

direction of the side from which the north wind blows, and the other part which is the *kinnor* proper, is facing the direction toward which the north wind generally blows, then, when the wind strokes the strings from both sides, it will create a kind of musical whisper; not a particular melody, orderly and distinct, as created intentionally by trained harpists; that would be an absolute miracle, which is unnecessary. Our Lord, blessed be His name, will neither steal from nature nor seek miracles, except as special times, for a very special cause, in order to enhance His name, His glory, and His magnificence.

In this chapter we have attempted to present some of the more difficult problems that confront one who wishes to study the historic dimensions of Jewish music. Examples have been selected from different sources and different historical periods, starting with biblical times and ending with the Renaissance. The Bible is the main and richest source for studying music in Israel in ancient days, while the comprehensive work of R. Abraham Portaleone, *Shields of Mighty Men*, represents the first and most all-inclusive attempt of a Jewish commentator steeped in Renaissance culture, to describe systematically the musical theory, songs, and instruments that were used for ritual purposes in the Temple. Basing his work on biblical texts and Jewish commentaries, Portaleone tried to reconstruct the Temple music in light of the musical theory and practice of his own times. This anachronism can be explained away by the fundamental conviction that the origin of music, as of the other liberal arts, is found in that holiest of all books—the Bible; hence contemporary music with which the author was familiar was merely a reflection of the Temple music. In view of its speculative nature, it is hard to say with any degree of certainty that Portaleone's work made a direct contribution to research into ancient Jewish music. There is no doubt at all, however, that it is important for the insight it offers into the cultural vistas of Italy's Jews during the time the author lived. Moreover, despite some Jewish reservations about the work, Christian historians of music from the middle of the seventeenth century until the end of the nineteenth century have quoted it as a dependable source for information about the music of the Levites in the Temple. Among those scholars are, for example, A. Kircher (1719–89), Ch. Blainville (1711–77), and N. Forkel (1749–1819).

3

Music and Religion

Alien Melodies Encroach on the Prayers

Countless reciprocal threads connect music and religion; as will be shown in this chapter, various aspects of this mutual influence have left their mark on Jewish music from ancient times until today. The infiltration into sacred music of popular secular tunes from the non-Jewish surroundings was facilitated by a natural desire to increase the emotional impact of prayers by adding a musical dimension to them. Yet many religious scholars have felt that tension is created by elaborating the musical element of the prayers and borrowing tunes from sources external to Judaism, as it causes a conflict between religious norms and the desires of the worshippers. With the passage of time, this tension has been expressed in different forms and with varying degrees of intensity.

Turning for a moment to our own days, we can find quite a few contemporary examples of secular tunes penetrating the prayers, and it is interesting to examine the reaction this has evoked. For a number of years following the establishment of the State of Israel, the radio held an annual song contest as one of the events marking Independence Day. The public was asked to choose the ten best songs. As time passed and the quality of the entries deteriorated, the organizers decided to commission a song each year from one of the better-known composers. It would have its first hearing on the holiday, but would not be included in the competition. Thus it transpired that shortly before the outbreak of the Six Day War in 1967, Naomi Shemer's song "Jerusalem of Gold" was heard for the first time. Obviously, subsequent events—the war that broke out almost immediately after the celebrations of that year's Independence Day—had much to do with making "Jerusalem of Gold" one of the most popular songs in Israel. Very soon the melody also crossed the sacred

threshold and was absorbed into the repertoires of synagogues representing all shades of Israel's population. The original words, of course, were replaced by words from the prayers or liturgy, such as the Trisagion (*Qedushah*) or "Come my Beloved, Welcome the Sabbath Bride" ("Lekhah dodi"), which ushers in the Sabbath.

What brought this popular secular song into the nation's most hallowed halls? Might this particular melody have been adopted by the synagogue because of its association with the historic event of the liberation of Jerusalem? Was it taken over because of its subject-matter—Jerusalem—a theme celebrated in sacred song by liturgic poets of all generations? Or might there be some quality inherent in the melody itself?

These questions are hard to answer unequivocally because, for one thing, we are not dealing with an isolated case. Many similar examples are known, from both past and present; in other words, the adoption of alien tunes touches on a most complex phenomenon that is not necessarily limited to Jewish music. This is borne out by another example, also from Israel, of something that occurred a short time before Naomi Shemer's song began its metamorphosis. Soon after the Pope visited Israel in 1965, a nun composed a hymn in commemoration of the event, adapting it to the tune of a popular Israeli song: "Go out Girls and See" ("Tsena ha-banot wur'ena"). The original words dealt with girls and soldiers.¹ True, the two cases differ significantly. The first example adopted the tune of a secular song to serve a prayer, while in the second case, despite its religious nature, the song is not liturgical and therefore falls into a less demanding framework. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the melody of a cheerful song about girls and soldiers was chosen as the setting for a hymn to be used by another culture, and the new content is diametrically opposed to that of the original. Can such a popular hit possibly find its way into the realm of prayer? Obviously it can, as further exemplified by the tune that has been borrowed for one of the important prayers, the *Qaddish* (Consecration, or prayer for the soul of the dead). The French song "Chéri je t'aime" (also called "Ya-mustafa," after its Egyptian source) acquired world-wide popularity in the late sixties.² Its words are "I love you my dearest, I adore you my dearest"; nevertheless, its tune was adopted to accompany this profoundly pious prayer.

Is it indeed conceivable that these three examples: "Jerusalem of Gold," "Go out Girls," and "Chéri je t'aime" represent a pattern—in other words, that highly popular songs have been adopted as prayer melodies for the very reason of their popularity? This phenomenon may well be widespread in works of a popular nature. Folk bards will set a newly created text to a tune the public knows well, thereby ensuring the text a wide audience. But methods applicable to folk songs are hardly appropriate when the subject is a prayer or religious hymn. Significantly, an Ashkenazi cantor from Alsace (France), discussing the attempt to utilize "Chéri, je t'aime" for synagogue services, described the shock and consternation with which it was greeted by the congregation. As a result, the tune was rejected by the Ashkenazi

synagogue. At the same time, however, he described the adoption of other foreign tunes, among them a well known "romansa" that tells of the love between a shepherd and shepherdess. In its new transformation, this music became the melody of the Trisagion (*Qedushah*). When asked in what way the French hit differed from the "romansa," the cantor offered the interpretation that conceived allegorically, the love of the shepherd and shepherdess symbolized the love prevailing between Israel and the Congregation of Israel (*Knesset Yisrael*).³ Thus in this case an additional element—one not always considered—has influenced the adoption of a hit tune for synagogue use: the content of the text.

From the few examples cited it is clear that in the first place, the complex, multifaceted subject this chapter deals with must be treated from various points of view. Second, the reference is to a perpetual process in the course of which different types of tunes from secular or alien spheres are absorbed into the frame of synagogue music as well as into paraliturgical poetry. In Judaism, paraliturgical songs include Hebrew devotional texts relating to religious precepts that are binding on the individual, even though they are not part of either the prescribed or expanded liturgy. Thus verses dealing with circumcision or bar mitsvah, for example, are included in the paraliturgy. Third, there is a difference of opinion with respect to the process that actually occurs, as well as to the intrinsic nature of the material absorbed.

