

Gestures of the Soul

The Prayer Chant of the East-European Jews

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Abstract: The basic style of East-European Jewish (East-Ashkenazic) prayer chant (*davenen*), even when it might seem to be simple on paper, in transcription, has a complex and unique system of micro-structure. This micro-structure, which is evident in subtleties of rhythm and melody, voice quality, form, techniques of variation and ornamentation, is inventive and daring, and creates a compelling aesthetic and spiritual effect in the auditory experience. The present article discusses the question of how this creative compositional practice might have evolved. The article claims that the uniqueness of *davenen* results from the fact that children begin learning this “art” at a very early age, before they are able to speak and conceptualize the phenomena of the surrounding world. With *davenen*, a spontaneously felt *language before language* is learnt: a language in which words and melodies, rhythms and musical gestures and effects, emotions and fantasies and associations are merged into one whole. As a result, in the realization of prayer chant, even in the case of professional prayer leaders, originality and tradition, copying and fantasy occur together in a continual fusion of memory and forgetfulness. This article discusses Eastern European Jewish prayer chant and its learning process on the basis of its author’s decades of fieldwork and of literature and memoirs from before WWII.

Keywords: prayer chant, East-European Jews, *davenen*, *lernen*

Roughly fifteen years ago, I received a grant to write a book explaining the structure of the traditional East-European Jewish prayer chant. No sooner had I begun the work than I realized that I wouldn’t be able to complete it in the way I had originally thought. I experienced a mental block which lasted throughout my tenure. I felt that in producing a clever scholarly book, I would be betraying the

people who transmitted this music to me, and in turn, I would betray the music itself. When, years later, I was presented with another opportunity, I realized that to write about this culture necessitated inventing a new genre. This genre was between ethnography, poetry, story-telling and intellectual exploration. The result, a memoir-novel in poetic prose, explains the fruits of my research. It is comprehensive – containing the ethnographic content as well as my findings regarding the systems of the musical structure – but this knowledge is transmitted in the form of creative writing.¹

In this essay, I attempt to explain one aspect of the existential context which created East-Ashkenazic prayer chant, and through this description, elucidate why the analysis of these sounds will remain eternally obscure, confused and contradictory, and why, as a result of this, I needed to write a book about this music in the genre of *belles lettres*.

The ideas presented here were formed throughout the course of my research, conducted over more than three decades, amongst the traditional East-Ashkenazic communities (the Jews of Eastern Europe). I recorded dozens of hours of prayer chant, complete services, and discussed aspects of life and music with prayer leaders and members of the community. I complemented the “fieldwork” with written memoirs, literary works, scholarly studies, musical notations and recorded material.²

The most meaningful source for understanding worldviews and attitudes was through encounters with the people who remembered and continued the tradition. During the long hours spent with them, I realized that it was not the professional manifestations – the singing of the *hazzan*, cantor and the prayer leader (*ba'al tefillah*, *sheliach tsibbur*) – but the practice of the simple people that held the key to the understanding of East-Ashkenazic prayer chant. The following discussion focuses on this basic layer. I will not address the melodic system of the prayer leader (the so called *nusah tefillah*), nor the art of the cantor, apart from the fact that, as I will explain, the practice of the simple people provides the foundation for these more complex musical expressions as well.

I ask the reader to keep in mind that whenever words like “Jewish prayer,” “prayer,” or “Jews” occur in this essay, they refer exclusively to *the non-professional practice within the traditional East-Ashkenazic milieu at the beginning of the 20th century* (representing, in this form, probably at least a century and a half

1. Judit NIRAN FRIGYESI, *Writing on Water – The Sounds of Jewish Prayer* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2018), first published in Hungarian as Judit NIRAN, *Jelek a vízen* (Budapest: Libri, 2014).

