The Postmodern *Shaliach Tzibbur*:

Music, Leadership, and Covenant

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A Reflective Introduction

"If worship is worship, it should somehow relate to the knowledge of God's presence in our midst."[1]

This thesis is about the intersection of thought and the experience of prayer in the contemporary North American Jewish milieu. It is about the particular postmodern reality of praying as a Jew in the first decades of the twenty-first century, and most specifically the burden of being a prayer leader, a *shaliach tzibbur*, in this particular context. The thesis asks what people seek in prayer: what do they feel and what it is that they think is achieved through prayer – what is prayer's efficacy? How does the postmodern understand the purpose of the prayer experience? What are the implications of the worldview of the postmodern in the prayer experience – how do we understand God during prayer and the rituals and music that we use in worship? What deeper understandings of the way God and the world works enable people to experience prayer as they do? Do people think that their prayer experiences are simply a manipulation of the subconscious through spoken and sung language? When people feel that prayer has "worked" for them, what has it done?

Here is an example from my own life of the kind of questions that the thesis will explore. A friend of mine from college who is in the process of becoming a Catholic priest responded to a very public Internet post announcing that I was pregnant with my daughter Johannah, who was born during the thesis writing process. He wrote that he would be praying for my family in the coming months. I smiled from ear to ear and my

[1] Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only*, 2 ed. (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 1999), 9.

eyes filled with tears as I read his comment. Dozens upon dozens of other people had wished us well as they learned our good news, yet my reaction to Bob's post was quite different. What I experienced when reading this comment was a sense of profound love and joy. He said he would pray for me, whereas others simply said *mazal tov*, *b'sha'ah tovah*, or congratulations. Why did the promise of this person's prayers elicit a greater emotional response in me than wishes of congratulations? He is not a close friend by any means, just a person who used to live down the hall in the college dorm. The answer is far from simple and requires a theological response. Was it knowing that someone else cared enough to include me in their prayers that made me feel loved? Perhaps. But I believe there is more. Despite scientific doubts about prayer's efficacy, I believe that prayer unites people with each other and with the Divine – both horizontally and vertically, that is – individual-to-individual and individual-to-God. I claim this truth through subjective reflection into my own experience and through reasoned theological explication of what that experience is about. Bob's promise of his prayers brings me closer to him and closer to God.

This thesis is rooted in theology, philosophy, and ritual theory. Ultimately, this is a thesis about prayer and the postmodern condition, with music and prayer leadership at its very core. Without fully engaging in the most fundamental questions about the prayer experience, a holistic treatment of the way that music and leadership function in prayer is unachievable. Clergy may assert that they know how to create a worship experience that they believe gives people room to access community, the self, and the Divine, but do they ever really ask what, truly, prayer has to do with God? What does it really mean when someone expresses the hope of creating a transformative prayer experience where

congregants can encounter God? What do we think prayer does? What are people doing when they pray? What outcome is desired from prayer? In sum: what will count for prayer being deemed "efficacious"? What, "effects" does efficacious prayer anticipate. We cannot begin to answer questions about what prayer is meant to do without having a sense of the way we believe that God works in the world.

In the first chapter of this thesis, these and other questions of the theological implications of prayer are explored through the particular lens of the postmodern condition. Answers are derived from a survey of contemporary writing on the subject, especially the work of Reform theologian Eugene Borowitz.

Chapter Two shifts from theology to music, analyzing the body of contemporary literature about the music of the synagogue in particular. I survey the ways thoughtful people have approached synagogue music since the mid-twentieth century, teasing out implicit and explicit assertions about music in worship. The close analysis provided in this chapter helps us move beyond the context of the original writing (which may not even mention worship) to arrive at a set of assumptions and ideas about music's worship function – essentially a reinterpretation of older discourse. Chapter Two will demonstrate that the shifting nature of the discourse is, in fact, a movement towards postmodernism and propose a way to approach all of the material examined in a holistic fashion.

Chapter Three is, at once, a deconstruction and expansion of Chapter Two, as ideas introduced there are reconsidered in greater detail. The final chapter explores extant academic theory on ritual and postmodernism as it applies to leaders of contemporary Jewish worship. Chapter Three draws heavily from the works of Ronald Grimes and Lawrence Hoffman, experts in ritual theory and liturgy, respectively. Their work offers

thoughtful cultural interpretation to the meaning of ritual, providing us with a useful theory of a larger human process of ritualization and symbolic communication. This chapter is quite different from the first two in that it is concerned largely, though not entirely, with writings that are secular – and must then be "translated" into applications that are decidedly religious in nature. This chapter examines what scholars from within and without the Jewish tradition think about culture and ritual practice. It is critical to include this material in our discussion of prayer not only so that we may benefit from the sophistication of their scholarship, but also so that we may understand the applied and extended theory of contemporary Jewish scholars like Hoffman and his students.

The thesis concludes as personally as it began, reflectively synthesizing the material covered previously. It articulates a personal understanding of the role of the contemporary *shaliach tzibbur*, reconciling theology, philosophy, and professional skill sets. It is a synthesis of the ideas explored within the earlier pages and reflection on the implications of those ideas for the professional worship leader. The conclusion is my opportunity to explain what I have come to believe are the cultural and intellectual forces at play in the creation of ritual and worship today, under the best and most idealistic circumstances. The product is a postmodern, liberal, and interdisciplinary assessment of the challenging role of the *shaliach tzibbur* in Jewish worship.

Chapter One

The Jewish Self at Prayer:
Praying in a Postmodern World

Vatitpaleil Channah
"And Hannah prayed" [2]

Hannah is often cited as a model person at prayer, yet her prayer is quite different than what we find in the average synagogue. She does not use a *siddur* – she prayed many centuries before the first prayer book found its way to Jewish hands, and she follows no rubric set forth by the rabbis who lived many centuries after the biblical account of her prayer was penned. Similarly, she is guided by no prayer leader, no *shaliach tzibbur* – this would also be anachronistic. She prays, instead, "in her wretchedness…to the Lord, weeping all the while,"[3] from a place of spontaneous and deeply felt personal prayer. We learn a great deal about prayer from these fragments of biblical verses: Hannah prays alone, rather than in community; she prays with profound emotion and intention; and perhaps most importantly, she prays to God. There are many different models of Jewish prayer of which Hannah is only one, yet her example can be instructive to anyone desirous of improving her prayer experience. Hannah knows what she is doing and how to do it; and she holds fast to her position even when Eli the priest questions her actions.[4] She is not afraid to do it alone and without guidance. She knows that in her despair she must reach out to God in the only way she knows how, through a sacrifice of her heart: her words of prayer and, ultimately, the dedication of her future child to God's service. For many contemporary Jews, the clarity that Hannah possesses

[2] 1 Samuel 2:1
[3] 1 Samuell 1:10
[4] 1 Samuel 1:14

regarding the "how and why of prayer" has long faded away. Certainly people still despair, as Hannah did – so why not reach out? But reach out how? And to whom?

This chapter is about theology. It looks at trends in contemporary writing on prayer and worship for ideas about how people understand the "to whom" and "how" of prayer today. No one exists in a vacuum, unaffected by history and society, and postmodern insight requires that we "own up" to the milieu that most affects what we have to say. In my case, I have adopted the postmodern liberal thought of Dr. Eugene Borowitz. Borowitz's work provides a larger theological framework with which to understand what people think and believe about prayer. I choose it for its relevance and distinctly liberal character. This chapter begins a larger discussion of the postmodern "how" and "to whom" of prayer while understanding such thought holistically in a larger social and theological framework as defined by Borowitz.

A close reading of recent publications on prayer reveals much about how people think about the purpose of prayer and worship. Most of it focuses on prayer as it affects either the self or relationships, particularly the human/Divine relationship. Some contemporary Jewish thinkers focus only on the former, how prayer affects the self, so that prayer's ultimate purpose becomes its impact on the most intimate self of the one praying. Others refer explicitly to God, believing prayer's purpose to be the establishment of human/Divine relationship. Still others believe prayer benefits the establishment and enhancement of extant human relationships.

Another group of writers avoid the question of what prayer is or does, preferring to deal with the struggle people have with prayer in the first place. In an essay entitled "Searching for God in the 7th Grade," Rabbi Joel Mosbacher explores the challenge of the

liberal Jewish adult facing the High Holiday liturgy with a stunted understanding of God and the relationship of God and prayer. He is critical of Reform educational norms that essentially prepare the *bar* or *bat mitzvah* student for a life where his or her "faith development remains stunted in paralyzing ways."[5] The movement, he holds, produces students with a certain skill set that enables them to perform ritually at the *b'nei mitzvah* service without ever laying a foundation of theological enduring understandings that will enable the student to develop an adult understanding of God. He narrates accounts from his personal experience of Reform Jewish adults whose understanding of God and the prayer experience are so limited that they balk at the opportunity to pray in informal settings, for they only understand Jewish prayer as something that occurs within the sanctuary doors at set times during the year. If God remains in the sanctuary – remains accessible only through the scope of our liturgy – how then can one grapple with the images of the Divine in the pages of the *machzor*? Mosbacher argues that we leave our congregants ill equipped to struggle with the difficult imagery of the *machzor*. He suggests that the failure of clergy to speak to young and old alike about God emerges from the fact that the clergyperson's own faith is stunted and underdeveloped.[6] If clergy do not shape their own personal theology and reconcile Jewish liturgical tradition to that theology, they can never hope to be the role model and teacher of congregants that the North American liberal context requires.

Mosbacher's concerns reflect the larger context of the time in which this thesis is being written – a reconsideration of the prayer experience of the Reform Jew on

[5] Rabbi Joel Mosbacher, "Searching for God in the 7th Grade," *CCAR Journal* LVI no. II (Spring 2009): 43.

[6] Ibid, 45.

the High Holidays, generated by plans to compose a new Reform *machzor*, *Mishkan T'shuva*. The thesis therefore benefits from a rare moment in time, when a plethora of thinking people grapple with what can and should be part of a contemporary liberal High Holiday prayer experience. Not only is this prayer experience shared by the widest demographic of liberal Jews, its liturgy is often the most challenging. At no other time during the year does the liberal Jew face the profound life and death drama of the liturgy as during the *Yamim Nora'im.* Furthermore, at no point during the average *Shabbat* or festival do the prayers of the individual seem as critical as they do on the High Holidays, when our prayers are for the sake of our own lives and, seemingly, the sake of our community.

For many, the *Un'taneh Tokef* best exemplifies this kind of prayer when it teaches *ut'shuvah, ut'filah, utz'dakah ma'avirin et ro'ah et hag'zeira.* – The Reform *machzor* renders the prayer's promise of *ma'avirin et ro'a hag'zerah* as "tempers the divine decree" suggesting that the true efficacy of this prayer, at least, is to alter fate. Prayer is like repentance and righteous behavior – all three change the course of a person's future. The efficacy of the first two terms, repentance and righteousness are not my subject here. Prayer is. So we should ask whether prayer's efficacy really is what the Reform *machzor* in question says it is. The impact of the promise is heightened by the prayer's listing of divine punishments, the horror of which the prayer may temper. Does God work that way – punishing, on one hand, but heeding prayers for amelioration of punishment on the other?

The debate over this particular prayer's meaning is not new to the Reform

movement. In Isaac Mayer Wise's *machzor Tefilot B'nai Yeshurun l'Yom Hakippurim,* published in 1866, all mention of Divine punishment in *un'taneh tokef* are removed.[7] It is missing also from the various editions of *Union Prayer Book.* The text returns in full to the pages of *Gates of Repentance,* first printed in 1978, giving rise to significant discussion and response. Some see the implication of the text – that we have the power to affect the judgment of a God who punishes – as hurtful and even "wrong" because it causes "unnecessary pain" to people who try to pray with sincerity but find their prayers "useless" – giving rise to the conclusion that they must be characterologically at fault, deserving of punishment that God might temper but chooses not to.[8] Others are able to reconcile the language as rich and figurative.[9] In the first case, particularly, but to some extent in the second as well, the liberal Jew, for whom prayer may simply be a profound inward turning, a communing with the self, must wrestle with the notion that their prayers may have some specific external efficacy. Whether literally or symbolically, how is it that prayer tempers Divine judgment? Does my personal theology allow for a God whose decrees have worldly repercussions? Do I have a personal theology? These are deeply challenging questions that the average congregant may not be prepared to answer, or even prepared to ask.