This may well lead one to question whether all alien songs are potential candidates for absorption into some type of religious music or whether this is determined by certain crucial factors such as the nature of the melody or the essence of the original text associated with it. Is a tune that has been chosen for integration into religious music prepared for its new role by the change in its original function or by the content of the text newly affixed to it? Does it preserve its original identity or must it change either nature or structure in order to adapt to its new environment? Are transformations made to align the melody with paradigms of the ideal type of religious music? In other words, do certain religious melodies embody specific criteria to become the model for the transformation of new tunes? When attempting to answer the above questions it is important to clarify who has the deciding voice in these matters.

The Cantor's Role in Integrating New and Alien Music

Cantors have done more than anyone else to introduce alien tunes into music used in the synagogue—and outside of it as well. The responsibility of the cantor and the *paytan* (liturgical poet-musician) for the musical aspect of the prayers goes back almost as far as the earliest synagogues. Even then the cantor—who replaced the voluntary lay reader—was one of the most important officials in the house of worship. Learned and fluent in the ritual and liturgy, he must have a pleasant voice and is under contract with the synagogue to lead the prayers. Originally he was a

poet who composed and sang his own liturgies and appeared together with the lay reader. As time went on he undertook to lead the regular prayers as well as perform his own liturgies or paraliturgies, thus combining the role of *paytan* and lay reader.

A *paytan*, if there is one, performs alongside the cantor but his role is limited to that of a talented singer or poet-musician. He plays no special part in the prescribed prayers but does fill a particular role outside the synagogue. He participates in the performance and writing of paraliturgical and other religious songs. Both the *paytan* and the cantor use their poetic talents and fine voices to enhance the sacred ritual, their objective being to increase the emotional impact of the prayers. Presumably, the audience is interested in the same objective. The people also influence the services, although in a different direction. They want more than just the passive role of listeners; they want to join actively in the singing. Indeed, certain passages are sung by the whole congregation and for such passages the cantors try to use familiar, or at least less demanding, melodies.

Obviously, the cantors borrowed from whatever was at hand, and some of them seem to have gone too far. Quite early on complaints were heard about the excessive number of alien tunes that were seeping into synagogue music,⁴ which makes it clear that the cantor and *paytan* have not been entirely free to do exactly as they pleased. Even when one or the other of them ignored the limitations the rabbinical authorities wanted to place upon them, other factors like the attitude and reaction of the worshippers and the officials of the synagogue were at work that tended to restrict their freedom of choice. On the whole, these factors were not evoked by musical criteria; there almost seemed to be a conflict of interests between the cantors and the rabbinical authority, and between him and the congregation. The tension between them was not caused only by the introduction of alien melodies, but by a difference in ideological approach as well. Each side had its own particular attitude to the inclusion of music in the ritual; there were times, as will be seen below, when music was rejected on the grounds of principle.

R. Judah al-Ḥarizi was a poet and Hebrew translator in Spain (about 1170–1235) who traveled extensively throughout the Orient. In 1220 he visited Baghdad and recorded his impressions in two (numbers 18 and 24) of the fifty Hebrew-language *maqāmāt*⁵ of his book *Tahkemoni* (The wise one). Al-Ḥarizi is mercilessly critical of a certain cantor-preacher who was also well-known in his community as a musician and poet—a fairly usual combination in those days. He describes the appearance of the cantor and the quality of his singing (ed. 1952, pp. 224–25):

And here comes the cantor, the phylacteries bound around his forehead. White and handsome, two hundred cubits in size. The hair of his beard reaches his navel. He is draped in a blanket and drags its fringes along the ground, almost tripping over the edges. Upon his appearance we were all overcome with awe and bowed toward him. And we fell silent in fear of him, until he began to sing. And began to pray. And as he prayed I counted more than 100 blatant errors—outside of those not

worthy of mention. But I said nothing, thinking it might be an accident or panic over the tribulations of the Sabbath. Or perhaps he was dead for sleep.

With the advent of dawn, I rose up to go to the house of worship. And there was the cantor sitting in his great chair. He opened with a hundred blessings, organized and ready on his tongue. And he said in a loud shout, "Blessed be thou O Lord who created man an animal." And in singing he made so many mistakes they cannot be counted. Instead of "from the wicked [*zadim*] too spare thy servant" he said: "from the olives [*zetim*] too educate thy servant" [*vegam mizzedim ḥasokh 'avdekha—gam mizzetim ḥasokh 'avdekha*]. And instead of: "And may you have an abundance of nectar of the wheat [*helev ḥittim*]"—"May you have an abundance of sharp swords [*ḥerev ḥaddim*]." And instead of: "he who covers the skies with heavy clouds [*be'avim*]," he said ". . . with clothing [*begadim*]." And instead of "And May Israel have joy in His deeds" he said "And may Yishmael [Islam] have joy with Esau [Christianity]." And instead of "Praise him with strings [*minnim*] and with organ [*'uggat*]" he said: "and praise him with cheeses [*gvinim*] and cake [*'aggah*]." And instead of "It is within your power to aggrandize [*legaddel*] and strengthen [*uu-lehazzeq*] all," "it is within your power to vilify [*legaddeḥ*] and harm [*uu-lehazziq*] all." Until I was deeply ashamed—to the point of regretting having come to the synagogue, but I put my hand over my mouth and was mute. And when he finished his hymns he stood there conducting his paeans of error, and he covered his face, but not in modesty. And stood there proudly, gesticulating, moving his shoulders. And raised his right foot and put it down again. And moved backward a bit and opened the hidden vaults of his wisdom.⁶ And brought forth its treasures and began to recite poems and songs, all of them tattered, halt and blind, following round-about paths, without rhyme or meter, without form or content. And then his hymns fit for idiots, his ridiculous canticles fit for nincompoops and his psalms fit for asses went on endlessly. Some of the crowd remained sitting up. Others reclined, sleeping blissfully. And some fled and did not return. They left the synagogue. So the oxen fled from the herdsmen, and the cattle and flocks scattered. And only four asses remained. Bestirring themselves and shouting with the cantor, looking upon themselves as poets. And he dragged his liturgies out for them until noon. Until their tongues stuck to their jaws. And when he completed his liturgies and turned to complete the prayer, there was not a soul in the synagogue. The whole congregation was at home, sleeping.

Then al-Ḥarizi quotes a debate between one man who believes in simple, straightforward prayer with no musical embellishment and another who cites the Levites in the Temple to support his view that music in praise of the Almighty is better than the most devout, heartfelt prayer. Al-Ḥarizi speaks harshly of the quality of work composed by the liturgists and is also highly critical of the tendency to overburden the congregation with excessive musical accompaniment which prolongs the prayers and results in keeping worshippers away. Finally, he mocks the theatrical, frivolous atmosphere of the performance, in that the cantor is assisted by "four poets" (probably a reference to choral rendition).⁷

One of the targets of Judah al-Ḥarizi's criticism is taken to task by other sources

as well. For example, the author of *Havvat Ya'ir*, Rabbi Ya'ir ben Moshe Shimshon Bakhrakh⁸ writes "The lay readers' lengthy singing of 'yošrot' [poetic embellishments added to the prescribed prayers; the first one is incorporated into the blessing "creator of light" in the morning prayer] is harder for me [to accept] than the solemn reading, also because the melodies are many times longer than the verbal passages" (Lemberg Edition, 1886).