2. A large selection of my fieldwork recordings (without the interviews) can be found in the National Sound Archive of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem and in the Sound Archive of the Institute for Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. A considerable body of the interviews was published in my book cited in the previous note. For my analyses and further information, see <<https://music.biu.ac.il/en/frigyesi>> (accessed 29 March 2019).

of practice). This practice was different – at times slightly, other times radically – from the present-day main stream Ashkenazic practices with which some readers might be familiar.³

1. *Davenen* and *Lernen*

It is often said that the Jews are the “people of the book.” On the basis of my research of Eastern Ashkenazic culture, I would propose that Jews are the people of “melodic reading of sacred texts.” In visual representations, the image of Jews bending over books and gazing at letters is a recurring theme.⁴ For those familiar with this tradition, this image evokes sound – the sound of the words emitted from the person whose face we see immersed in thoughts.

The *Shema*,⁵ the fundamental prayer of the Jewish faith, central to every morning and evening service, requires the believer to repeat the religious teachings

3. The culture of pre-WWII prayer chant could have been found in many small synagogues for decades after the war, and it is likely to exist today among some Hassidic communities, and perhaps also sporadically elsewhere. However, the mainstream non-hassidic Ashkenazic Orthodox practice had significantly changed already by the 1970s. It largely preserved the melodies, but developed a new orientation regarding issues such as melodic variation, voice quality, transmission, the role of the individual, improvisation, the *hazzan*, and most importantly, the songs. It is not possible to discuss here the reasons for the near disappearance of the pre-WWII practice as an aesthetic entity, although, clearly, its denouement was necessitated by the ideological-social transformation that took place in the Jewish community at large. See Haym SOLOVEITCHIK, “Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” *Tradition* 28/4 (Summer 1994), 64–130.

4. From among the many examples, it is worth mentioning the paintings of Isidor Kaufmann (1853–1921) and Lazar Krestin (1836–1938), for instance Kaufman’s “Rabbi and student,” and “Yom Kippur.” Mark (Moishe) Chagall’s (1887–1985) many paintings reflect this practice, such as “Praying Jew” (1914 and 1923). A nineteenth-century painting documents a woman and girls immersed in the recitation of prayer: Moritz Daniel Oppenheim, “Henoch Enters while Mine says the Hallel Prayers with Two Young Girls” (1876). See also photos of Avrohom Tsvi Erbst in the chapter “Only Woods...” in *Writing on Water*.

5. The prayer *Shema* is the encapsulation of the monotheistic belief: “Hear, O Israel: Hashem is our God, Hashem, the one and Only.” Deuteronomy (Hebrew: Devarim) 6,4–9. The above translation comes from the ArtScroll edition, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1984. In this translation “Hashem” means “The Name,” which is one substitute for the unpronounceable name of the Almighty, normally used when the text appears outside of liturgical or other sacred context. It is also worth noting that the first word of the above sentence, “hearing”/“listening” also means “listening to a voice” – “listening to a voice of teaching” – understanding and awareness. In this article, I refer to texts from the Tanakh (the original Hebrew of the Christian Bible’s “Old Testament”), which contains the Torah (in the Christian Bible: “Five Books of Moses” or “Mosaic Books”), and to prayer texts (many of which originate in the Tanakh). Torah means teaching. Besides prayer texts and/or texts from the Tanakh, I will refer to texts from the Babylonian Talmud (in Hebrew: Talmud Bavli). All texts referred to in this article can be found in their original Hebrew or Aramaic versions together with English translation: <<https://www.sefaria.org>> (accessed 29 March 2019). The *Shema* should be searched at sefaria: Tanakh/Torah/Deuteronomy.

6. ArtScroll translation: “Teach them thoroughly to your children and speak of them while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise.” Sefaria translation: “Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up.” See <<https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.6.7?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>> (accessed 29 March 2019). These two translations signal the difficulty with the translation of Hebrew sacred texts. Here, in particular, the word “veshinantam” is difficult to translate: it means repetition, teaching as an intellectual process, but in this specific context, it also means repetition/teaching as done with the purpose of having emotional/spiritual/life changing effect (“impress”).

continuously.⁶ This uniquely important text is both prayer and teaching, and one fundamental aspect of its meaning is that intellect, intention and feeling are inseparable.⁷ Eastern European Jews rendered this idea the governing principle of daily life. Reading sacred texts was not merely a religious activity. It was a surrounding – an enwrapping and embracing sound-space full of meaning and feeling.