A series of books on the High Holiday Liturgy named *Prayers of Awe* addresses the call of those, like Rabbi Mosbacher, who realize that many Jews have yet to grow past the theological understanding of a *bar mitzvah* boy. Its editor, Lawrence Hoffman

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[7] Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig, "The Poetry and the Power of Paradox," *CCAR Journal* LVI no. II (Spring 2009): 53.

[8] Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman as quoted in Wenig. "The Poetry and the Power of Paradox." 54.

[9] Wenig, 52-74.

explains that many contemporary Jews have yet to move beyond Paul Ricouer's "first *naïveté*," or the "elemental religious mentality" that is learned as a child.[10] Healthy human religious development demands that the individual question childhood views and then go through a period of doubt, what Ricoeur calls a hermeneutic of suspicion. Only after a period of doubt can one emerge into a "second naïveté," or a mature and sophisticated religious understanding. Mosbacher's writing illustrates encounters with those trapped in that first naïveté, for whom God is precisely as described in the pages of the prayer book. The great many disaffected Jews are surely stunted in the adolescent stage of religious questioning. These individuals lack the tools necessary to achieve a sophisticated understanding of God.

Rabbi Mosbacher believes that "the development of a new *machzor* gives us the opportunity to give Jews of all ages the opportunity to pray what is in their hearts." He concludes writing, "Let us give them wings to let their souls fly."[11] Hoffman, the authors published in the *Prayers of Awe Series,* and Mosbacher would argue that only through deeper education and a profound maturing of the individual's personal theology is a prayer experience free of cognitive dissonance possible.

Another recent publication addresses some of the questions that I have set out in this chapter. Rabbi Mike Comins's book *Making Prayer Real: Leading Jewish Voices on Why Prayer is Difficult and What to Do About It* explores the author's own journey from disaffected Jewish teenager to a Rabbi deeply committed to the act of personal prayer. Comins marks the turning point as his realization that he must pursue a personal

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[10] Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Prayers of Awe: Who by Fire, Who By Water, Un'taneh Tokef*, Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010, 7.

[11] Mosbacher, 50.

relationship with God. He writes, "Pursuing a direct relationship with God, something to which few liberal Jews of my generation aspired, brought me to the critical insight that changed my relation to prayer."[12] The work is comprised of Comins's own reflections, observations, and thoughts along with essays and interviews carried out with many liberal Jewish clergy.

Comins's own religious journey helps him to understand prayer as a spiritual practice, something that one must commit to and work at over years. His devotion to the experience emerged when he decided to be proactive about the prayer experience: "No one can pray for me."[13] Comins identifies the "stated intentions" of prayer as "praising, thanking, or beseeching God," with widely articulated functional goals of "fulfilling our religious obligations, spurring us to action, bringing us comfort in times of stress, improving our character traits, or bonding with the historical and the present Jewish community." [14] At the very least, he argues, prayer "lays the foundation for attaining any of the articulated or functional goals." For Comins, "When prayer works, we see the world and ourselves with increased clarity."[15] Prayer is a means to achieve a clear mind and thereby gain the strength to improve the praying individual and the surrounding world. This view is shared by Cantor Ellen Dreskin, who Comins quotes saying,

> I'm unimpressed by the idea that prayer is just to make you feel good or feel better. Prayer is also supposed to challenge you. I appreciate the quote, 'Prayer comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.' I like that a lot. There's often too much emphasis on feeling good. It's all about

[12] Rabbi Mike Comins, *Making Prayer Real: Leading Jewish Voices on Why Prayer is Difficult and What to Do About It*, Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010, xvi.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Comins, 41.

[15] Comins, 45.

> changing yourself in order to change the world. When you walk out a better person, prayer works.[16]

An additional viewpoint captured in another compelling essay in *Making Prayer Real* goes beyond the notion that prayer makes us better, more capable people – and explores the idea that prayer is a profound inward turning, a communing with the self. Rabbi Aryeh Ben David writes, "Prayer brought me back to myself, to the inner chamber of my soul."[17] For Rabbi Ben David, prayer is about self-knowledge. Prayer, a calling out to God, is different than conversation between people – even those with whom one has the most intimate relationship – because "there is no embarrassment—God already knows. There is no shame—God already knows… I call out to stop being a stranger to my own soul."[18] Ben David characterizes his relationship with God as "personal" and that God is his "confidante."[19] Yet Ben David does not offer a fuller understanding of God's role in the prayer relationship. Do our prayers affect God? Is there a tangible way that he understands God to affect him through the act of prayer, through this relationship? For Ben David, the answer to these questions seems to be "no." Instead, the prayer's efficacy is solely the resultant perceived relationship between the praying individual and the Divine.

In another essay examining healing and prayer, Rabbi Anne Brenner points out that for her, "prayer may or may not involve God."[20] Describing her own prayer practice while healing from cancer, she writes, "I pray when I glance at the *Mi Sheberach* list on

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[16] Cantor Ellen Dreskin in Comins, 45.
[17] Rabbi Aryeh Ben David in Comins, 22.
[18] Aryeh Ben David in Comins, 23.
[19] Aryeh Ben David in Comins, 24.
[20] Rabbi Anne Brenner in Comins, 25.

my computer desktop and feel connected to those for whom I wish healing. I am soothed by the knowledge that there are people praying for me. I breathe more deeply, and on that breath, there is relief."[21] Here, God is not considered critical to the prayer equation and the writer is uninhibited to articulate that prayer can have positive goals without having concern for God's involvement. For Rabbi Brenner it seems that prayer is about the human connections established.

Rabbi Shira Koch Epstein also embraces this notion, rooting her ideas in those of French philosopher Emanuel Levinas. Koch identifies cognitive dissonance for the congregant who does not believe in an "interventionist God,"[22] yet must confront the petitionary *Avinu Malkeinu* of the High Holidays. She writes that when the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* falls on *Shabbat,* the congregant for whom God does not intervene must be relieved, since petitionary texts are not traditionally recited on the Sabbath. She reinterprets the purpose of petitionary prayer from simply asking for things for oneself, to focusing one's attention on the other. She quotes Levinas saying, "To pray signifies, for a 'myself,' seeing to the salvation of others instead of — or before — saving oneself,"[23] thereby arguing that the purpose of petitionary prayer is to strengthen human bonds. Thus, Epstein attempts to reconcile the inconsistencies of the stated purpose of petitionary prayer to a more humanistic approach in line with the beliefs of others. In fact, her reinterpretation seems to be a synthesis of the beliefs of Brenner and Comins above. For Comins, prayer is a focusing of attention enabling the praying individuals to

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Rabbi Shira Koch Epstein, "Answering Prayers." www.shma.org. Available from http://www.shma.com/2009/09/answering-prayers/, Internet; accessed 7 May 2010. (published 4 September 2009).

[23] Emanuel Levinas, "Judaism and Kenosis," *In the Time of Nations*, p. 129 as quoted by Epstein.

reach their human potential in the world around them, whereas for Brenner prayer establishes bonds between individuals. Epstein teaches that petitionary prayer can focus our attention to our human bonds.

My reading, however topical, has provided responses that fall into two main theological subcategories that I will call literary/scientific and mystical. The literary/scientific response is one that can reconcile the text of a prayer or the act of praying through reason beyond a state of cognitive dissonance to a second naïveté. Traces of this kind of reasoning are evident in any thinker who chooses reinterpretation over radical reinvention. Mosbacher and *Prayers of Awe* advocate increased dialogue and congregational education to give individuals the tools to ask and answer troubling questions about the prayer experience – through additional information and exposure to ideas, one comes to a new and comfortable understanding of difficult issues. In the debate on the problematic text of *Un'taneh Tokef,* those who reinterpret the text, even metaphorically, are essentially making a literary/scientific choice. At once, they are giving preference to a tradition that may not be truly relevant to their innermost beliefs and doing the hard cognitive work of reinterpretation. These writers remain deeply engaged in the text, even when the text does not express their core beliefs. Their commitment to both the text and their own convictions regarding the nature of the Divine are what render their reinterpretations "theological" and not merely literary.

The other group of contemporary writers on prayer, particularly those captured in the pages of *Making Prayer Real,* more fully address the kinds of questions I asked at the outset of the thesis, those whose writing I will call mystical – those who employ theological reasoning that moves beyond the rational. These writers are less concerned

with what is on the page than they are with the larger forces at work within the prayer experience. Less of their writing is concerned with the content of the *siddur* or the *machzor* – which is not to say that these particular clergy are more willing to forgo tradition or view the literary prayer tradition of our people as disposable, but only that their writing addresses issues of the larger process of prayer. These can be grouped into three categories of expected relational efficacy: God, self, and other. These praying individuals have expectations of the efficacy of their prayer and this effect will be expressed through relationships. They expect tangible, albeit mystical, outcomes to their prayer to be manifest in their relationships either with God, the self, or the other. Ben David, for example, has an expectation of a relationship with God as the product of his prayer experience; Comins desires a more developed understanding of the self; for Brenner, prayer should affect the quality of human relationships.

I suspect that any of the writers quoted above may see my systematization of their writing to be overly simplistic. In fact, while I can analyze their writing to find these discrete categories, I believe that the three articulated anticipated outcomes of prayer to be highly interconnected, yet the clarity of their writing enables me to categorize them as such. These three categories – God, self, and other – are actually an expression of the postmodernism in contemporary liberal Judaism. Furthermore, if we include the work that I previously labeled as literary/scientific, this reading has given us the foundation for a theory of prayer and the Jewish Self as argued by Dr. Borowitz in *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew.*

Applying Borowitz's postmodern liberal thought helps to further organize and understand how the above-analyzed thinkers are, in fact, working from a postmodern

Jewish experience. The postmodern "Jewish self," as Borowitz calls one who lives by a personalized theological system (like the literary/scientific respondents categorized above), remains concerned with the content of the text that is inherited from tradition, valuing it even when it challenges core beliefs. Yet, the Jewish self is certain that the true prayer experience lies beyond the text. This observation is bolstered by the career's work of Lawrence A. Hoffman, whose volumes all advocate a broader interpretation of liturgy and a realization that while the literature is critical, prayer only exists when it is lived. First, however, we must explore some of the nuances of Borowitz's thought and his particular brand of postmodernism from which our paradigm arises.

Dr. Eugene Borowitz is one of the most prominent theologians of contemporary non-Orthodox Judaism; he is "internationally recognized as the dean of Jewish religious thinkers,"[24] his prolific writing and professional activities spanning the second half of the 20th century and continuing until today. He is a first-generation American and the "result of an intermarriage between a Litvak and a *chassid*," – an explanation often offered to account for his own intellectual tension between profound rationalism and a more intuitive and spiritual understanding of Jewish existence – the marriage of the literary/scientific with the mystical. This dialectic tension and the resultant pursuit of nuance between divergent ideas characterize much of Borowitz's work. An examination of some of the ideas articulated in *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew*, Borowitz's 1991 systematic theological statement, and related intellectual product reveals the depth of this dialectic discourse. He engages in the penetrating questions of contemporary Jewish existence, never shying away from the

[24] Jean Bloch Rosensaft, "Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz at 80: A Spiritual Journey at HUC-JIR," *The Chronicle* 63 (2004): 8.

difficulty of asserting the nuanced and intellectually honest answer, thereby "giving an orderly, abstract articulation of [his] life's truth,"[25] a new covenantal theology. While this is his "life's truth," it can also be understood as a larger, liberal Jewish truth as evidenced through the words of those writers discussed above.