From all that has been said above, then, it is clear that the cantor and *paytan* are the focal point of ritual performance; they are largely responsible for the quality and development of synagogue music. Nevertheless, certain elements actively supervise their work and check them when they overstep what might seem to be conventionally accepted bounds. And indeed, as they represent the congregation, neither the cantor nor the *paytan* is likely to intentionally flout the values accepted by their public. Hence it may be said that to a great extent the cantor reflects the basic views of his congregation and of the society he belongs to. A congregation that for some reason or other does not want an innovative cantor will reject his innovations. The public's judgment is influenced by ideological positions, but these are not fixed immutably; they represent a broad gamut of viewpoints that sometimes favor aesthetic considerations and sometimes reject them, as we shall see below. In other words, the cantor is answerable to his public, and the stand of both is affected by the rigidity or leniency with which the rabbinical authority is interpreted and the extent of its influence on the public. In any case, the cantor is duty-bound to explain himself, to justify his actions, and, as we have said, he is not entirely free to follow the dictates of his own will.

The late Moshe Vital, the well-known Sephardic cantor of Jerusalem who was born in Izmir (Turkey), studied with the famous Turkish cantor and musician Algazi at the School for Cantors in Rhodes, and in his youth settled in Jerusalem, expresses these matters from the viewpoint of the Sephardic cantor:⁹

From the artistic and religious standpoint the Sephardic cantor is forbidden to introduce secular songs into the synagogue. In the synagogue one must sing only songs of praise to the Almighty, nothing else. A cantor of ours may occasionally be a secular singer who entertains others with secular songs, but it is most unusual to hear him use the tune of a love song accompanying passages of prayer such as the following examples of some of the verses sung on the Sabbath and holy days: the Consecration or prayers for the soul of the dead [*Qaddishim*] and the Trisagion [*Qedushah*], "Joyously they go forth" [*Simḥim betsetam*], "Thou shalt be crowned" [*keter yittenu lekhab*]. He may permit himself to do so only if the tune is not familiar to the congregation. I, for example, know some lighter refrains, *coplas* (couplets of religious themes that are not included in the accepted liturgy)¹⁰ that the congregation does not recognize, and those I can incorporate into the *Qedushah* of holy days, of the three pilgrimage festivals, Passover, etc. The congregation does not know from where I have taken the refrain, does not know its source. It simply has a slight resemblance to the *maqām* [mode or melody type] of that day's prayer."¹¹

(As a matter of course, Sephardic Jewry recited all the passages of the Sabbath prayer in the specific *maqām* adapted to each particular Sabbath.)

Thus we see that according to Moshe Vital, the adoption of new melodies involves three principles:

1. Introducing secular songs into the synagogue is forbidden, but the cantor may sing such songs on festive occasions and outside of the framework of the prayers. He was referring to an example such as the *coplas* (couplets) of Joseph the Pious (telling the biblical story of Joseph) which to a great extent conform with this principle in that their Jewish subject matter gives them a suitably pious nature.
2. The use of new melodies is contingent on their anonymity: They must be unfamiliar to the public. That is, they may be used on condition that the congregation cannot identify their source. This principle obviously conflicts with the examples of popular secular songs referred to at the beginning of this chapter.
3. The melody of the original song is adapted to the characteristic mode of the particular day. Here for the first time an artistic musical component rooted entirely in the secular world is adduced and it appears to conflict with the cantor's first principle.

The Hasidim in eastern Europe evolved an interesting theory in relation to the adoption of alien tunes, as indicated by the following quotation:¹²

"The story is told by the Karlin Hasidim that at the funeral of Tzar Nikolai, the rabbi's son who would some day inherit his father's rabbinical post, the rabbi, and Zadik R. Israel of blessed memory, were all standing together with a few disciples. During the funeral a certain song was sung that the rabbi told his disciples would be worthwhile adopting; it would be good for singing the psalm consecrating the House of David. And until today it is customary to sing that song during the Hanukkah festival or when celebrating a house-warming."

This obviously was not just a few lone individuals surreptitiously exceeding the bounds of convention, nor was it an attempt to justify gleaning in alien fields, nor a case of some cantor seeking to publicize his talent. All is purposeful, open, and above-board. It is the rabbi who proclaims the alien tune worthy of being chosen and he is the one who issues instructions to incorporate it into his repertoire. His disciples, considering themselves redeemers in that they recognized the "holy sparks" in the foreign folk song, created collections of "tikḥunim"—songs "redeemed" from an impure existence. These were new, reprocessed variations, in which entire passages were sometimes added. The renovated prayer was looked upon as bringing salvation, and therefore as more important than the usual prayer. The adopted tune was processed as a hymn of praise, its desirable "holy sparks" were reinforced, and it too was "redeemed." The process of change, grounded in ethical, mystical intentions, essentially changed the borrowed song's style. This particular conception is unique in that there is total ideological support of the very act of absorbing and changing alien songs. Hence it involves neither conflict nor apologetics.

The Attitude of Rabbinical Authorities to Alien Melodies

As indicated above, religious authorities have had reservations about incorporating musical elements into the ritual and on occasion have expressed outright objection. In discussing the extent and sources of this negative attitude, it is essential to clarify whether its only cause was the desire to prevent the secular from invading the realm of the sacred, or whether there was a principled objection to the inclusion of any music at all within the frame of religious ritual. In other words, the crucial question is whether the objection is inherent in music's very nature or can be attributed to entirely extraneous factors.

Yehudah Ratzabi (1966) cites multiple significant quotations that reflect the views of people well versed in the Bible and traditional law. Stressing their persistent objection to alien melodies, he introduces the theme as follows:

Long ago, as far back as the time of the Second Temple, sages and scholars disapproved the Greek songs that were heard in the sanctuaries of Israel, as they considered them pagan. Of Elisha ben-Abuya who left the fold and followed evil ways, they used to say that he never ceased singing Greek songs (Bavli, Hagiga, 15,23). In the Gaonic period the influence of alien music increased throughout Israel's congregation in the Islamic countries, pursuant to the similarity of language and culture, and also due to the belief in the close relationship of the two peoples. From this period onward, generation after generation, judges and interpreters of traditional law have concerned themselves with the music of Ishmael.

It is clear, therefore, that alien influences were already filtering into Jewry in ancient times; they became more pervasive during the long period of dispersion which meant constant exposure to surrounding non-Jewish musical cultures. Theoretically, then, there are the following three possibilities:

1. Conceivably, there is special, appropriate Jewish religious music with roots reaching back to the period before the dispersion; in other words, some sort of ancient, archaic model exists—such as the music used in the Temple or in the earliest synagogues.
2. Music of all kinds is totally excluded from religious ritual.
3. There is a kind of music that is ideally suited for the role assigned it within the framework of the ritual, a kind intrinsically different from prevailing forms of secular music.