Traditional Jews were reciting the sacred texts continually: they were either *lernen* (לערנען), Yiddish for learning, or *davenen* (דאווענען), praying.⁸ The idea is that *lernen* and *davenen* should never stop. The perpetuity of melodic recitation was entrusted with the power to evoke and realize spirituality; this was the “Jewish way” of piety.⁹ Jenő Roth explained:

This is how people in my village prayed, because we had a traditional and deeply religious community. People prayed with devotion. No, not devotion, that’s the wrong word, it’s not devotion like in church. With us, there is no such thing where you just stand and stand and say nothing, just meditate in

7. Artscroll translation: “You shall love HASHEM, your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your resources. Let these matters that I command you today be upon your heart.” Sefaria translation: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all you soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day.” See <<https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.6.7?lang=bi&with=all&lang=en>> (accessed 29 March 2019). Similar to the case of the note above, even several translations cannot grasp the meaning of these lines. In the text of the Tanakh and the prayers, the meaning of the words rests with their evocative power. In the above sentence, heart, soul, emotional–mental resources, “might,” willingness, intention are superposed and expressed with three words, each of which holds complex ideas and overlaps with one another.

8. There is surprisingly little literature on the spiritual meaning and structure of the melodies of *lernen* and *davenen*. The origin of the word of *davenen* is unknown. See Judah A. JOFFE, “The Etymology of ‘Davenen’ and ‘Katoves’,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 28 (1959), 77–92; and the popular but informative site: <http://menachemmendel.net/blog/the-etymology-of-davenen/> (accessed 2 February 2019). Samuel Heilman discussed prayer practices extensively in terms of their social meanings in his *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); his *The People of the Book: Drama, Fellowship and Religion* (Abingdon etc.: Routledge, 2017) and “*Lernen* versus Learning, *Davenen* versus Prayer: An Ethnographic Analysis of how Orthodox Jews Define Themselves,” <<https://thetorah.com/lernen-davenen-and-identifying-orthodox/>> (accessed 28 March 2019). There are numerous accounts of *lernen* tunes but they mostly present sources without touching upon issues of meaning and aesthetic, e.g.: Janina WURBS, “Chanting the Alefbeyts. Notes on an Oral Tradition,” unpublished lecture at *Yiddish Music – Historically Informed Performance Practice (YHIP)* at *Yiddish Summer Weimar*, July 22, 2016; Edwin SEROUSSI, “Four Melodies for Four Questions,” *Jewish Music Research Center: Song of the Month: October 2018*, <<https://www.jewish-music.huji.ac.il/content/four-melodies-four-questions-some-new-findings>> (accessed 29 March 2019).

9. The traditional East-Ashkenazic service consists primarily of the individual’s melodic reading of the prayer texts. Each and every congregant must recite the liturgical text assigned for the service in its entirety from beginning to end, in an audible voice, according to his or her pace, style and momentary mood. The many individual and uncoordinated voices result in a heterophonic sound mass – this sound is the marker of the traditional prayer house that, in the eyes of the practitioners, makes a space “Jewish.” See my “A Kazinczy utcai zsinagóga hangtere” [The soundscape of the the Kazinczy street orthodox synagogue], in *Schöner Alfréd hetven éves – Essays in Honor of Alfréd Schöner*, ed. by János OLÁH and András ZIMA (Budapest: Gabbi-ano, 2018), 113–124; and “Music for Sacred Texts,” *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Gershon D. HUNDERT (published for the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research by New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), vol. 2, 1222–1225, <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Music/Music_for_Sacred_Texts> (accessed 29 March 2019).