It is important to state at the outset that Borowitz is careful to articulate that he envisions his theology as one suitable for all liberal Jews, not only those of Reform affiliation. This is particularly relevant to our discussion, which emerges at a time in American Jewish history where sociologist Stephen Cohen argues that we are entering a period of post-denominationalism and non-denominationalism[26]. But even though Borowitz does not think of himself as "a card-carrying Reform ideologue,"[27] his prolific career has been firmly rooted within the institutional milieu of North American Reform: ordination in the HUC class of 1948, his long tenure as professor at that institution, and his significant contributions to the Movement's foundational documents like the 1976 Centenary Perspective. Without doubt, his systematic thought is articulated as liberal and non-Orthodox, but decidedly grounded within the Reform context. Conservative theologian Elliot Dorff has, therefore, challenged Borowitz's intention to develop a system of thought that is viable for all non-Orthodox Jews, The two exchanged a series of open letters in the journal *Conservative Judaism* in 1996 and 1997. Ultimately Dorff

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[25] Eugene Borowitz, "Postmodern Judaism: One Theologians View," in *Reviewing the Covenant: Eugene Borowitz and the Postmodern Renewal of Jewish Theology*, ed. Peter Ochs with Eugene Borowitz (Albany: State of New York Press, 2000), 36.

[26] Steven M. Cohen, http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history/Jewish_World_Today/Denominations/Post-Denominational.shtml, accessed October 24, 2010

[27] Borowitz, "The Reform Judaism of *Renewing the Covenant*: An Open Letter to Elliott Dorff," *Conservative Judaism* L, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 62.

concedes that his initial reading of *Renewing the Covenant* was colored "through the prism of [Borowitz's] earlier writing and [his] long association with Reform Judaism," and agrees that the two are "closer" than Dorff originally charged.[28] Perhaps Borowitz's assertion of his thought as non-denominational – simply liberal – is in fact rooted in his postmodernism and not solely in his efforts to "think academically about Jewish belief and its consequences," and engage with the work of earlier Jewish systematic thinkers who never "did their thinking as part of a movement or in the context of its ideology."[29] It is possible that Borowitz' non-denominational assertions in fact emerge from the fact that such ideological divides among liberal Jews are, in fact, modernist institutionalism – precisely the condition that Borowitz seeks to transcend.

Understanding Borowitz's use of the term "postmodern" is critical to understanding his theology. His postmodernism emerges because something must fill the vacuous failure of modernity as the post-Enlightenment ideal: for Borowitz, modernity is the "betrayer."[30] The trappings of Modernism, essentially the intellectual, political, and social structures that emerged in Europe during the Enlightenment, had failed to produce "messianic benefits."[31] Jewish hope was in humanity itself and when that was so profoundly broken, thinking Jews would have to look elsewhere for a model by which to order their lives.

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[28]Elliot N. Dorff, "Matters of Degree and Kind: An Open Response to Eugene Borowitz' Open Letter to Me," *Conservative Judaism* L, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 65.

[29]Eugene Borowitz,, "The Reform Judaism of *Renewing the Covenant*: An Open Letter to Elliott Dorff," *Conservative Judaism* L, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 62.

[30] Ibid, *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew* (Philadelphia, New York, and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 20.

[31] Ibid, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide,* 2nd ed. (Springfield, NJ: Berman House, 1995), 283.

Borowitz's thinking is decidedly post-Holocaust in the sense that it is shaped by the reality of a Jewish community living in a shadow of the Shoah. Yet he carefully delineates the Holocaust as a "matter of extraordinarily great significance,"[32] rather than an *absolute*, or the ultimate locus for the future of Jewish religious understanding. Still, the fact that the Holocaust could occur in a world supposedly guided by reason, is proof of modernity's brokenness. "By the early 20th century modern Jews had been thoroughly secularized and if they worshiped anything, it was an enlightened humanity. Furthermore, this, modern Jew's functioning deity became the "god' who died for us at Auschwitz."[33] The crux of modernity was the belief in the ultimate triumph of the reason-endowed human, before whom the God who failed us at Auschwitz now loomed as effectively dead.

Borowitz's postmodernism emerges from his own disillusionment with this modern ideal. He holds that modernists allowed culture to dictate their Judaism, their understanding of God emerging from culture, whereas his postmodern thinking causes him to "proceed more from [his] Judaism toward the culture."[34] His postmodernism asserts that, "people are, on their own, incompetent to legislate the basic laws by which they ought to live. They are similarly ill-equipped to bring about the Messiah, as the Kantian liberal Jews grandly professed."[35] This jaundiced view of human capacity demands a new understanding of the Divine and the divine relationship to individuals, Israel, and all of humanity. Borowitz explains, "I speak of a God who is real in His/Her own right and is not merely the grandest of my rational ideas. I further insist this God

[32] Ibid, 79.
[33] Ibid, *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew*, 79.

commands people, albeit nonverbally, and, as best we can put it, has input into our lives by coming into relationship with us."[36]

All of this is part and parcel of Borowitz's thought as expressed through his many writings prior to *Renewing the Covenant* – which we should see as his latest and most sophisticated statement of covenantal theology in general. Borowitz's covenantal theology is often an expression of dialectic process. While the classic Hegelian dialect charts the course of an idea or history through thesis, then antithesis, and finally synthesis, Borowitz's theology often progresses through a similar, though not always, precise tripartite development. The meta-assertion of the Borowitz dialectic is evident in his conception of Jewish history, from which emerges his argument for postmodernism and thus a postmodern Jewish theology. Borowitz periodizes the Jewish experience through this three-fold construction: Pre-modern, Modern, and Postmodern. In each of these periods, Borowitz proposes a distinct set of relationships of God to Israel. The three models exist, moreover, in dialectic tension. We have already discussed the modernist notion of religiosity that values the capacity of human beings above all because it is "more certain of people than God."[37] This model was the antithesis to the earlier, pre-modern "religiosity dominated by God," who in traditional Jewish texts, like *Un'taneh Tokef*, our example above – and like the Bible and prayerbook generally – "speaks, commands, listens, answers, observes, judges, rewards, punishes, forgives, helps, saves,"

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[34] Ibid, *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew,* 55.

[35] Ibid, "Postmodern Judaism: One Theologians View," in *Reviewing the Covenant: Eugene Borowitz and the Postmodern Renewal of Jewish Theology,* 153.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide,* 288.

resulting in a "passive" Jewish people dependant upon God.[38] Since neither of these models has proved lasting for the Jewish people, Borowitz proposes a third, one in which God and Israel (and the individuals who comprise Israel) exist in Covenant.

Pre-Modern	God → Israel
Modern	Israel → God
Postmodern	God ←→ Israel

These three models chart the evolution of the relationship between God and Israel from God-given, to people-driven, and ultimately "mutually-striven." Borowitz calls for a renewed attention to God as a supernatural, non-rationalist entity, where God is not the ultimate product of reason nor the Absolute that does not offer the individual agency, but a partner in a mutually agreed-upon relationship bound together by a covenant. In his own words, "Covenant lends itself to a personalist reinterpretation that allows me to express my belief in an enhanced reciprocity between God and people."[39] It follows that we must ask, How must prayer and liturgy develop to accommodate such a world-view? How is this give and take between God and Israel reflected in the "how" and "to whom" of postmodern prayer?

For Borowitz, the one undeniable gift of modernity is the notion of the autonomous self. Borowitz asserts throughout his work that human dignity is conferred through the ability to act with agency and autonomy. Yet, the primacy of the individual is at the heart of modernist ideology and thereby responsible for many of the societal failings to which Borowitz's postmodernism responds. In a typical dialectic fashion,

[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid, *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew,* 212.

Borowitz synthesizes the pre-modern idea of the primacy of Jewish corporate life promulgated in the Bible and later re-enforced by the social structures of pre-modern Europe and the Near East with the modern triumph of the individual, taken from Enlightenment Europe, and proposes to "retain but rethink autonomy."[40] The individual self, who must remain individual in order to guarantee the retention of agency and dignity can exist only in covenant, not totally as an autonomous "other." Relationship entails a stance not only with God, but also with the whole of Israel, and additionally with all of humanity as an expression of the Noahide covenant.[41] Borowitz writes, "In my postmodern theology, personal autonomy has validity only when exercised in intimate involvement with God as part of one's community relationship with God. For Jews that means as part of the people of Israel's historic relationship with God, the *brit*, or covenant."[42] This is distinguished from the modern notion of autonomy where the belief in the infallibility of humanity trusted the individual to have acquired all of the knowledge and experience necessary to act with autonomy. Thus the individual in covenant with God and Israel must act from within the context of the covenant, not simply from their individual experience; Jews in covenant are duty bound to God and Israel not in order simply to feel good or to fulfill the individual self, but to respond responsibly to the weight of the covenant. Furthermore, without the covenant binding the individuals of Israel, Borowitz has little faith in the continuity of Jewish peoplehood

[40] Ibid, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought: A Partisan Guide*, 292.

[41] Borowitz establishes the convention of using "Covenant" to represent that which exists between God and Israel and "covenant" to represent what exists between God and all of humanity in fulfillment of the Noahide covenant.

[42] Ibid.

because otherwise, "simple ethnicity must carry a burden of continuity that it cannot long sustain."[43] There must be a "personal-yet-folk intimacy with God."[44]

The individual who lives by Borowitz's theology would be a "Jewish self," as opposed merely to the "self" prescribed by the modernists. Borowitz credits the work of the great Jewish existentialists Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber with giving him the tools to see that covenant could describe the postmodern connection between God and humanity, again in an act of dialectic reasoning. Where Buber and Rosenzweig concur, they "had succeeded in balancing an activist human religiosity with an unabashed avowal of God's independence, authority, and relatedness."[45] Both address covenant in the course of their work, but for neither is it central as for Borowitz. Borowitz writes, "Yet had they not taught me the theological virtue of the metaphor of relationship, I would not have been empowered to find a way between Buber's antinomianism and Rosenzweig's dogmatic legalism and disdain of ethnicity."[46] Essentially, these two are heads and tails of the same coin for Borowitz, each scratching the surface of the idea of covenant, but mired by their chronology, in that neither can rise above the modernist Enlightenment ideals still prevalent in their historical moment. Borowitz's postmodernism demands a self that is more that monadic, a self that at once exhibits individual agency and corporate longing. He writes, "We shall not arrive at a theory of robust Jewish duty as long as we do not transform the Enlightenment's self into a Jewish self, the kind of person I contend our religious experience has shown many of us we are."[47]

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[43] Ibid, *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew,* 215.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid, 214.

Borowitz concludes *Renewing the Covenant* with five critical points by which to live in "dialectic autonomy"[48] as a postmodern Jew in Covenant with God and Israel. These prescriptions approach postmodern Jewish life holistically and systematically through the rubric of God, Torah, and Israel. This postmodern self – the Jewish self – fully exists when decisions are made within the five point decision-making paradigm that Dr. Borowitz establishes at the conclusion of *Renewing the Covenant.* It is evident that Borowitz's theory of authority and conception of the Jewish self are alive and well among liberal thinkers who address issues of prayer and worship. The contemporary thinking liberal Jew is becoming the Jewish self of Borowitz' core text.

Here are the five points with which Borowitz concludes *Renewing the Covenant.* The authentic Jewish self must employ these in order to live in "dialectic autonomy"[49] as a postmodern Jew in Covenant with God and Israel.

"*First, the Jewish self lives personally and primarily in involvement with the one God of the universe."*[50] For those contemporary Jews like Rabbi Ben David, prayer is a way to nourish one's personal and primary involvement with God. Ben David and Mosbacher both articulate their congregants' surprise to hear the Jewish notion of a personal relationship with God. God is accessible to each of us individually through prayer. We need not only seek God on the days when our liturgy is most dramatic, the *Yamim Nora'im,* but also each day through the development of our own prayer practice. The centrality of a personal relationship with God is both the benefit of prayer and critical to continued growth as a praying individual.