These possibilities are all closely bound up with the fundamental question of whether music has a special meaning in the religious sphere or simply serves to emphasize the message embedded in the text it embellishes.

Thus, from a different perspective we arrive at the same question raised previously: Are the reasons for objecting to music in religious services inherent in the very nature of music, or are they to be found in extraneous factors such as dispersed

Jewry's absorption of alien tunes during the long sojourn in foreign lands? The attempt to answer this principal question confronts us with great difficulty: available sources dealing more thoroughly with these matters generally relate to the receiving end of the process, in this case with the listener and how he absorbs and is influenced by the music. In other words, only very rarely do the sources at our disposal deal with the special message that may be an intrinsic part of the music itself; they are concerned even less frequently with the performer, the person responsible for transmitting the message.

Grief over the Temple's Destruction Rules out Music

Mourning for the destruction of the Temple is one of the main extrinsic reasons given for the proscription of music, a reason that appears in most relevant texts and has pervaded centuries of Jewish history. The most ancient source adduced by specialists in interpreting the traditional law and by commentators is the 137th Psalm, in which the Levites chant

By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea, we wept,
When we remembered Zion.
Upon the willows in the midst thereof We hanged up our harps.
For there they that led us captive asked of us words of song,
And our tormentors asked of us mirth:
'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'
How shall we sing the Lord's song
In a foreign land?

Although the subject of this Psalm is the destruction of the First Temple, it was later construed as referring to the destruction of the Second Temple as well. In his commentary on the Book of Psalms, R. Sa'adia Gaon maintains that the Levites ceased singing because their musical role depended on the fulfillment of three basic conditions: a site—the Temple in Jerusalem; a function—assisting at worship in the Temple; and finally, a status—responsibility as Levites for the singing. With the destruction of the Temple these three conditions disappeared as did the singing associated with them. The implication is that for objective reasons, as it were, the music used in the Temple did not survive in the Diaspora. But might it have been replaced by other prayer music used in the Temple alongside the Levites' songs, music that may have been more suitable for the new circumstances? The sources do not deal with these questions, which makes it impossible to answer them definitively. However, a discussion of the concept of mourning can serve as the point of departure for further pursuit of certain aspects of them. Since grieving over the Temple's destruction

is the main reason given for forbidding the use of music—a reason that has spawned numerous divergent and even extremely polarized positions—it has direct relevance for the discussion.

One of the most cogent expressions of an extreme position appears in a booklet published fairly recently (1969) called *El gil ka'ammim* (from Hosea 9:1: "Rejoice not, O Israel, . . . as other people").¹³ The book is divided into sections that allegedly include a distillation of everything that has been or can be said in Jewish traditional literature about the prohibition of music. In his introductory words the author complains of the decline in spiritual norms that has paralleled the rising standard of living; he bemoans the enthusiasm for "the music heard today in most of the homes in Israel," and then stresses that "to our regret we have already reached a situation in which the radio and transistor are looked upon as essential accoutrements even within ultra-orthodox circles that are considered devoted to biblical learning." Further on the author devotes a special chapter to technical innovations in the realm of electro-acoustical equipment and quotes a new rabbinical proscription. But even before this section, there is a reference to Rabbi Diskin and Rabbi Sonnenfeld, who headed orthodox Jewry earlier in the century. They decreed that the radio, phonograph, and tape-recorder are in the same category as musical instruments, since they too emit music. As both prohibitions and sanctions must have the support of traditional law, the author cites numerous scriptural statutes as well as the writings of renowned rabbinical authorities. The following quotations are of significant relevance here:

"When the Temple was destroyed it was decreed not to play any instrument of music or sing any songs and all who sing songs are forbidden to be joyful and it is forbidden to let them be heard because of the destruction, as written: 'The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music.' (Lam. 5:14) and song is forbidden to cross the lips unless it is in praise of the Almighty." This prohibition, based on the end of the talmudic *Soṭah*, Maimonides, and all the interpreters of the traditional law, is recorded in Eliezer Azikri (1601). The author continues with a quotation from *Yosef Omets* (1929) by Rabbi Joseph Han-Nordlingen (d. 1637):¹⁴

"And above all, musical instruments are forbidden at feasts; they are prohibited even if there is no feast." "Hence," pursues the anonymous author, "how important it seems to me to absolutely forbid the rich to hire one who knows how to play an instrument to teach their daughters, as this is for no purpose other than to give them pleasure and make them haughty." The first quotation, which is not the only one of its kind in this collection of religious ordinances, stresses the motivating force behind the prohibition—mourning for the destruction of the Temple. Indeed, this is the subject of the first chapter, which covers several pages. The mourning must be real and perpetual, apparent even in circumstances calling for joy such as that evoked by a bridal celebration. At all times one must share in Israel's sorrow and never forget that the divine presence (*Shekhinah*) has been exiled from the land. Throughout the discussion music in all forms is identified with joy—the very antithesis of grief. Joy

and music are for the future, for the time of total redemption, as in the passage "Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing" (Ps. 126:2).

This stern approach conflicts with the basic outlook of Hasidism which particularly stressed joy in worship of God and ecstasy induced by song and dance. The following passage castigates proponents of the Hasidic view:

How very bad, how unbearable is the action of those men or women who assemble together to bask in the joy of friendship on the departure of the Sabbath [the reference is to the *melaveh malkah*, the festive singing that accompanies the departure of the Sabbath]¹⁵ and on all the other nights. [This is] particularly [so] in winter when there is much vain joy and music and drinking and playing and amorous singing—and alien songs are sung and woe be to them for surely their joy will turn to sorrow, if not in this world then in the world to come, if they will not give thought to repentance. . . .

And in Jerusalem the prohibitions are all infinitely harsher because the [Temple's] destruction is before the eyes of the people of Jerusalem and woe to one whose dead lies before him.

Those who violate these prohibitions are warned of severe punishment either in this world or in the world to come. This type of literature makes extensive use of passages from the Gemara that deal with punishment. Two such passages from the tractate *Soṭah*, "The ear that hears song will be torn off" and "Song in the house, desolation in the house," are quoted time and again to support traditionally grounded opposition to the use of music.

Thus we find that throughout the centuries, mourning over the destruction of the Temple is referred to as a factor of prime importance in proscribing musical instruments of all sorts. This prohibition is never violated in the framework of synagogue ritual, with the exception of synagogues belonging to the Reform movement. It is less strictly observed and sometimes completely ignored when certain religious elements are involved in events taking place in homes or even in synagogues on weekdays or at the close of the Sabbath.

The Yemenite community has been consistent in its refusal to use musical instruments; to accompany dancing on festive occasions Yemenite Jews beat on oil cans and copper trays which are not looked upon as instruments. More recently a variety of drums have been introduced into their celebrations, but the Yemenite Jews still refuse to permit the use of melodic instruments. In this case, of course, there is no absolute proof that the destruction of the Temple is the reason for avoiding the use of such instruments. Many Islamic theologians and religious authorities have forbidden the playing of instruments. There are places where this prohibition has been violated, but in Yemen it seems to have been strictly observed. We know definitely, however, that no type of instrumental music was popular enough there to either directly or indirectly influence the Yemenite Jews, or to be used by them as a model.