silence. With us, there is always *davenen*... the whole time and it never stops this *davenen*.¹⁰

From a musical point of view, *davenen* and *lernen* constitute a “native language.” But *davenen* is more than a musical language. In this article I use terms such as “reading,” “melodic reading,” “chanting,” and “recitative” – but these words are misleading. It would be more accurate to conceptualize *davenen* and *lernen* as behavior and aesthetic orientation. They are a worldview, the manner with which the total self relates to the totality of the environment and to the cosmos. *Davenen* is a means of self-orientation in a confused and unstable environment. A Jew knows his/her place in the universe when he/she *davens* – I often heard people say: “When you *daven*, you know where you are, in front of whom you stand, and what is important in life.”¹¹

2. The Origin of *Davenen* in the Life of Children

A Mishnaic sage, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, praised the mother of Rabbi Joshua ben Chananiah because she “took his cradle to the prayer house.”¹² In the East Ashkenazic tradition, children and even infants are brought to the prayer house. They hear the sound of *davenen* before they are able to form any concept of the surrounding world. They hear their parents, grandparents and older siblings pray

10. NIRAN FRIGYESI, *Writing on Water*, 69. Jenő Roth (Chayim Binyomin Ben Ha-Rav Shmuel Rotha) was born in Hajdúnánás around the 1910s, attended the hassidic yeshiva in Bodrogkeresztúr, and studied *hazzanut* “with great masters” in Miskolc. During the Shoah, he was in various labor camps. After WWII, he settled in Budapest, lived in the 7th district and functioned as cantor in various synagogues, amongst them the Dohány, and later, the Dózsa Street synagogue. Roth was one of the few persons who had a global knowledge of virtually all styles of prayer, including hassidic styles, simple village styles and Eastern and Western cantorial styles. He was an accomplished Torah reader. He had the capacity to explain the structure of prayer tunes and differences between prayer styles. I recorded him between 1977–1980. The chapter “Silver Thread” in *Writing on Water* is devoted exclusively to him; quotations in this article can be found in their context in that chapter.

11. This sentence is a paraphrase of Pirke’ Avot, chapter 3,1: “Know whence you came, whither you go, and before whom you will give justification and reckoning.”

12. On the basis of a line in “Ethics of the Fathers” (2,8, see <https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei_Avot.2?lang=bi> [accessed 29 March 2019]), a Talmudic passage claims that Rabbi Joshua’s mother took her son’s cradle to the study room in order for him to hear the explanations of the Torah (see <https://www.sefaria.org/Jerusalem_Talmud_Yevamot.81a?lang=bi> [accessed 29 March 2019]). Until today, this passage is cited to reinforce the belief that it is beneficial for infants to listen to the *sound* of study and prayer. Traditional Jews believed that the sound of the sacred texts penetrates the soul even before birth. As with many aspect of life, this belief was often carried to the point of absurdity. Agnon’s parodied the idea in one of his stories: a husband went to the rabbi in order to get a divorce agreement, but at the moment when the rabbi was about to sign the document, his wife gave birth to a boy. After this unexpected event, the husband no longer wanted to divorce her, and furthermore, the child became a great Talmud scholar, because, in the room of the rabbi, he “had smelt the scent of the Torah” at the moment of birth. S. Y. AGNON, *The Bridal Canopy* [*Hakhnasat Kallah*], transl. by I. M. LASK (New York: Schocken, 1967), 211.

at home. *Davenen* was all encompassing; it formed an environment – a sound-universe.

When children began to babble their prayers – that is, began to *daven* – they mimicked the totality of an act, and thereby internalized something much deeper than the intellectual meaning of the words. With each word and accent, with each musical motive, they internalized sounds and rhythms, colors, emotions, intonations and gestures, feelings and sensations.