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[48] Ibid, 288.
[49] Ibid, 288.
[50] Ibid, 289.

"*Second, a Jewish relationship with God inextricably binds selfhood and ethnicity, with its multiple ties of land, language, history, traditions, fate, and faith.*"[51] Jewish tradition has long struggled with the issue of the vernacular verses *lashon hakodesh* in prayer. Modernists prejudice understanding over the ethnic bond of a shared holy tongue. Hence the decision of early Reform Jews to pray primarily in the vernacular – witness Isaac Mayer Wise's liturgy (mentioned above), David Einhorn's *Olat Tamid* (from the same era) and the *Union Prayer Book* (from classical Reform Judaism) as prime examples. By contrast, Reform prayer books after *Union Prayer Book*: *Gates of Prayer* and *Mishkan T'filah*, have seen a resurgence of extensive Hebrew usage, not with the expectation that congregants will suddenly understand the language, but as an expression of ethnic uniqueness, a connectedness to *k'lal Yisra'eil*. The theological difficulties of prayers like *Un'taneh Tokef* arise because of the return to traditional prayers, even when they resist rational assent by the people praying them. They are signs of revived traditionalism, brought about by devotion to peoplehood and the shared community of all Jews across time and space.

"*Third, against the common self's concentration on immediacy, the Covenant renders the Jewish self radically historical.*"[52] In the instance of prayer, this idea of being tied to a communal history is an extension of the point above. Those who I labeled as literary/scientific give preference to this very aspect of the Jewish self, that Jews have a common, historical tradition upon which contemporary Judaism stands. Preference is given to maintaining as much of the prayer literature as is possible to reconcile through hard cognitive work. Knowing that thoughtful and intelligent people are hard at work to

[51] Ibid, 290.
[52] Ibid, 291.

reshape and rethink texts like *Un'taneh Tokef* for the postmodern Jewish reality is critical to maintaining the essential historicity of liberal Judaism. Where modernism was content to excise passages of prayer, postmodernism struggles deeply to retain and gain new understanding.

"*Fourth, though the Jewish self lives the present out of the past, it necessarily orients itself towards the future."*[53] This step of decision-making is a critical transition between points three and five; it is no accident that they are ordered as such. While, in my own reading of Dr. Borowitz, this is the most difficult point for me to discern with confidant clarity, I can interpret it from my own understanding of our Messianic future. This transitional step, moving from a reliance on the past to a full expression of human/Divine interconnectivity, empowers the Jewish self to work towards the betterment of humanity with their whole being. We have seen others, such as Epstein, express this hope in prayer as a goal to working tirelessly towards a more complete bonds between people and thereby a more complete humanity. Through prayer, we gain the ability to move forward and partner with God in the continuing work of creation.

"*Fifth, yet despite the others with whom it is so intimately intertwined – God and the Jewish people, present, past, and future – it is as a single soul in its full individuality that the Jewish self exists in Covenant."*[54] The utter unity of the divine, the individual and the People Israel (as expressed here) is what I have attributed to mystical thinkers on contemporary prayer. Prayer practice enhances relationships: with one's self, with the other, and with God. The praying individual who sees the efficacy of prayer in developing these kinds of relationships is actually expressing the final point of

[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid, 293.

Borowitz's five point system.

It is inherently postmodern to think that prayer can be efficacious, yet not in the way that the texts of petition might have us believe. I have encountered no thinkers who truly believe that God will act in their lives based on the words of their prayers. Rather, they expect God's presence in their relationships and one of those relationships will be with God.

From Borowitz we learn not only about the nature of postmodernism, but also a concrete way to order one's existence Jewishly within the framework of such a worldview. The Jewish self is faced with a world chastened by the failure of our unrelenting trust in institutionalism and the primacy of the individual. Yet, the Jewish self realizes that only through acknowledging the individual's unique interaction with and experience of the world can human dignity every be achieved. Furthermore, Borowitz's notion of Covenant teaches us to balance the weight of tradition, the historic "how" and "why" of prayer, with contemporary understandings of prayer's purpose and the Divine. Thus, one must traverse the space between individual and community, contemporary culture and history, the literary/scientific and the mystical, in order to live and pray as a postmodern Jew – a Jewish self.

Chapter Two

Form and Function:
Dynamic Discourses in Synagogue Music

> *"…Music is a vessel that may hold anything. It may express vulgarity; it may impart sublimity. It may utter vanity; it may inspire humility. It may engender fury; it may kindle compassion. It may convey stupidity and it can be the voice of grandeur. [It] often voices man's highest reverence, but often brings to expression frightful arrogance."*[55]
>
> *~Abraham Joshua Heschel*

For nearly 40 years, discussions of Reform Jewish music can be characterized as representing rival perspectives within a divisive culture war. The emergence and wide-spread use of the folk style and subsequent contemporary popular sounds in synagogue worship have created an environment often hostile to one or the other of the musical styles in use and the professionals who employ such music in worship. These discussions often focused on issues of taste and personal musical prerogative, but also training and worship ideology. Essentially, the professionals already in the field tended to speak out passionately about music's form, not in the sense of its structure, but its aesthetic. The alternative discourse attempts to understand synagogue music through how it functions in worship, such as the mood the music creates or the emotion it hopes to evoke from the listener.

This chapter explores the nature of these conversations as part of a movement towards postmodern thinking about worship. Rather than assume one side of the debate is right and the other wrong – a modernist judgment that assumes the possibility of a single absolute truth in the argument – the postmodern lens enables us to value both positions as

[55] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Vocation of the Cantor," In *The Insecurity of Freedom*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1963), p. 296.

complementary components in the process of becoming Jewish selves in dialogue. Neither type of analysis is sufficient on its own for fostering meaningful worship. In practice, there will be conflicts of course, but we can understand the conflict as a dialogue of discourses: one party addressed form (art or folk), and the other addresses function (how music works in worship). Neither form nor function alone, a classic modernist dichotomy, can satisfactorily address the musical needs of the postmodern congregation.

Form/Art

One entrenchment in the culture war dialogue is comprised of individuals who evaluate the state of synagogue music by criteria such as musical quality and sophistication. While not all music in this category would meet the criteria of "art music" in the Western sense, for the purpose of this discussion we can use the compound term Form/Art to designate music whose form is at a level of high musical artistry. One member of the Form/Art camp is the composer Samuel Adler, whose stern critique of the state of synagogue music is found in several publications, including a compendium of opinion from a conference in 1990, the proceedings of which can be found in a book entitled *Sacred Sound and Social Change.* Adler's comments there are limited to a discussion of musical style and quality. He questions only *what* music is used for in worship, not *how* that music functions in worship or what one might hope to achieve by using it. He then offers an interpretation for what he sees as a change over time, charging the state of contemporary synagogue music to be quite dire, not because the form of music was changing, moving away from the organ and choral textures of historic Reform,

but because the "finest" of Jewish composers are not engaged in the production of Jewish music. He sees a disengagement of high-level musicians in the creation and implementation of Jewish synagogue music. He is greatly troubled by cantors who "feel free to do their own thing. Even if their own thing is purely the music they themselves compose, regardless of quality."[56] Adler's argument centers on the notion of quality, by which he means that which is musically and technically sophisticated. Music of "quality" should be retained; music of questionable quality is not appropriate to worship.

Form/Folk

Here "folk" is used not to represent the music of the American Folk movement of the 1960s and 70s, but simply as music that is for the folk – any Jew in the pew. The term "folk" is as fraught with musical assumptions as its more contemporary counterpart, "pop." I have chosen to designate this category "folk" versus "pop" for two very specific reasons. First, while "pop" connotes that the music is "popular," presumably across some demographic groups, "folk" implies the sense of peoplehood that is critical to our applied theology and to the communal, participatory type of music often advocated in this literature. Second, writing in 2011, I find the designation "pop music" to be laden with a particular contemporary sound, whereas the chronological distance from the American Folk movement leaves the term "folk" to be slightly less weighted in today's parlance.

In the October 1996 issue of *Sh'ma*, Rabbi Daniel Freelander argues for the use of Form/Folk music in the synagogue. While he himself is spiritually fulfilled by choral

[56] Samuel Adler, "Sacred Music in a Secular Age," In *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience*, ed. Lawrence A. Hoffman and Janet R. Walton, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 296.

singing in particular, he is "painfully aware that in the late 20th century America, performance functions differently for [him] than it [does] for the audience"[57] at such a choral performance. He extends his observations to the synagogue, noting that "the culture wars that plague American society have found their Jewish expression in the tension that too often exists between today's professional synagogue musicians and their highly-motivated spiritually-seeking worshipper. Neither group denies the power of music"[58] to achieve spiritual uplift, but they differ on the Form that is most effective to do so. Freelander explains that the "large communal song sessions" experienced at conventions and in synagogues "remind [the] baby boomers of [their] youth days singing together at summer camp, on the college campus or at the protest rally… [Their] souls open up, and [they] sing familiar sounding melodies and words, and feel comfortably connected" to community and to God.[59]

In 1999, the American Conference of Cantors and the Guild of Temple Musicians jointly published a collection of essays entitled *Envisioning Jewish Music for the 21st Century*. These twenty-one essays for the 21st century are the collective response to a call from each organization's leadership issued in 1997, asking for personal essays that would "enunciate the role, clarify the sound and shape, and define the direction of synagogue music as we approach the twenty-first century."[60] The editors write that the selected essays were chosen not "to advance a particular agenda but rather to represent the

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[57] Daniel H. Freelander, "The Role of Jewish Communal Singing," *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility* (October 1996): 6.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] John Planer and Cantor Howard M. Stahl, eds., *Koleinu B'yachad: Our Voices as One: Envisioning Jewish Music for the 21st Century* (The American Conference of Cantors and The Guild of Temple Musicians, 1999), 2.

diversity of views among music professionals who have dedicated their lives to Jewish music."[61] Furthermore, the essays have only been "lightly" edited, "preferring that the timbre of each voice resonate clearly."[62] Thus, the editors created a volume representing individuality across the spectrum of Reform musical professionals. They consciously chose to paint a tapestry of opinions, presenting a multi-vocal collection of thought on synagogue music. This volume contains clearly articulated opinions along the spectrum of the Form/Art – Form/Folk debate (on one hand) and the emergence of a new language of Function (on the other).

Cantor Bruce Benson responds to the Form/Folk movement, referring to the preference for communal singing described by Rabbi Freelander above as the "*Kumsitz Paradigm."*[63] Benson explains that the "*Kumsitz Paradigm"* imbued Jewish life with warm and fuzzy feelings, liturgically unchallenging music, and a breakdown in the relationship between Jewish music that lives through the ages and temporal, touchy-feely expressionism." He explains that cantors were left feeling "unwanted" because this new paradigm was not in line with their "training or vision." He calls for cantors, at the very least, to "participate in the circle," learning the Form/Folk style, while cantors educate congregants about Form/Art music so as not to "create [their] own obsolescence." He charges his colleagues to "find a way to include many forms of musical expression," sternly warning that if cantors do not choose to lead and "become the spiritual and liturgical leaders" necessary for a time of debate, then their worst imaginings will come

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Cantor Bruce Benson, "The Kumsitz Paradigm," in *Koleinu B'yachad: Our Voices as One: Envisioning Jewish Music for the 21st Century,* ed. John Planer and Cantor Howard M. Stahl (The American Conference of Cantors and The Guild of Temple Musicians, 1999), 4.

true – they will indeed be less "revered" as synagogue music is permanently reduced to the "*Kumsitz Paradigm.*"[64] Benson does not advocate abandoning the Form/Art style; instead, he urges his colleagues to pursue a more musically eclectic style; and he does this not for the sake of worship but for the purpose of professional survival. Fearing the demise of the professional cantorate, he proposes that the cantor will remain relevant only if full "diversity of Jewish music" is "explored and honored." Benson is proposing a Form/Eclectic model for the preservation of the professional cantorate, which he observes to be threatened by the Form/Folk style. Benson is a moderating voice, however. Some advocates of synagogue music, although hardly cantors, would request Form/Folk alone.