With this one exception, however, no Jewish community in the Diaspora has refrained from hiring musicians—whether Jewish or not—to add to the festivities on joyous occasions. To some extent these lapses have been carefully ignored, but from time to time rabbinical authorities have let their objection to the use of musical instruments be heard. An early document on this subject is the response of Rabbi Hai Gaon to the Jews of Gabes in Tunisia in which he came out explicitly against secular love songs, songs extolling an individual, etc.¹⁶

Music as a Force Evoking Joy

Although mourning over the destruction of the Temple is cited as a reason for refraining from the use of music or any of its related arts, in actual fact this has nothing to do with the realm of music. Had the Temple not been destroyed, can we assume that the problem would not have arisen? On the surface, that would seem to be so, but the matter is actually much more complicated. Another set of rationales enters into the discussion about forbidding or permitting music. For example, the passage quoted above from *El gil ka'ammim*, leans toward value judgment, tending to discuss the problem in accordance with criteria applicable to the inherent nature and influential power of music. In the long run this value judgment leads to divergent, even conflicting, positions that run the entire gamut of possibilities—from permitting all music to forbidding all music. In the latter case music has become identified with the concept of joy which—broadly construed—can include thoughtlessness, distraction, and entertainment in the deprecatory sense associated with taverns, drinking parties, etc. These polarized positions are expressed in the two quotations that follow, the first from *El gil ka'ammim*, the second from the great Hasidic figure Rabbi Nachman of Breslav.

A person who fears the word of the Almighty shares the sorrow of Israel and is pained because the Divine Spirit has, so to speak, been sent into exile. How can it be gratifying and enjoyable for him to amuse himself with the pleasure of hearing the sound of music? For in truth, we have been greatly impoverished and none amongst us knows what we lack and what we have lost and what we have caused in the evil world and what the exile of the Divine Spirit means and the extent of its sorrow and the sorrow of those above and below; for this all the anguished will grieve. . . . Indeed, it is good that we remain close to the hearth weeping and moaning like a woman over the spouse of her youth, like a lone mourner; perhaps the Lord will look down and pity his people and again gladden us as the groom gladdens the bride and then we shall be happy and joyful. (*El gil Ka'ammim*, pp. 11–15)

Such advocacy of unremitting gloom and mourning until the day of redemption is very far from the Hasidic approach that in essence preaches worshipping God with joy and believes in a close connection between music and spiritual uplift, mystical ecstasy, and “restoration” of the world. In the teachings of R. Nachman of Breslav, for

example, music fills a central and very important role. R. Nachman (1772–1870), whose followers are known as the Breslav Hasidim, was one of the most outstanding and original thinkers of the Hasidic movement. A writer of tales, he was also known for his special attitude to and profound interest in music as part of ritual worship. As he perceived it (1951, pp. 229, 272), music brings a person nearer to serving the Almighty and to the joyful experience of aspiring to ecstatic fulfillment: “By means of song you will achieve joy and ecstasy”; “One who is fearful will allay his fears with songs of joy”; “And faith too has its own special songs.” Sadness, on the other hand, puts distance between man and his God, which coincides with the words of the Zohar:

For indeed we see that the Divinity is not present in a place of sadness but in a place in which there is joy. Where there is no joy, the Divinity does not rest. And it is written: “But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him” [2 Kings 3:25]. How else do we know that the Divine Spirit is not present in the abode of sadness? From the story of Jacob who was deserted by the Divine Spirit because he was sad about Joseph, and the moment the news of Joseph brought him joy: “The spirit of Jacob their father revived” [Gen. 45:27].

According to this approach, then, only joy brings one close to the Almighty, and the joy inherent in the sound of music can improve the world. Moreover, sadness is identified with wailing, which emanates from evil. R. Nachman writes: “Thus most of the evil make mournful, wailing music for they are a motly multitude and the mother of this teeming multitude is Lilith [a legendary figure considered one of the devil’s minions. The Talmud describes Lilith as a long-haired seductress]. She wails constantly and therefore their music is baleful.” It is important to note that according to R. Nachman, in Breslav they introduced “the custom of applauding during prayers and dancing with joy every day after prayers; for by dancing and clapping hands the Masters of Judges (Prosecutors) [*dayyanim*] are appeased.”

The spirit here is altogether different from the wrathful temper of *El gil ka'ammim*. In this regard it is very interesting to trace the similarity of the Hasidic approach to that of some of the Oriental rabbis. Rabbi Mordechai Abadi, a poet and musician who lived in Aleppo, Syria in the nineteenth century, writes in the chapter “The Virtue of Song” included in his book *Miqra Qodesh* (1873, p. 28): “Through the tunes you intone you rouse Almighty God to look upon this people for whom you make music and see how enslaved it is. And indeed the poets who came before us, and those of our own day, would take alien melodies and sanctify them by turning them into songs [in praise of] the Lord.”¹⁷

The Concept of Music in Religious Doctrine

The taste and intellectual proclivities of the members of any given society are reflected in music, one of the most fundamental attributes of a culture. Religious

doctrine, too, takes cognizance of music's pivotal role and therefore does not conceive of it as functioning in some separate sphere in conformity with exclusive criteria; nor are musicians free to do as they please. Thus religious music is an integral part of the general fabric of theological thought and is contingent on the meaning given by the religious authorities to the way people looks upon themselves and their place and purpose in the universe. That being the case, it is important to view attitudes to music in their broadest context and to examine them as part and parcel of the basic concepts of religious doctrine. In a way, the doctrine thereby becomes both guideline and critic of the faith and actions of those who have bound their destiny to it. Basic doctrinal tenets, however, do not always offer a clear, unequivocal approach to the concept of music, and elucidation must be sought in the comments of recognized interpretive authorities.

From the foregoing sections of this chapter it is quite clear that there is tension and often friction between musical activity and the proponents of religious doctrinal laws. Does this mean that there may be a conflict of values and interests between musical concepts and basic doctrinal concepts? The point of departure for an analysis of the tension seems to lie in the powerful influence wielded by music. Recognizing music's effective role in daily life, the sources stress its tremendous, overwhelming power. This almost magical power can evoke sensual reactions, can move people so intensely that they lose themselves in ecstasy, cannot think rationally, and abandon themselves to great emotional excitement. A state of such trance-like intoxication of the senses certainly can be construed as conflicting with purposeful, clear-headed worship.

