazement on an IMAX screen. The normal considerations for the amount of text that can be displayed on a given slide would be negated. VT in an IMAX theater could be an overwhelming experience, for better or for worse.

FAR FUTURE

As the technology develops, there is no way to predict the potential for VT in the future. Technology that exists today in prototype form may become readily available for use in VT. For example, 3D glasses-free technology could create a fully immersive environment for prayer. Additionally, head gear that measures thought patterns (specifically alpha waves) could read and project worshippers' state of relaxation intermingled with others' creating a visual thought symphony.

The possibilities are endless.

<p>This guide represents the state of the art as of early 2010. For current information, visit www.visualtilah.com or contact visualtilah@gmail.com.</p>
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Note: Quotations that appear attributed to initials (*e.g.*, MS, DF, SH) are from congregants who have experienced VT and submitted their feedback for use in this thesis.

Image Sources

Pg. 10 - "Cyber Judaism." Reform Judaism, Summer 2009, 34-40.

Pg. 17

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Pg. 18 - Film: "A Clockwork Orange" Stanley Kubrick, 1971

Pg. 37 - Ark of The Temple, Atlanta, Georgia. Kelly Holtz Photography.

Pg. 38 - Beit Alpha Mosaic Floor, Steven Medwin, 2008.

Pg. 39 - Biblical scenes in Wilshire Boulevard Temple sanctuary, Iris Schneider, 2008.

Pg. 42

- Hamilton *Siddur*, Narkiss, Plate 7, Haggadah and siddur for *Pesach* and *Sukkot*, Spain, 13th c.
- Rylands Spanish Haggadah, Narkiss, Plate 13, Spain, mid-14th century

Pg. 43

- Damascus Keter, Narkiss, Plate 5, Bible with Masoretic notes, Spain, Burgos, 1260
- The Second Leningrad Bible, Narkiss, Plate 2, Egypt, Fostat (old Cairo), 1008 or 1010

Pg. 45

- First Cincinnati Haggadah, Narkiss, Plate 45, Southern Germany, c. 1480-90
- Darmstadt Haggadah, Narkiss, Plate 43, Germany, Middle Rhine, second quarter of 15th c.

Pg. 46 - Hamburg Miscellany, Narkiss, Plate 39, Germany (Mainz?), about 1427

Pg. 52 - Union for Reform Judaism Biennial 2009, Toronto, Canada, Steve Medwin
(Grand Prize Winner of Photo Contest)

Pg. 65

- Rabbi Billy Dreskin, samples of visual worship, http://www.dreskin.us/html/more_on_visual_worship.html
- Dan Medwin, Visual T'filah created in collaboration with CCAR Press, 2010

Pg. 70 - Dan Medwin, Visual T'filah created in collaboration with CCAR Press, 2010

Pg. 72 - Dan Medwin, Ireland, 2009