The comments by Adler, Benson, and my unnamed (and usually non-cantorial) advocates for folk music only illustrate some of the issues of "Form entrenchment," the state of affairs that has characterized the contentious debate over what is appropriate synagogue music that emerged in the last decades of 20th century. As long as the terms of argument remain the "what" of synagogue music, the two sides have little to say to one another. The best that is to be expected is something like Benson's compromise, which is itself a position that neither pole of the debate is likely to accept, as Benson himself may have known – that is why he argues it only on grounds of saving the cantorial profession, not on grounds of form itself, and not on grounds of function either. That is to say, he champions eclecticism but not because the compounding of forms is aesthetically ideal, and not because such compounding facilitates worship well. I have said that form and function are two parallel and vital categories for discussion. Benson introduces a third, utility for saving cantors! But utility is advisable only if cantors find themselves losing

[64] Ibid.

the debate over form and are unwilling to enter the parallel conversation on function. The proper advice to cantors would be to welcome an alternative discourse: function.

Lawrence Hoffman introduces this second discourse, a discussion of function, in *The Art of Public Prayer.* "The biggest problem," he observes, "is that even music that everyone agrees is both good and sacred often turns out not to facilitate worship."[65] Once the question changes from *what* to *how* – not *what* synagogue music should be, but *how* it works to help people to pray, the nature of the dialogue changes as well.

This second type of dialogue addresses Jewish synagogue music from an entirely different perspective: function. The Functionalists strive to identify objective criteria for discussing and measuring music's success in facilitating worship. Much of the Functionalist writing emerges as a direct response to the Form/Art and Form/Folk debate, attempting to create another, less emotionally charged language. For instance, Cantor Alane Katzew warns against the reliance on labels for worship music that depend on the subjective and the qualitative. In an Internet guide designed to help synagogues adapt to use of the Reform Movement's newest *siddur*, *Mishkan T'filah,* she writes about pitfalls to avoid. Here is the first:

> **Using labels.** Generalizations about musical styles ("traditional," "classical," "camp," "cantorial," "performative,") are often inaccurate, and worse, meaningless. They also have the potential to set up different factions within the group, splintering discussion rather than unifying. Talk instead about what the different pieces of music make happen or about the mood that they create.[66]

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[65] Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Art of Public Prayer: Not for Clergy Only*, second edition, (Woodstock, Vermont: SkyLights Path Publishing, 1999), 177.

[66] Cantor Alane Katzew writing for the Union for Reform Judaism. Accessed May 20, 2010. http://urj.org//worship/mishkan/music//?syspage=article&item_id=3605

Katzew touches on both terms of discourse, form and function. As to form, discussion of musical quality, or labeling, can be divisive; as to function, a more productive vocabulary attempts to express what happens when worshipers experience music in worship – how it makes them feel, perhaps, or what it accomplishes in their state of prayer. For those concerned with the larger experience of worship, the objective quality of the music is often a meaningless criterion – or, at the very least, only when functional concerns have been met are they prepared to think through alternatives in form. To really understand why certain music is used in worship, we must explore how it functions. Ideally, we would hope to learn how it behaves in the minds of the worshippers and in the context of worship.[67]

What makes the debate so fraught with emotion is the fact that music is symbolic communication. Hoffman explains that when "people debate the musical merit of their worship, they resort to the sort of unbending absolutism that we rarely encounter elsewhere… symbols are things to which we are attracted or from which we are repelled so strongly we cannot even explain why."[68] Synagogue composer Ben Steinberg's writing illustrates the extent to which music is so symbolic: "The composer of commercial jingles knows [the] psychological dimension of music well and uses it effectively. The serious composer of religious music, no less aware, writes music that resonates accordingly."[69] Steinberg's assertion is easily extended to thoughtful clergy members who realize that the worship music and liturgical experience that they offer

[67] The method to obtain such insight is beyond the scope of this thesis.

[68] Hoffman, 179.

[69] Ben Steinberg, "Composing Sacred Sounds: Four New Settings of Psalm 136, The Jewish Tradition" in *Sacred Sound and Social Change*, 269.

have the power to communicate on innumerable levels. Steinberg insists on sacred music being sacred, but he knows how much the sacred and the secular intertwine. He therefore puts musical communication into the context of the larger, secular world.

> Worshippers in synagogues or churches cannot disengage their twentieth-century ears as they enter a sanctuary for a worship service. The music they encounter in concert halls, or cannot escape in elevators, supermarkets, and television commercials, reflects their society's sonorities, values, and technologies. What they hear also shapes their musical expectations and triggers involuntary responses to certain rhythms, harmonies, and tempi.[70]

Music in the synagogue cannot help but be symbolic, with a message that communicates clearly and effectively to the worshiper and prayer leader alike.

Rabbi Jeffrey Summit discusses the larger symbolic communication of worship music in his book *The Lord's Song in a Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship.* Summit's book explores the musical choices of several Boston area Jewish communities, exploring music as an expression of, and shaper of, a participant's identity. Instead of calling music symbolic language as Hoffman does, however, he identifies music as melodic code. His terminology emerges from the sociolinguistic term "code switching," which is when an individual switches between languages or modes of communication during the course of a conversation in order to establish connections or create separation between participants.

Contemporary Jewish life is replete with examples of linguistic code switching. Take, for instance, something as simple as one English speaker offering another English

[70] Ibid.

speaker a holiday greeting in Hebrew or Yiddish: upon "*Gut Shabbes,"* say, or "*Shabbat Shalom."* Think how different these are from "Good Sabbath!" The choice of term conveys a wealth of information about the speaker and the responder, and elicits a confirmation of understanding in the greeting that the initial recipient chooses to return. A Yiddish Sabbath greeting between the children of two Yiddish speaking families establishes a bond between them, especially in a world where Yiddish is fast disappearing. The same Yiddish speaker may chose to use the Hebrew greeting instead when speaking to an Israeli or a young rabbi with a Sephardic background. As the sub-communities within the Jewish world become increasingly specialized, the particular kinds of codes used between people also evolve. In a group of College-Institute trained professionals you are quite likely to hear code switching that employs Talmudic terminology or the contemporary or street Hebrew acquired while living in Israel, such as "*davka* we should have co-authored the paper! The *ikar* was basically the same." Often, the most sophisticated code switching tolerable within a group is what is used, creating the most insular bonds possible for the group. Furthermore, the group insider who chooses to code-switch among non-insiders will most assuredly establish distance between the group members, creating social distance. For instance, when a young Jewish professional meets a peer age Jew who is less Jewishly knowledgeable in a first-time social situation and wishes that person "*tzom kal"* instead of "an easy fast" in advance of *Yom Kippur*, she sets up a boundary between herself and her hearer, who is effectively excluded from identification with the group that the speaker takes to be her own. This is a boundary violation of code switching, an inappropriate assumption of knowledge and group status.

Summit quickly acknowledges that traditional Jewish music, *nusach* and *Torah trope*, is inherently laden with code; the listener schooled in these systems understands the symbolic reasons for code switching. Other listeners do not. For them, the effective message of the music may be that they are ignorant outsiders, just like the young person wished a "*tzom kal*" who did not know the meaning of the words. Summit's analysis explores the potential for synagogue music to layer multiple codes, just as we layer multiple identities. His argument may be seen as a more sophisticated version of Benson's eclecticism.

Summit cites an incident when the boundaries of code switching were breached: a service where the worship leader employed the melody of "O Come, O Ye Faithful," a decidedly Christian tune, to the *K'dushah* for *Musaf* for the Sabbath that coincided with Christmas. "First several worshippers chuckled," he recounts. "Then a few members walked out of the room." After services the prayer leader was "accosted by a group of worshippers who roundly criticized him for appropriating" this particular Christmas song for one of the most central parts of the *Shabbat* liturgy.[71] Summit reports that the worship leader had the best intentions in utilizing this particular melody in Jewish prayer. He is quoted saying "That's great music. I thought, why shouldn't we be able to use it?"[72] But quality was irrelevant! The entire argument of form was dwarfed by the music's symbolic communication to the congregation; the leader was oblivious to the music's symbolic weight. Even though the leader rendered the prayer with seriousness and good intentions, it was interpreted as an embarrassment and a breach of the accepted symbolic and coded musical language appropriate for Jewish worship.

[71] Ibid, 143.
[72] Ibid.

As the conversation about synagogue music has shifted towards uncovering music's function, a number of rubrics have been developed in order to express the symbolism or code that is conveyed through different sonorities and styles. Arguably the most widely used of these rubrics by graduates and affiliates of the College-Institute, was developed by Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller. These "Five Ms" of creating meaningful worship have been widely cited in the literature, perhaps most recently in Dr. Ron Wolfson's *Welcoming: How to Transform Your Congregation into a Sacred Community.* Here, Schiller's "Ms" are included as a way to discern "five major feelings"[73] that are invoked through the music of particular settings during the prayer experience.

1. Majestic: A Sense of Awe and Grandeur
2. Meditative: Inward and Reflective
3. Meeting: Creating and Encountering Oneness
4. Moving Along: Creating Momentum
5. Memory: Connecting to the Past[74]

Schiller's "Five Ms" were arrived at in conversation with Lawrence Hoffman, and serve as an indication of how his preferred conversation on function might proceed. They provide a worship leader with a palette of emotional colors with which to "code" a service. Her rubric moves beyond the pitfalls outlined by Katzew above, because instead of using arbitrary or potentially divisive labels to talk about musical style or genre, the "Five Ms" talk about emotions conveyed through the music and the types of experiences they may help to elicit in the worshiper.

[73] Cantor Benjie Ellen Schiller as paraphrased by Dr. Ron Wolfson, *Welcoming: How to Transform Your Congregation into a Sacred Community,* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006), 103.

[74] Subheadings as given by Wolfson.

Functionalists generally assume musically eclectic worship on the ground that worship is not homogeneous or monolithic in intent. But the reasoning here differs from our brief discussion of the Form/Eclectic camp described above, whose articulated intentions for making eclectic choices fall short of specifying that the music's function is the motivation for eclecticism. The Functionalists draw from the breadth of Jewish musical tradition because it is all fodder for crafting a functional prayer experience. It is important to note that Form may still be judged by aesthetic standards (hence the validity of the Form Discourse even within the parameters of the Function Discourse – because the same function may be satisfied by more than a single melody. But form follows function, not the other way around.

Cantor Richard Cohn's writing is decidedly Functionalist. His submission to *Koleinu B'yachad* is entitled: "*Music in Service to Prayer,"* in other words "Form (music) Follows (in service) Function (to prayer)." He recognizes that "music of only one style will inevitably disenfranchise those whose hearts beat to different spiritual drummers, and its expressive impact will be diminished through repetition and intrinsic limitation."[75] He argues that eclecticism is the only way to "express the liturgy with wholly-conscious *kavvanah."* He explains the rigors of being the cantor of an eclectic, Functionalist service: "The cantor must be responsible for choosing compatible components, assembling them into a coherent sequence, and supplying the musical bridges to link them persuasively together."[76]

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[75] Cantor Richard Cohn, "Music in Service to Prayer," in *Koleinu B'yachad: Our Voices as One: Envisioning Jewish Music for the 21st Century*, ed. John Planer and Cantor Howard M. Stahl (The American Conference of Cantors and The Guild of Temple Musicians, 1999), 6.

[76] Ibid.

Like Cantor Cohn, the more sophisticated user of Schiller's rubric also realizes that with each of the "Ms" demands a specific kind of delivery and intention on the part of the worship leaders to convey the true symbolic meaning of the music. It is not only the melodic code that communicates with the listener, but also the worship leader's technique used in delivering the music. What happens to a Majestic setting of music when intimate eye contact is made with individuals in the congregation? Conversely, what if in a song of Meeting, where the musical intention was to create communal bonds, the worship leader only looks above the congregants' heads? What if music that was intended to be introspective is sung at a raucous volume and tempo? What if a musical composition in its original form belonged decidedly to one group, yet upon instrumentation changes became more ambiguous? There are many additional variables that complicate the application of this rubric. It is not for use on its own, but as a part of a larger set of liturgical tools.