The Eastern European Jews spoke Yiddish, whereas the language of the prayers was Hebrew. Hebrew was not spoken in everyday life, and thus, for these children, the sounds of *davenen* were their sole experience with the sound of the Hebrew language. Hebrew language existed only in its melodious form in *davenen*. Neither the melodies, nor the prayer texts were taught. The prayers were simply “all around,” sung and listened to continually – their melodies and texts sounding always together in inseparable unity. When I enquired where and how he learned to *daven*, the prayer leader Jenő Roth described his experience thus:

Where did I learn [this]? Well, first of all ... I don't know because ... because I did not learn this. I've been praying since I was a small child, since the time ... I don't remember a time in my life when I wasn't saying the prayers ... The moment children began to speak, they were saying the prayers. Perhaps even before ...

And he added:

The questions you are asking, Juditka ... Such questions never ... how shall I say ... never arose. We never spoke about dates and melody and origin. Only one thing mattered: devotion, *kavvanah*, *kavunes*. The *kavunes* brought out the melody.¹³

The hesitations and pauses as Roth attempted to explain how *davenen* is learned are as meaningful as his worded response. *Davenen* predates retained memories, preceding consciousness and speech: children were *davening* before they could form words. With *davenen*, a *speech beyond speech* is learnt – a *speech before the separation of words and melody*.

In this culture, children mature alongside *davenen*, and *davenen* grows and morphs concurrently. Hearing their voices uttering the text with its sound is a deeply felt, lived-through experience of their early childhood. Initially, a child only feels some essence or idea in the prayer without grasping the words' intellectual meaning. Although gradually this primary experience shifts towards

13. NIRAN FRIGYESI, *Writing on Water*, 69.

intellectual understanding, the intellectual and the emotional remains inseparably intertwined.

How was this achieved? Avigdor Hameiri writes:

I was a year and a half when I began learning the alef-bet [the letters, reading and writing] in the *cheder* [Jewish elementary school]. And in this way, actually, I learnt speaking immediately together with reading, and in fact, together with the [reading of the] Bible. To teach a child at the age of a year and a half to write is madness. But if we consider that this madness-pedagogy achieved that millions of six-year-old children could understand, and remember word by word, ideas and sections from the world's most complex scholarly writing – because the Talmud is scholarship and not a literary work – then we come to the conclusion ... that our *cheder* education produced the masses of child prodigies in the world's human herbarium.¹⁴

Roth's recollection adds precision to Hameiri's account:

This is how it was in my village: we, the children, got up at four in the morning and went to the *cheider* to *daven*. It lasted until six. Then we ran home and had a quick breakfast, because we had to be at the public school by eight. There we studied until about noon. By one o'clock, we were back in the *cheider*. [In the *cheider*] we studied the *Taire* ... the Torah. Not prayers, because we knew those already ... The *cheider* lasted until seven in the evening, but if the material was difficult, which happened often, it did not end until nine. Then we prayed and went home.¹⁵

Another prayer leader, Márton Fóti explained:

It is difficult to describe what *Shabes* meant to us to someone who did not live through it. I often ask myself what made it so special. There was something in the air, a feeling ... I never feel this today ... Someone who has not lived through these things cannot understand ... It is impossible to explain that feeling of ... warmth ... there is no better word ... blessedness ... a feeling of blessedness. And even if many of us did not keep the religion, at least not in that rigid form, the experience remained for life. It is alive in me to this day.

But religion also had its dark side. In those days, learning meant memorizing; you had to repeat the texts until they stuck in your head. We could sing the

14. Avigdor HAMEIRI, *A daloló máglya. Ady és a Biblia. Versek, cikkek 1916-ig* [The singing torch. Ady and the Bible. Poems and essays before 1916] (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 2006), 29–30. Translation mine.