On page 47 of *El gil ka'ammim* the anonymous author writes:

The very basis of Hasidism and the root of pure worship is to confirm a man's obligation to the world around him. . . . And this is what our sages of blessed memory have taught us: that man was created only to take pleasure in God and to enjoy the glory of his Divine Presence, which is the true pleasure and the greatest of all available delights. The more so in that by their very nature song and gaiety are prohibited in principle and lead to all sorts of vain delusions, and through them one is swept away with the noisy, unruly multitude by meaningless loud sounds and the clanging of cymbals [a play on the words of the 150th Psalm "Praise him with the loud-sounding cymbals; Praise him with the clanging cymbals"]. [All this is] for the sole purpose of enjoying gaiety and the pleasures of the flesh—following the maxim "eat, drink . . . for tomorrow we will die," taking no stock of the purpose of life or of our precious time like the hyena who emits musical sounds by means of which it attracts humans to its lair, where, as is known, it traps and devours them.

From this passage we learn that:

1. Music distracts the mind from concentrating on the one important thing, that is, on prayer and a man's obligation in this world (as implied in "The very basis of Hasidism and the root of pure worship").

2. Music evokes sensual feelings of enjoyment that conflict with true pleasure, which is essentially intellectual (as implied in "to take pleasure in God and the glory of his Divine Presence").

3. The outcome of sensual pleasures is debauchery and thoughtlessness.

4. The magic spell is exemplified by the hyena who traps his victim in his lair.

5. The prohibition itself is the essence of the matter as in the statement: "by their very nature song and gaiety are prohibited in principle." That is to say, the prohibition against song and gaiety being an inseparable part of the traditional law, the issue is not open to argument at all. Here the author cites Maimonides, who maintained that music is prohibited not because of the destruction of the Temple, but because it can give rise to debauchery and thoughtlessness. (Maimonides's approach to music will be discussed more fully below.)

The Origin of Music According to the Homiletic Commentaries

The question of origin figures significantly in a discussion of the different ways in which music is perceived. An important debate on this issue is found in the commentaries on the stories in Genesis, particularly those connected with Jubal, "the father of all such as handle the harp and pipe" (Gen. 4:21) and his family. First of all, it should be noted that according to the *Midrash Hag-gadol* (1947, 1, p. 126),¹⁸ Jubal invented not only the two instruments explicitly mentioned but all musical instruments, and was even the originator of the art of singing. This means that he was the inventor of music as a whole, from which we derive that music is an invention of humankind and takes its place among other human inventions such as the brass and iron tools devised by Jubal's brother, Tubal-Cain. The textual proximity of music and iron leads to speculation about a possible connection between music and armaments or between the sounds of iron and of music. Various cultures are known to identify the sounds made by iron with those emitted by Satan, or, on the other hand, with the din made to keep the devil at bay.¹⁹

In the midrashic literature we find another association that is relevant here: music is associated with corruption and moral degeneracy. Ginzberg (1968, 1, pp. 79) reports that Jubal, the inventor of music, is one of the sons of Cain, who was said to have been "a leader in corrupt acts . . . and so too were his progeny." It was said of Na'ama "that she would please people by playing loudly on cymbals and lured them to worship alien gods. . . . the ministering angels mistook her wondrous beauty and were attracted, led astray and trapped." Thus according to *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* (chap. 22), with song, dance, and intoxicating drink, Cain's female progeny seduce the pure offspring of the sons of Seth, the hill-dwellers: "And when they ascended the holy mountain they plucked the strings of the harp, blew the trumpets, beat the drums, sang and danced and clapped their hands, and succeeded in seducing the 520 sons of Seth who were thereby corrupted." The result was the deluge that was meant to destroy that entire tainted generation. These commentaries linked together music,

earthly physical love, and wine. In this way, we believe, they established the basic conception that music has great seductive power and a magical influence over the senses that cannot be withstood. Belief in this occult power gave rise to the association of music with Satan, who figures prominently in Christian and Muslim literature of the Orient.

In any event, once the art of music is considered as a creation of human beings, it is perceived as embodying the hubris and insubstantiality of man. Its role is seen as irreconcilable with the fundamental moral and theological demands of a religion that proclaims the omnipotent rule of one God. The sole sovereignty of the transcendental God is challenged the moment music is seen as akin to satanic magic that enables the devil to control and direct the deeds and wishes of human beings. And when music is considered from the standpoint of its overwhelming power, it is found to have much in common with those magical powers that can effectively "force" themselves on the individual; religious elements, on the other hand, must be "served" or sought. In contrast to the forces of magic, religious forces are described as possessing the ability to guide and determine a man's fate. Hence, one who adopts the fundamentals of this view in toto necessarily arrives at the conclusion that all forms of musical expression must be rejected.

From the standpoint of actual practice, this conclusion has not been completely borne out, as cantillation has never been rejected. It remains absolutely true, however, with regard to traditional religious conceptions about music by composers who apply the same rules and aesthetic principles that govern all music written in the hope of eliciting a favorable audience reaction. The problem exists even when the sole purpose of the melody—or the composer—is to serve a chosen text, be it a prayer or any other ritual material: the many kinds of religious music offer a much broader variety of musical possibilities than only cantillation. Were this variety to be placed along an imaginary line, at one end we would find simple, spontaneous works, very close to declamations, and at the other, creations so sophisticated as to be almost indistinguishable from art music. The very simple type of work is not generally considered worthy of inclusion in the concept of music. Indeed, it is variously described as readings, recitations, etc. Today music scholars ordinarily use the term "cantillation" to distinguish this type from more complex, organized musical compositions. Some consider cantillation as the most typical, most unadulterated expression of religious music. Moreover, as stated, in view of the fact that the musical element of cantillation is secondary and is intended to serve the text, it is accepted—either openly or tacitly—even by the most extreme opponents of music.

Conceptual Tenets as Mirrored in Reality

Essentially, the most extreme viewpoint has been held only by a minority and therefore has not had the field all to itself. There have been other conceptions, above

all the approach epitomized by the world of the Kabbalah, which through the years has profoundly influenced the thinking of many people. This approach is based on belief in the tremendous power of music and its far-reaching effect on the human spirit. As against those who attribute the invention of music to Jubal, the Kabbalists maintain that music stems from more than one source and its influence is multifaceted. Because of the importance of this view and the role it has played in the development and enrichment of music, chapter 6 will be devoted to it.

A degree of flexibility was first manifested when paraliturgical music is used outside the synagogue to enhance joyous family events and holidays such as Purim, the Passover week, Sukkot—was greeted with toleration. Reality, in these cases, seems to have been stronger than ideology; people felt they should forget, even if only for a short time, the drabness and afflictions of the dispersion and on happy occasions released their pent-up tensions. Traditional religious texts were expanded to include secular songs and even instrumental music. In an early text about music, R. Hayya b. Sherira Gaon (939–1038) of Pumbedita was asked why "it was usual here in the homes of the bride and groom to play drums and dance and invite non-Jews²⁰ who bring happiness with the harp, violin, and organ [*nevel*, *kinnor*, and *'uggav*—biblical names for instruments that were popular during the writer's time]; whether it is permitted or forbidden, and whether or not it matters which instrument is used."²¹ The Gaon answers by forbidding secular love songs, and allowing laudations in honor of God, forbidding women to sing and dance in male society, and permitting only drums. The substance of this responsum was quoted by one of the greatest traditional legal scholars, R. Yitshaq al-Fasi (1013–1103) in his authoritative talmudic compendium. In a response to a question regarding the misbehavior of a cantor (1884, no. 281), al-Fasi went so far as to equate the song of Ishmael (i.e., Muslims) with obscene speech, and rules that if the cantor takes any part in such singing at feasts and festivities he is to be dismissed and is not to be permitted to pass before the Holy Ark. And yet, despite this extreme view, expressed in many other sources as well, it emerges that outside of the synagogue the prohibition against music was not actually put into practice. The people felt the need to enhance their festive occasions with song and music—and created facts that were hard to ignore. This situation may well have been the cause of the profusion of commentaries and variety of practical approaches suggested. Such commentaries encompass a number of all-inclusive viewpoints, as discussed in detail below.