When evaluating articulated expectations of prayer in our first chapter, we established two different categories by which to organize those expectations: literary/scientific and mystical. We demonstrated that in order to be a Jewish self at prayer, one must draw from both categories. Here we see other dichotomies at work. To begin with, much writing on contemporary Jewish synagogue music has staked out claims in the genre war – classical verses camp, traditional verses trendy, performative verses participatory – and are organized as Form/Art and Form/Folk. Function literature can achieve a synthesis of Form/Art and Form/Folk, since Functionalists advocate the use of an array of musical styles within worship, so long as the music employed (whatever it

may be) serves the worship experience, *form* must follow *function;* it can become the concern of the *shaliach tzibbur* only after its function is established and utilized properly.

To the extent that the Functionalists develop their language in response to the entrenched and institutionalized divisions in the Form camps; and to the extent that they admit the validity of some conversation on form as long as function is prior, they are postmodern. The Functionalists openly advocate eclecticism since the music's form is inconsequential so long as it works. Furthermore, the Functionalists understand that music's symbolic language cannot communicate to those who are not adept at the symbols; since each member of the *kahal* perceives the worship experience differently, not every symbol is likely to be clearly understood by every pray-er – thus the need for eclecticism. Functionalists advocate the casting of a wide net of communication with the hope that something at some point will stick for most who come to pray.

The Functionalists have yet to address a further necessity for successful postmodern prayer. What is needed is an additional criterion of Function absent from the literature that is found in abundance in the Form writing: the need for the *shaliach tzibbur* himself to be passionate about the music of worship. What I propose is a *further* Function that draws upon elements of both Form and Function so that the experience of the *shaliach* is just as valued as that of the *tzibbur*.

Writing decades before the Functionalist literature emerges, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel presciently provides an understanding of where functionalism must go next. In a critical appraisal of the mid-century cantorate, *The Vocation of the Cantor,* he writes, "The tragedy of the synagogue is in the depersonalization of prayer." Heschel charges cantors with worrying only about skill, "a technical performance, an impersonal

affair."[77] He accuses the skill-concerned cantor with failing to engender participation – an echo in advance of Form/Folk's criticism of Form/Art. But unlike the Form/Folk camp, Heschel does not call for an eradication of sophisticated music. To the contrary, he writes that "listening to great music is a shattering experience, throwing the soul into an encounter with an aspect of reality to which the mind can never relate itself adequately."[78]

What Heschel requires of the cantor is impassioned, educated leadership. Heschel's cantor must both "ponder the meaning of the words" and "seek to identify [her] inner life with what is proclaimed [in the *siddur*]."[79] There is no doubt that the Functionalists would meet Heschel's criterion to be engaged with the text. Yet, when the *shaliach tzibbur* is concerned *only* with the welfare of the *kahal* and the community's prayer experience – with how music functions to facilitate prayer for others and not necessarily for the *shaliach tzibbur* herself – prayer can never hope to reach the heights prescribed by Heschel and by postmodern ideology at its worshipful best.

The Functionalist literature falls short of addressing the prayer experience of the *shaliach tzibbur.* In its attempt to defuse the volatile Form debates of the late 20th century, the Functionalists threaten to replace one kind of depersonalization of prayer with another. Heschel explains, "A Cantor who faces the holiness in the Ark rather than the curiosity of man will realize that his audience is God;"[80] but only when the cantor's prayer is the truest expression of self, can the *kahal* be reached. Heschel is critical of the

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[77] Abraham, Joshua Heschel, "The Vocation of the Cantor," in *Insecurity of Freedom* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1963), 244.
[78] Ibid, 246.
[79] Ibid, 248.
[80] Ibid, 247.

cantor's potential vocal and musical egotism which leads him to chose music that demonstrates his artistic skill, in the service of man's "curiosity" concerning the cantor's ability. So too, the cantor fails equally if she serves the congregation's "curiosity" and not "the Ark" through functional thinking about the technique of the service alone. The cantor cannot subvert the need for her own honest prayer experience in an attempt to create something that "works" for everyone.

> Better music, better sermons, and better prayer books can only go so far. Many innovations have been tried around the world, and no doubt synagogue leadership will continue to think creatively about improving services. But deep and lasting change will only come when each of us takes ownership and responsibility for what only we can really guide: our inner lives.[81]

If the *shaliach tzibbur* does not pray in a way that is deeply personally satisfying and expressive, functional thinking about worship leadership will simply be another fad in the history of Jewish prayer. That is, the Form thinkers are deeply motivated by the musical style that was meaningful to them personally, whereas the Functionalists are ultimately concerned with the prayer experience of the congregation. Service to the Community without concomitant service to the Self falls short of our postmodern ideal. The Postmodern *shaliach tzibbur* must have a foot in the worlds of both the Form and Function narratives, retaining consciousness of Function, while being passionate about Form. But in addition, the *shaliach tzibbur* must value his own prayer first and only through the medium of the truest expression of self, can he hope to stir the same outpouring from his community.

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[81] Comins, Rabbi Mike, *Making Prayer Real: Leading Jewish Voices on Why Prayer is Difficult and What to Do About It,* Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010, xviii-xix.

Dr. John H. Planer, musicologist and former Guild of Temple Musicians president, postulates, "Cantors need to express more openly the private and personal commitments which lie at the core of their beings… [It] is not the charisma and presence of the pulpit personality standing above and apart from us on the *bima* who will move us but rather the fellow soul who walks among us." The postmodern *shaliach tzibbur* must be at once unencumbered to express herself most honestly in public prayer – even if that prayer is expressed in a Form that challenges the congregation – while drawing upon the fullness of her understanding of music's Function in worship to create community out of isolation. The space erected by this dialectical tension is where the postmodern *shaliach tzibbur* will thrive.

Chapter Three

The Postmodern *Shaliach Tzibbur:* Special Challenges and Special Skills

Writing about the "Land of the Sick," Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman argues that the way people interact with a seemingly common object is inherently different because of the circumstances of their individual lives – in this case: sick versus well. He offers the analogy of two friends who meet, one blind and one seeing. The seeing friend explains that she has a game board with black and white squares and offers to move the pieces for her friend who cannot see. The blind friend agrees and instructs her friend to make her first move as though it were a game of chess, rather than checkers, which was the game that the seeing friend had with her. "A common game *board*," Hoffman writes, "does not ensure a common *game*."[82]

This notion – that even though no two people experience the world (or any discrete part of) it in the same way, they both long to play the game together anyway – is the very crux of our postmodernism. For the *shaliach tzibbur*, this dichotomy between acting for oneself and acting as part of a larger whole is both a gift and a challenge. We learn from Dr. Borowitz's theology that autonomy – the ability of the individual to *act* independently – is what gives human beings precious dignity and self-worth; and *acting* as an individual – as an autonomous agent of the self – also means *experiencing* as an individual. We therefore value not only how an individual behaves in the world, but also how he interprets the world. Yet, the same theology teaches that the individual is only in covenant when in relationship with God, Israel, and humanity at the same time. The

[82] Lawrence A. Hoffman, "Post-Colonial Liturgy in the Land of the Sick" in *CCAR Journal*, Summer 2006, article page 8.

postmodern Jewish self's autonomy is tempered by his corporate longing, the desperate desire to connect to others and to God. So the worship leader must find a balance between only being able to pray her own individual prayer, and inspiring others to find *his* own prayer, all the while creating a communal bond and shared experience. What happens to group worship when we acknowledge that we can *never* play a "common game," even though our theology binds us to try to do so? This chapter explores the unique challenges faced by the postmodern *shaliach tzibbur* and the skills that emerge from a thoughtful engagement with these problems.

Symbols and Story

In the previous chapter, we discussed the symbolic function of music in worship. Consideration of music's function gives rise to a body of thought and literature (here dubbed Functionalist), which is concerned with whether or not music actual fosters the prayer experience for the community. But music is laden with conscious and subconscious symbolic meaning that informs the way that it functions. Functionalism must therefore address the issue of musical symbolism. A closer look at the requirements of a true symbol elucidates one of the particular challenges of the postmodern *shaliach tzibbur.*

Hoffman uses the term "symbol" in line with Jung's understanding of the psyche. For something to function as a true symbol, it must convey meaning that is beyond normally descriptive language. Rather than pointing to a reality that can be captured in words, it evokes a visceral response and communicates on multiple levels simultaneously. If someone feels "constrained to explain what a thing symbolizes," then

it is not a true symbol.[83] The power of symbols "seems self-evident" to people, so they "frequently hold to them with considerable emotional tenacity."[84] Symbols have such power to move people that ritual expert Ronald Grimes warns that engaging in symbolic communication[85] "is risky… Dormant values and meanings may awaken, emerging into daylight…"[86] Furthermore, a symbol functions successfully for a group only when the group's members have a shared experience of it.

The Form/Art – Form/Folk debate of the previous chapter is, in fact, an instance of a breakdown in symbolic communication. For each side of the entrenchment, the music being advocated functioned symbolically for its advocates. The writing of Rabbi Freelander and Cantor Benson each indicate how Form had become symbol. Freelander writes that Folk style helped worshippers to reach God because it harkened back to a shared experience, reminding "[the] baby boomers of [their] youth days singing together at summer camp, on the college campus or at the protest rally…"[87] In Benson's article, a charge to his colleagues to embrace eclecticism and musical open-mindedness as a way of ensuring the future of the cantorate, he implores "Become the spiritual and liturgical leader that you imagined you would be."[88] Benson is addressing colleagues, the vast majority of whom have shared a singular path to the cantorate by way of the School of

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[83] Lawrence A. Hoffman, *The Art of Public Prayer: Not For Clergy Only* (Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1988), 20.

[84] Daniel H. Freelander, "The Role of Jewish Communal Singing," *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility* (October 1996): 6.

[85] Referred to by Grimes as "metaphors."

[86] Grimes, Ronald, *Rite Out of Place: Ritual, Media, and the Arts*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, 99.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Cantor Bruce Benson, "The Kumsitz Paradigm," in *Koleinu B'yachad: Our Voices as One: Envisioning Jewish Music for the 21st Century*, ed. John Planer and Cantor Howard M. Stahl (The American Conference of Cantors and The Guild of Temple Musicians, 1999), 4.

Sacred Music. Asking the cantors to become the professional that they had "imagined" they would become is drawing upon the shared group experience of cantorial school and all of the musical assumptions borne from that experience. For both of these groups, music is a symbol of those previous shared experiences: camp (for Freelander) and cantorial school (for Benson). For each group, the type of music advocate functions as a positive symbol; while the music advocated by the other side functions as a *negative* symbol.

The breakdown in communication between the two is a predictable problem borne of contradictory symbolic associations. Both Form/Art and Form/Folk constituents were united sub-communities within the already specialized community of Jews, Jewish leadership, and Jewish musicians; even with so very much in common, these groups could not overcome the powerful symbolism of their respective musical cohorts. Symbolic resonance depends on identity formation, the groups or sub-groups within which people take their stand.

The postmodern prayer leader understands that each member of the congregation comes to worship taking his or her own stand. Each one has a particular identity and world-view. Thus, the congregation is filled with individuals who interface not only with prayer, but also with the Jewish community, the broader community, and with God in different ways. The *kahal* shares a common game board: *siddur* and attendance at the same worship opportunity, but their inherent individuality almost assures that they are playing different games in their own, distinct ways.

A great deal of the music literature, whether Form or Function, advocates education as the remedy to symbolic dissonance. For instance, composer Michael

Isaacson prescribes a series of educational opportunities to help different demographics of congregants to be able to better understand Form/Art music, including inviting "college-age children of temple families who are studying art to give a lecture-performance followed by a discussion to the congregation" and inviting "a scholar to teach for a weekend to explore Judaism's greatest music."[89] The unspoken hope is that through education and exposure, what is positive symbolic communication for one individual or group will become positive symbolic communication for another, fostering more effective and diverse communication in worship.