Singing Inside and Outside the Synagogue

A fundamental distinction is drawn between songs sung in the synagogue and those sung outside it. The latter can be divided into two subcategories: the first is songs with religious content—paraliturgical songs—as against general festive songs; the second is songs with instrumental accompaniment and those without. In both cases, whether the general festive songs have instrumental accompaniment or not,

there is disagreement indirectly touching on the overall question of the use of secular, particularly art, music.

Songs in Hebrew: With respect to questions of text, it is obvious and generally agreed that songs inside the synagogue must be sung in Hebrew. From the answer given by Rabbi Hayya Gaon and from the comments of many others, it appears that theoretically the same applies to songs sung outside the synagogue, although in reality, this is not so. But is it enough for the words to be in the holy language for a song to be considered permissible? Certainly not. The content of the text too must be appropriate in that it must clearly serve religious purposes.

What the Melody Expresses

Discussions of this aspect are extremely rare. First of all, it is important to clarify the associations connected with the early role of song. They involve the proscription of two main types: love songs and prayer tunes used specifically for non-Jewish religious ritual: "tunes played for idolatrous worship." The same prohibition pertains to letting Israel's religious melodies be heard by non-Jews. *Sefer Hasidim* (The book of the pious) (ed. 1924) by Judah he-Hasid (died in 1217), founder and leader of Ashkenazic Hasidism, states that just as one may not let music that is used for idolatrous worship be played before the Lord Almighty, so it is forbidden to perform a pleasing Jewish song before a non-Jewish priest, as he might incorporate it into his own ritual. As against Rabbi Judah he-Hasid's opinion, another wise scholar, Rabbi Israel Moshe Hazzan (1886) who lived in the nineteenth century, and served in Jerusalem's High Religious Court, maintained that alien music is permitted, even if it is used in non-Jewish houses of worship: "Is it conceivable that because profligate fools brought them into the house of worship, we are forbidden [to use] something that we instinctively approve?" The practice of learned cantors of his time in the city of Smyrna²² gave support to his basic position that an attractive melody should not be prohibited just because non-Jews use it as part of their ritual.

And I testify by heaven and earth that when I was in Smyrna, the great city of scholars and mystics, I saw some of the outstanding religious authorities who were also great creators of the science of music, headed by the wonderful Rabbi Abraham Ha-Cohen Ariash of blessed memory, who secretly used to go (behind the screen) in the Christian church on their holy days to learn the special melodies from them and to adapt them to the High Holiday prayers which require great humility. And from those same melodies they would arrange the most remarkable blessings and holy prayers, and it is clear from this that the tune is not of the essence, but the sacred words. There is a decisive argument that this is so for otherwise from whence would our pleasing tunes and voices come, since we have forgotten the songs of David and the songs of the Levites on the podium and, as is written: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" Wherever Israel was dispersed we learned the music of the countries in which we settled. And in the Land of Israel and in the Arab coun-

tries the melodies of the prayers and blessings and all the dedications are in accordance with the Arab tunes and in Turkey and Turkish tunes, and in Edom [countries under Christendom] in accordance with the voices of Edom. And who can deny that which can be demonstrated? Is it to be said that all of Israel erred, heaven forbid, by taking the utmost care to ensure that the language for serving and praising the Almighty, blessed be He, should be the holy language?" (1886, no. 10, fol. 4)

The rabbi's comment with respect to adapting melodies from the Christian church to the High Holiday prayers is most interesting. He is undoubtedly referring to the neo-Byzantine style that crystallized in the nineteenth century and acquired a dominant position in the Greek church.²³ It is also of particular interest to note that the erudite rabbi expresses rather bold ideas about the identity and sources of Jewish music, which were discussed in our first chapter.

Rabbi Hazzan's words as quoted above seem to supplement and support the views on this issue expressed by Rabbi Obadia Yosef, former Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel, and at present the spiritual leader of the Sephardi Orthodox Party *Shas*, in his *Responsa* (1976, 6, pp. 18–21):

"I have been asked if it is permissible for the cantor to graft the melody of a sensual secular song on to the blessings and commemorative or other prayers such as 'All things that live and breathe . . . ' or whether a distinction must be drawn between the holy and the mundane. To the extent that approval is implicit, is it permissible to modify the text to fit the melody?" In the learned answer given by Rabbi Yosef, he makes an interesting distinction between *manginah* (melody) and *qol* (voice), which is interpreted as melody and text combined. The melody in and of itself is something abstract, or as the rabbi says: "a mere melody in which there is nothing tangible." Only the text makes it concrete and meaningful. Moreover, removing the melody from its original context is likened to the performance of a good deed (*mitsvah*): "and on the contrary, . . . it is a *mitsvah* to do so, and implies sanctification of God's name in that something has been transferred from the realm of the profane to the realm of the sacred"—a concept touched on above in connection with aspects of Hasidic ideology.

As Rabbi Yosef sees it, the transfer gives the melody a new countenance but only on condition that "the cantor chooses the songs . . . out of the purest motives, to praise and sing to the Lord, blessed be He. . . . The reference here is to the deepest inner motives, for the cantor who is glad at heart that he has been privileged to praise and thank the Almighty in a fine, pleasing voice and whose joy is awe-inspired, will be blessed. A fine, pleasant voice is an essential requirement for one who stands before the Ark of the Torah . . . but if it is his [the cantor's] intention that the congregation acclaim him personally for his beautiful voice, why, that is reprehensible."

This suggests that such musical activity is much closer in spirit to cantillation than to art music. Convincing evidence to that effect can be found in the part of the answer that deals with increasing the number of measures or going beyond the text of

the prayer by introducing melodic passages and extraneous ornamentation for the sole purpose of embellishment. The rabbi warns against such practices and against excessive lengthening of bars, for fear that the word will lose its meaning, because it is "the foolish way of cantors who, to give their voices the opportunity to be heard, break every word into tiny fragments, so that not the word but the voice is heard, etc."

In conclusion, the rabbi refers to the extremely important musical issue of adapting borrowed tunes to texts. Such adaptation must be done to suit the text rather than the music: "not according to the rhythm of the secular tune; the cantors contort the meaning of a verse, put the accent on the ultimate syllable, whereas it should be on the penultimate . . . and these are boorish inversions, the way fools sing; they transform the words of the living God and subordinate the prayers and blessings to a secular tune." The borrowed tune, then, is redeemed and endowed with new life both by subordinating it to the new words and by its musical content and structure.

Musical Instruments

It seems that with respect to instruments, particularly in the framework of synagogue music, the most severe prohibitions have always prevailed. They have been strictly observed in all synagogues except those belonging to the Reform and Liberal trends. The only instrument that has always been used in all congregations is the shofar—the ram's horn, blown during the High Holiday prayers. The use of the shofar clearly contains vestiges of a magical rite, as has been explained in chapter 2. Nonconformist movements emerged during the eighteenth century and prospered in Amsterdam's Portuguese-Jewish community, in the four communities of southern France—Carpentras, Avignon, Cavaillon, and L'isle de Sorgue—as well as in northern Italy. In all these communities general art music invaded the synagogue ritual and compositions in contemporary style were even commissioned for certain Hebrew texts.²⁴ During the nineteenth century the Reform movement developed in central and western Europe and then moved on to various centers in the United States. Among other things, this movement introduced the organ and the mixed male and female choir into the synagogue.

In almost all literature dealing with musical instruments in the synagogue, the prohibition was applied first and foremost to those used for performing art music, particularly string instruments. The poet and philosopher R. Mosheh Ibn Ezra (Spain, circa 1055–1135) discussed the use of musical instruments in his *Book of the Garden* (*Kitāb al-ḥadīqa*) which is devoted in the main to philological, philosophical, and theological interpretations and comments evoked by the metaphors in the biblical books. With respect to instruments he wrote:

"Not all musical instruments are capable of influencing the rational mind. Only those among them that are convex and have strings (similar to the lute) are likely to

inspire the soul. All the other instruments are used for sundry joyous occasions as has been told about the Ark of God in 1 Chron. 13:8: 'And David and all Israel played before God with all their might; even with songs, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with trumpets' (Shiloah, 1982). Ibn Ezra would seem to be making a distinction between art music and folk music. The convex instruments which move the listener to philosophical inspiration are those that resemble the 'ūd, the consummate art instrument.

A similar view with respect to the role of string instruments is found in commentaries on Plato's *Republic* by the Spanish Arab Ibn Rushd Averroës (1126–98), one of the greatest of the Islamic philosophers in Spain. The original commentary has been lost but its Hebrew translation, rendered in the thirteenth century by Shmuel ben-Yehuda of Marseille, is still extant. Ibn Rushd says (with respect to what Islamic culture prohibits or permits, "the *mizmār* [an instrument similar to the oboe, used in folk music] is forbidden, the 'ūd and *mi'zafa* [two important string instruments used for art music] are permitted" (Adler 1975, pp. 102–4).

These two citations represent a divergent view and can be traced back to Greek philosophy, particularly to Plato. Although not widely accepted, they are further evidence of the great variety of opinions that have existed.

Rabbi Moses b. Maimon Maimonides (1135–1204), one of the major figures of rabbinical-legal literature, lived and worked in Spain almost at the same time and in the same cultural milieu that nurtured the two works referred to above. Among many other things, he bequeathed to future generations, including our own, an important discussion about music that has relevance for all deliberations on the subject. The Jews of Aleppo asked him if it is permissible to listen to regional Arabic strophic songs (*muwashshahāt*) accompanied by a reed-pipe instrument (*zamar*); his answer reveals his approach.²⁵ He makes the instrument his point of departure, saying that it must be judged as all other instruments, and all music meant for amusement is absolutely forbidden. Further on he systematically summarizes the major prohibitions in ascending order of severity:

1. Listening a song with a secular text, whether it be in Hebrew or Arabic;
2. Listening to a song that is accompanied by an instrument;
3. Listening to a song whose content includes obscene language;
4. Listening to a string instrument;
5. Listening to passages played on such instruments while drinking wine; and then the most severe transgression:
6. Listening to singing and playing of a woman²⁶

All these prohibitions are meant to help Israel be a "holy nation," as is written. And yet, Maimonides's answer does not mean a total prohibition of music, but rather forbids various types of secular music. The ultra-orthodox author of the anonymous work that we quoted at length earlier in this chapter bases his extreme approach on his interpretation of what Maimonides wrote in a letter. He says that in his answer Maimonides "did not explain the prohibition of song as due to the destruction of the

Temple, but to the very essence of the song which is reprehensible and which he very much despises, as whatever is not in worship of the Lord, blessed be He, leads one to debauchery and thoughtlessness" (*El gil ka 'ammim*, p. 42).

Thus we find that the ideological stance of the rabbinical authorities toward music derived from two fundamentals: first, from their basic view of music in principle and second, from the special circumstances incurred by the destruction of the Temple and life in foreign lands during the prolonged dispersion. Neither a uniform nor an unequivocal opinion prevails with respect to either of these fundamentals. The controversy can be summarized as follows:

- Some maintain that until the final redemption, the Jewish believer must devote himself at all times to mourning for the Temple. Consequently the use of musical instruments and organized festive song must be avoided in the house of worship.

- Others maintain that music must be avoided as it is identified with pleasure, or at least is symbolic of the normal life that was destroyed when the nation was dispersed.

- Certain people have reservations about the inherent nature of music. They claim that as a result of its power, it elicits a variety of negative manifestations: it affects the listeners' equilibrium and undermines their ability to keep all their actions under the strictest control; it distracts thoughts from study of the prayers, etc.; it causes intoxicating sensual emotions, which are irreconcilable with the basic demand to be a *goy qadosh* (holy nation).

- Some prohibit the use of music out of the desire to prevent "copying" the actions and melodies of the non-Jews.

- One type of religious song, cantillation, has been left out of the argument between the protagonists and antagonists of music in the ritual framework. This type will be dealt with at length in the next chapter.

4

Cantillation

The prime importance of cantillation is the role it plays in enhancing the words of the prayers as well as those of other basic texts not included in the liturgy. We have already noted the general consensus to the effect that cantillation is so essentially different from singing and most forms of musical activity that even its performers do not always consider it music. The recurrent use of terms such as declamation, reading, recitation, to indicate this type of presentation, shows clearly that the text takes precedence over the melody. Prior to the early days of the twentieth century, "recitative" and "psalmody" were the terms usually used, which means that the word cantillation is relatively new. It apparently is derived from the Italian *cantillare* or *cantilenare*—to murmur, hum, declaim in a tensed voice—a kind of restrained vocalizing that falls somewhere between actual singing and modulated declamation.

In effect cantillation can be defined as having a simpler, freer structure than ordinary vocal music, closer to solemn declamation than to structured, organized singing. Although on occasion this music may be ornamented with rich vocalizations, its form and flow are subordinated to the text and it is clearly adapted to the syntax and punctuation, the natural rhythm and melodic nature of the text being sung. Thus in this type of presentation, the word has absolute priority. Nevertheless, unlike declamation in which the modulations of the tensed voice are not restricted to precise pitch and melodic or rhythmic organization, there is an obvious musical component in cantillation that makes its own contribution and thereby reinforces the message of the text.

The basic principles of cantillation are universal, although their application reflects unique local attributes as expressed in language and intonation, as well as in the temperament and mores of a given population. Cantillation is primarily, but not exclusively, associated with religious rites. It may be used, for example, to foster