Successful educational initiatives will enable congregants to appreciate and engage with music in a more erudite way than without. Yet, the true symbolic power of that music cannot be conferred through education alone. By our very definition of "symbol," if it must be articulated – or taught – it is not a symbol. The subject matter may become symbolic for the student, but it will be symbolic of something very different than it was for the teacher or for the group of baby-boomers who sang during sit-ins. It will take on new symbolic meaning derived from the learner's inherent individuality and from the reference group with which the individual takes his or her existential stand. Here is the problem: the postmodern *shaliach tzibbur* can never know in advance what symbolic meaning any particular music or ritual has to congregants. The very notion of a shared experience is flawed because the way that the individual interfaces with that experience will be as unique to them as their fingerprint. To restate Grimes, symbolic communication is "risky;" no manner of congregational education, cultural pulse-taking,

[89] Michael Isaacson, "A Paradigm Reconsidered," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* Winter (2002), 5.

and perceived shared experience can ever account for the workings of the individual's inner life.

In 2000, a panel was convened at HUC-JIR in celebration of Peter Ochs's then new book *Reviewing the Covenant: Eugene Borowitz and the Postmodern Renewal of Jewish Theology*. This compilation of essays responds and evaluates Dr. Borowitz' *Renewing the Covenant* on the eve of it's decennial. The College – Institute hosted this particular panel in order to bring the ideas of Borowitz, Ochs, and the other respondents from the stratosphere of abstract thought to the pragmatic level of synagogue life. Borowitz and Ochs were therefore joined by "representatives of two rabbinic generations and geographic areas,"[90] Rabbi Rachel Mikvah and Rabbi Michael Stroh. Their conversation, preserved in transcript in the Winter 2002 volume of the *CCAR Journal*, provides critical insight to our exploration of the *shaliach tzibbur* in the postmodern synagogue.

Rabbi Mikvah notes the upsurge in text study in the decade preceding the panel. She explains that the multivocality of traditional textual study is keeping with the postmodern notion of the value of individual *experience* of the world and, therefore, individual *interpretation* as well She explains, "Our members have a strong resonance with the rabbinic notion that the Torah has seventy 'faces.' Conceptually it fits well with some of what has been written about postmodernity, that, personal context being critical to interpretation, there will be as many different voices as there are different contexts."[91] Text study demonstrates that there is room in Jewish tradition to honor the individual

[90] Eugene B. Borowitz and Jacqueline Mates-Muchin, "The Postmodern Mood in the Synagogue: A Symposium," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* Winter (2002), 113-129.

[91] Ibid, 114.

within the framework of the community. Furthermore, people come to synagogue to "share their journeys."[92] Mikvah therefore sees congregants not just interpreting Torah individually, but doing so as a means to tell their own stories – a way to break down the isolationism of modernity and fortify the bonds of a community that values the individual.

Consider the form of *Mishkan T'filah* (*MT*) as evidence of our need for personal story- telling within the structure of communal prayer. Except for a single linear service – (like the services of *Gates of Prayer* (*GOP*) and *Union Prayer Book* (*UPB*) before it – that was included as a grudging compromise, the true innovation of *MT* is the availability of up to four options for each prayer on a two-page facing spread. The very layout is an invitation for individuals to personalize their own worship, since the text can be employed in any number of configurations to create an almost limitless worship experience. The congregational prayer experience that results remains that of the *sh'liach tzibbur*, but at the same time, it is "polyvocal,"[93] in that each individual prays his own personal choice of the two-page spread, even as other congregants make their own selection in the same way. In that way, the individual has the opportunity to pray a version of the prayer that most closely meets his personal needs all the while praying in community, with the cacophony of many voices, each with its own prayers, swirling about the sanctuary.

During my time at HUC-JIR, I have encountered story telling and self-revelation in worship on a number of occasions. The model, which has members of the *kahal* share

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[92] Ibid.

[93] Elyse D. Frishman, "Entering *Mishkan T'filah*," in *CCAR Journal*, Fall 2004, 60.

personal opinion or experience during the course of the worship service, has been tried with varying degrees of success. This differs from an informal sermon or Torah study during worship, where the *shaliach tzibbur* may ask questions and engage with the congregation, in that the "sharing" to which I refer was meant to function as *prayer* itself, rather than study occurring at a time in the service specifically designated for learning. Student or faculty members were asked in advance of the service to be prepared to share with the congregation words that relate to a designated liturgical moment but also respond to some larger theme of the *t'filah* or personal theology. Said another way, a student was asked to prepare a statement that in some way expressed their personal theology and understanding of the text of *Aleinu*[94]. The student would then present their thought within the worship service, either as a meditation before the prayer or in lieu of it – as the very prayer itself. Our postmodernism drives us to have rich inner lives that we long to share as part of a sacred community. This carefully planned sharing is only one way in which the self can engage openly and honestly with the community.

Form-Function, Third Readings, and Gestures

> Any means of ordering or classifying, whether explicit or implicit, creates a set of conceptual screens. Although less tangible than altar rails and room dividers, epistemological screens – whether constructed of abstract ideas or mental images – are no less determinative of action than physical barriers are. Consider the slashes between these pairs: black/white, east/west, good/evil. Each pair creates two conceptual zones with a slash, a strip of nobody's land, down the

[94] This particular example was the case during *t'filah* at the *Yom Iyyun* in Spring 2008 semester.

middle. The slash dividing these two *conceptual* zones operates like a sacredly guarded barrier. Such a boundary divides and is divisive."[95]

Our discussion of the divisiveness of the Form/Art and Form/Folk debate in the previous chapter illustrates Grimes's assertion above. The literature represents a professional community divided over the conceptual notion of what type of music is fit for synagogue worship. From that dichotomy emerged an antithetical response that hoped to strip the debate of the volatile language of the previous dichotomy by using the language of Function, a wholly new set of criteria, establishing another "conceptual slash mark." Now worship music must be analyzed solely by the way that it works in worship. We are left with a dichotomy of form or function.

The intellectual practice of dichotomizing the world, "such as tradition versus reason" and "*emet* versus *emunah*" – we can add "form versus function" – is the hallmark of modernist thinking.[96] Postmodernists see Grimes's conceptual slash mark as limiting one's ability to fully understand what is on either side; both sides of the slash mark must be understood in relationship. Borowitz explains that "one of the great failures of modernity was its insistence on the wall of separation between *emes* and *emunah.* It seems reasonably clear now that there is no statement about truth that does not begin from some personal, prerational stance," or a foundation of faith. At best, dichotomies limit one's ability to fully grasp the concept on either side of the divide. At worst, they create animosity between people – like our case in the Form/Art and Form/Folk debate.

Peter Ochs cites postmodernists as preferring to search for a "third" way of understanding dichotomies. He points to the discipline of semiotics, "a logic based on

[95] Grimes, 94.
[96] Borowitz and Mates-Muchin, 125.

notions of signs and symbols," that requires that "your logic always have three parts in it, not two."[97] Instead applying binaries to understand the world, one must seek out the "common root, or *shoresh* of each pole of the dichotomy and ask how does each of these two actually share in this common *shoresh?* How does each of these two articulate a common *shoresh* in different ways, appropriate to their apparently different contexts?"[98] Ochs applies this type of thought to sacred text. There are three parts of text encounter. First, there is the text itself, then the individual who reads the text – two seemingly disparate entities – and finally, the meeting of the individual with text, which produces a third reading. The third reading is the product of the encounter of individual with text; both are permanently changed as a result of the engagement one with the other.

The Form/Function model proposed in my previous chapter is a third reading, an attempt on my part to find the common worth in both the Form and Function approaches to synagogue worship music. Form/Function recognizes that both types of discourse have critical elements to contribute to a full understanding of what it means to be a Jewish self who carefully and humbly leads prayer.

The notion of a third understanding is not only critical to how one understands thought and writing on worship, but also to how one approaches other variables in the worship experience. As slash marks can create impenetrable divides in the world of thought, so too can they divide space and experience. "One can divide a space with a mere gesture; you do not need walls or room dividers or rails. Because of the nature of the human body, sectoring happens, even when there is no altar screen, glass case, or

[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.

desk between an actor and audience. The human body is quite enough…"[99] Grimes is referring to the metacommunication that one can exhibit through bodily gestures: a professor with his back turned away from the open office door does not communicate a willingness to greet the student who stands in the threshold.[100] Hoffman explores this idea in *The Art of Public Prayer* and would call Grimes's example a case of "Mixing Messages:"[101] the professor *seems* to be inviting students in because his door is open, but in fact communicates that he is not available since his back is to the door. Consider the implications of such sectoring during worship. Architecture, body language, and music can all create impenetrable boundaries during prayer. Worshipers may feel disenfranchised from the prayer experience if the *sh'lichei tzibbur* believe that they have opened the door to prayer, when in fact they have turned their backs.

We illustrated above that the postmodern goal is to understand the world through third readings, as opposed to dichotomies. Seeking the third reading is the only way in which both enactors, whether they be people, objects, or experiences, that participate in an encounter one with the other, can hope to have a meaningful exchange. What is a "third reading" between a *shaliach tzibbur* and a worshiper or a worshiper and a piece of liturgical music? Only when one is willing to allow oneself to *become* a third reading and be irrevocably changed by worship is the exchange truly postmodern. The *shaliach tzibbur* must come to prayer honestly and with an open heart, hoping that through a selfless act of personal exposure she may have opportunity to encounter the other in prayer. The stakes are quite high for the postmodern *shaliach tzibbur*.

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[99] Grimes, 94.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Hoffman, 81-103.

Art, Science, and Participant Observation

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of this thesis is the use of the analytical framework of postmodernism alongside a number of other interdisciplinary analytical tools to understand worship from the perspective of a believer. It is my belief that the believing *shaliach tzibbur* can be enriched and bolstered as an effective professional through the exploration of both secular and sacred academic pursuit. Yet, "using an interpretive framework, it might be argued, violates a ritual by imposing foreign categories on it" and "can either inhibit or facilitate interpretive goals."[102] Thus, this thesis explores the tension between the benefit of interpretation and intellectual engagement and pure, intuitive devotion. The postmodern *shaliach tzibbur* must be both scientist and artist, intellectual and mystic.

In Ronald L. Grimes's seminal work *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, he evaluates the state of the academic study of ritual and develops critical theory for that field's future growth. At the outset he discusses a curious problem faced by those who study ritual. Writing in 1982, Grimes explains that "we lack an integrated field of ritual studies,"[103] one that unifies a thorough knowledge of the prescriptive text of ritual and the skills of the symbolic anthropologist. In his discussion of developing a fieldwork methodology for ritual studies, he introduces two figures interested in ritual: the ritologist and the ritualist. The ritologist is one who studies ritual, whereas the ritualist is one who enacts ritual.

[102] Grimes, Ronald L., *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982, 19.

[103] Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies,*1.

Jewish clergy are trained ritualists, leading worship experiences for congregants professionally.

At HUC – JIR, future clergy are educated as skilled ritualists both inductively and deductively. Worship leadership is taught as a specific skill set learned in the classroom and through practical application and faculty feedback in the Chapel setting. Students become ritologists through course work in liturgy and by observing and praying as congregants in the HUC – JIR community.

This paradigm actually creates a complicated reality for the student *shaliach tzibbur,* who must be both a Jew at prayer and a ritologist in order to become the best ritualist possible. "I am doing and watching myself do;" performance theorist Richard Shechner encourages his students to find a place where they can "experience and observe" simultaneously. [104] This way of learning is actually an appropriate model for the postmodern *shaliach tzibbur* to incorporate into his professional life. The postmodern prayer leader must be scholar and mystic, ritologist and ritualist simultaneously. Grimes writes that both the "intersubjective and the analytical… are necessary for understanding ritual. The first calls for self-knowledge and recognition of our feelings. The second demands suspension of self-interest and requires concentration on actions and values that are not our own."[105] So too, are the intersubjective and the analytical necessary for honest prayer leadership. The postmodern *shaliach tzibbur* is obligated to examine the text of his own life, so that it may be offered as a point of sacred meeting to the congregation. Yet, the *shaliach tzibbur* is a professional with a Covenantal responsibility to the People Israel

[104] Richard Schechner, "Living a Double Consciousness," in *Teaching Ritual*, ed. Catherine Bell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24.

[105]Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies,* 19.

to bring his unique gifts to help facilitate Divine worship. "… [The] repetition and deep familiarity of a ritual, combined with the full sensory engagement – song, movement or dance, incense or other odor, tasting, utterance, participating in a group activity – help one surrender the I-self and merge with the Us-self, what Martin Buber called the Ich-Du."[106]

I have argued that postmodernity poses unique challenges to the Jewish professional who hopes to lead worship honestly and effectively. The self encounters the world in all of the glory of its inherent subjectivity, yet it desires simultaneously to draw closer to others and share in a common game. The thought of the postmodern *shaliach tzibbur* must be filled with dynamic, dialectic tension, learning to be artist and scientist, ritualist and ritologist. The *shaliach tzibbur* must always seek the third reading – the special place where individual meets Israel and the two together can find the Divine.

[106]Schechner, 24.

The *Shaliach Tzibbur* in Covenant

> *I spend my life working with thoughts. And one problem that gives me no rest is: do these thoughts ever rise to the heights reached by authentic music.*
>
> *~Abraham Joshua Heschel*[107]

Rabbi Eugene Borowitz's *Renewing the Covenant* explores the space between the Enlightenment rationalism that characterized the early Reform Movement and the more spiritual, faith-based Reform of the second-half of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. In the twenty years since its publication, *Renewing the Covenant* has shaped the thought of countless Reform rabbis and cantors, helping them articulate the abstractions of our relationship to God and our people. Borowitz's work delineates a postmodern, liberal way of living in covenant, responsible to the self, the other, and to God.

This thesis has explored different kinds of abstract thought: Borowitz's particular brand of postmodernism, synagogue music as conceived by professionals in that field, and the theory behind ritual and prayer leadership. The thesis was conceived as a way to marry two interests of my own: first, systematizing the abstract, a skill demonstrated by Borowitz in the classroom and in his published work alike; and second, what I have learned inductively and deductively about being a *sh'lichat tzibbur* while at the College–Institute.

I had hoped originally just to systematize the way that we talk about synagogue music from the perspective of the Functionalists of Chapter Two. As I read and

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[107] Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Vocation of the Cantor," in *Insecurity of Freedom* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1963), 246.

reconsidered this initial goal, I realized that to further the task of imposing unbendable categories onto synagogue music, and then imagining that these alone define what that music is *essentially* all about could not be reconciled to my understanding of postmodernism. Yes, the further development of that language might help to standardize the way that people approach the powerful, symbol-laden body of synagogue music, but at the same time, it would impose conceptual restraints and hinder our ability to relate to the music in an honest way. By moving beyond musical functionalism to embrace the argument from form as well, and then by superimposing also a postmodern notion of self, community, and God, I have better understood myself and others as prayer leaders – all within the framework of Borowitz's covenantal theology.

The conclusion of Chapter One analyzed Borowtiz's criteria for of the role of postmodernism in the worship thought and practice of contemporary liberal Jews. I can now conclude the project by returning to the same five principles as an outline of a theory of decision-making and authority for the postmodern *shaliach tzibbur.* This analysis assumes that the *shaliach tzibbur* has incorporated these ideas holistically into their person, and focuses specifically on their implications for worship leading.

"*First, the Jewish self lives personally and primarily in involvement with the one God of the universe."*[108] The *shaliach tzibbur* must lead worship in which he or she strives to connect personally and primarily with God. This means making textual, musical, and aesthetic choices that support the worship leader's own ability to be open to prayer and connect with the Divine. I criticize the functionalist approach for excluding

[108] Eugene Borowitz, *Renewing the Covenant: A Theology for the Postmodern Jew* (Philadelphia, New York, and Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 289.

this further criterion for successful worship. The postmodern *shaliach tzibbur* must be empowered to think both functionally (the *how*) and formally (the *what*), not simply as a professional concern, creating prayer for others, but as a personal spiritual pursuit, identifying the musical and liturgical tools that best serve their own prayer practice – personal and communal are inextricably interwoven. The postmodern *shaliach tzibbur* would need to have a rich prayer life on and off of the *bima* so that the technical aspects of the ritual, such as collaborating with other prayer leaders, musicians, or congregants, does not interfere with the ability to find a personally prayerful space on the pulpit. He or she must pray first as an individual in relationship with God before expecting to inspire others to do so.

"*Second, a Jewish relationship with God inextricably binds selfhood and ethnicity, with its multiple ties of land, language, history, traditions, fate, and faith.*"[109] The Jewish self as prayer leader must be committed to draw from the breadth of Jewish linguistic, musical, and liturgical tradition in order to better understand the cultural panoply of God's people Israel. The *bima* must be inherently ethnic in that prayer must occur in Jewishly distinctive ways. One of the great gifts of Reform has been the understanding that Judaism does not exist in a vacuum and will always be influenced by any culture with which it has close contact. The impact of European and later North American culture on Reform worship practice is well documented and is appropriate in that it honestly reflects contemporary Jewish life. Yet, it is critical that a congregation's specifically Jewish group identity be fostered. The *shaliach tzibbur* must strive to maintain a personal connection to Israel's ethnic distinctiveness and then to help

[109] Ibid, 290.

congregants maintain that same relationship from the *bima*. *Sh'lichei tzibbur* should explore different Jewish languages and musical idioms in order to help nourish a distinctly Jewish communal longing. *Chazzanut*, Jewish modal music, Ladino, and Yiddish song can all help to create the sense of ethnicity that binds one Jew to another.

"*Third, against the common self's concentration on immediacy, the Covenant renders the Jewish self radically historical."*[110] The musical implications of this principle are particularly critical to the student of Jewish music. We have discussed the potential for the powerful symbolic communication that music has. It is easy to understand why *sh'lichei tzibbur* and congregants would be strongly attracted to contemporary music or music from their youth. Yet, our theology teaches that we must be strongly rooted in our Jewish past in order to be in Covenant. The School of Sacred Music educates all of its cantorial students in what might be considered "historical" Jewish music: traditional *nusach*, *chazzanut* – high cantorial art music, music of the choral tradition, 19th-century European music, and even music from the folk tradition. All of these Forms should be considered both "traditional" and "historical," as a crucial part of the Jewish past that links generation to generation.

This thesis has strongly presented the opinion that cantors and rabbis should pray in media that are personally meaningful to them, so that they can honor their own truths, thereby praying more honestly. In order for the *shaliach tzibbur* to be able to utilize the forms of music here identified as historical, he or she must be able to find personal meaning therein. Inevitably, *sh'lichei tzibbur* face the task of making judgments based on their own taste – a product of their individual experience. They may not *like* some types

[110] Ibid, 291.

of music from the Jewish past, but they must be able to reconcile themselves to the fact that even the forms they do not find personally meaningful bind today to the past and therefore have value. A cantor in this position should be able to present these types of music in worship despite their personal dislike of them, without sacrificing their own prayer experience in the process, on the grounds that it is their covenantal duty to bind Israel to its past.

"*Fourth, though the Jewish self lives the present out of the past, it necessarily orients itself towards the future."*[111] To reiterate from Chapter One, this step of decision-making is essentially a polar opposite from the previous criterion: step three says look back, step four says look forward; we are bound in both directions. This sense of Covenantal timelessness is what enables the fifth principle to emerge.

For the *shaliach tzibbur*, this may be the most difficult criterion to incorporate. Orientation toward the future does not imply the need to use all of the newest music – that would be a contemporary orientation rather than a future orientation.

This principle is about eternity and the Messianic age. The *shaliach tzibbur* would better capture this idea through creating bonds between the generations surrounding issues of social justice These larger ideas must be communicated through *iyyunim* and liturgical choices, perhaps using music to highlight relevant texts like the *Aleinu*.

Additionally, clergy should invest significantly in a few students who show propensity for Jewish work. Our synagogues are already focused on our children, sometimes at the expense of appropriate adult and elder programming. What I am suggesting is that the *bar* or *bat mitzvah* student who is particularly skilled or interested

[111] Ibid.

in Judaism, liturgy, music, and Torah should be groomed and encouraged to participate in worship leadership under the close guidance of the clergy. Not only is the *shaliach tzibbur* investing in the life of the teenager she is also allowing the congregation to watch the future of Judaism unfold before their very eyes.

"*Fifth, yet despite the others with whom it is so intimately intertwined – God and the Jewish people, present, past, and future – it is as a single soul in its full individuality that the Jewish self exists in Covenant."*[112] This beautiful image – all are timeless and essentially One – is the inevitable outcome of Borowitz's postmodernism. When the individual takes on the responsibility of the Covenant, he or she becomes a part of a great unified whole bound to God and Israel for eternity. From here – the contract with God and history, not just the contract with the congregational board or polity, the *shaliach tzibbur* derives his or her responsibility to help the congregation pray. Cantors and rabbis are called in all their individuality to serve God through service to the Jewish people. In order to fulfill their own covenantal duty, they must serve. Inasmuch as the *shaliach tzibbur* can only pray as an individual, he or she is required to work towards helping the congregation pray and move closer to knowing that they are each "as a single soul" with all the others gathered there and with God, who is present as well.

This is the power of communal singing. In Chapter Two, Rabbi Freelander described the power in two different ways: choral singing and communal singing. The layering of voices and the swell of sound is music's symbolic way of making those gathered feel alone and as one, simultaneously. The individual's voice and breath rattle through their own body, yet their ears and the vibrations of the floors and furniture assure

[112] Ibid, 293.

them that they are a part of a whole – never alone. Imagine a community joined in prayerful song when the cantor layers his or her own voice above, singing how he or she best knows how, to communicate that we all have our ways of reaching to God in our individuality, and yet we are One.

I believe that prayer does something. I know that my efforts to lead a community in prayer reach at least some of those gathered in a profound way. I know that sometimes it "works" and I want to believe that when prayer works it is doing more for me and for others than just making them "feel good," as Cantor Dreskin articulated in Chapter One. My readings of recent publications on prayer, informed by the foundation of other scholarship that I have acquired during my studies and my personal experiences, has helped me to shape my own goals for how prayer can "work" in my own theology. If I view myself as the Jewish self outlined in *Renewing the Covenant*, then I must feel at once a sense of self – my human dignity, personal relationship with God, and connectedness to and responsibility for the Jewish community and then humanity. These critical relationships must be rooted in a sense of unique Jewish authenticity, both ethnic and historical. To pray as a postmodern liberal Jew one must not cast away troubling liturgical texts, including music. We must struggle with them and only after finding them irreconcilably contradictory to the Divine/human relationship discard or alter them. Furthermore, we must create new texts that express our historical moment and stand the chance of entering the chain of tradition for future generations.

The goal of prayer must be to effect relationships. Through prayer practice one has the ability to enhance one's personal dignity and sense of self, to focus attention and gain clarity of mind to better serve the needs of others, and, most significantly, to nourish

and nurture an ongoing personal relationship with the Divine. These goals should be incumbent upon all Jewish selves, but for those Jewish selves who find themselves clergy and in roles of Jewish leadership, the imperative to pray is even more critical. Rabbi Rachel Cowen writes of the need for clergy to pray: "God wants our heart; the essence of the spiritual life is to work on ourselves; and we cannot teach authentically when our role is divided from our soul. We cannot give what we don't possess."[113] We cannot act fully in the world as postmodern liberal Jews without first giving God our hearts.

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