15. NIRAN FRIGYESI, *Writing on Water*, 71.

prayers perfectly already as small children, without having the faintest notion of what the words meant. There were no translations and no explanations. Don't ask questions, just pray! The words were abracadabra, they meant whatever you imagined, their sound and melody – fortunately, there were melodies. If you were clever and motivated, you figured out the meaning, first a word here and there, then fragments and sentences. Of course, we discussed it among ourselves, and actually, by the time we finished school we understood most of it ... more or less. At *cheider*, although we were only four or five years old when we went there, the focus was on the Torah, which we translated and explained. The teacher took it for granted that the rest was already behind us; you were already supposed to know the prayers.¹⁶

Intellectual understanding, text interpretation and debates were central to Eastern European Jewish life. Yet the prayers, which form the fundamental textual layer of the ritual, were acquired in a manner that bypassed the intellect. As we learn from the above remembrances, neither the texts or the melodies, nor the act of praying was taught. Children learned *davenen* spontaneously, by practice, before they learned to argue and conceptualize. For them, *davenen* was an immediate, “naked,” primeval experience. And since, as we have seen, the prayer texts and melodies were not taught later either, this primary experience remained to a large extent untouched by intellectual matters. The educational system did not necessitate students to correct in later years the images, thoughts, and phantasies – the throngs of confused and pre-speech sensations and feelings that the texts originally evoked – constructed previously as a child. The childhood encounter with *davenen* as emotion–gesture–sound complex was preserved into adulthood, retaining a fundamental attitude toward musical style and expression. This early experience with *davenen* is the most crucial defining aspect of Eastern Ashkenazic behavior, music, speech and art.

3. Torture and Boredom, Polyphony of the Mind and Mystery

The art of *davenen* was mastered through enormous suffering. Abraham Munk recounts in his autobiography how, by the age of five and a half, he learnt the whole corpus of the prayers by heart, and, by age seven, he was familiar with the

16. Ibid., 181–182. Márton Fóti (Mordechai ben Shlomo Yechiel) was born in Sátoraljaújhely. His family prayed with a strictly Orthodox community that used one room within the compound of the Neolog synagogue, and they considered themselves “Orthodox belonging to the ‘neolog kile’ [Neolog congregation].” He learned the prayers as a child but did not function as prayer leader until later in life. He was self-taught, learning cantorial compositions from records and mixing this knowledge with the basic prayer style as he remembered it from his childhood. I recorded complete services and numerous interviews with him in the 1990s. Sections from interviews: NIRAN FRIGYESI, *Writing on Water*, 177–184.

entire Torah: “If somebody asked a biblical verse from me, I could always tell in which weekly portion and in which section this verse was to be found.”¹⁷ Nevertheless, Munk devotes many pages to the description of the torture he, together with his peers, suffered to achieve this proficiency. Many of the *melamed* (teacher) were knowledgeable, patient, and loving but this was by no means the norm. However kind the teacher was, the demand remained extreme. These children had no childhood; they did not relax and play, but were faced unrelentingly with texts that contained, for them, often incomprehensible thoughts and philosophies.¹⁸

It was also considered self-evident that children who came unprepared were beaten in school as well as at home, sometimes brutally. Munk recounts an episode that happened when he was only twelve years old. He had been instructed to demonstrate his knowledge of a Talmud passage to a learned family member in the context of an evening lesson in the relative’s house. Once Munk had diligently learnt the passage, he joined the other children in play. When his father saw him playing rather than studying, he brought the child into their house and beat him so aggressively that he fainted and may have died if his mother had not intervened.¹⁹ In addition to the long hours and extreme demands of studying and the beatings as part of the method of pedagogy, most of these children lived in abject poverty; Munk also provides a heartrending account in this regard.

Remarkably, despite such suffering, memoirs often recall the childhood years as being life’s most meaningful, mysterious and poetic period. The “blessed” atmosphere of the Shabat and the holidays, which Fóti notes in the above quotation, and the Torah and the Talmud were rich sources for the children’s imagination. They were inspired to weave magical stories from the mysterious ideas of these books; like those in the works of Itzig Manger and Joseph Patai.²⁰ This child-imagination was poetic and inventive, as well as playful and humorous.

While the text inspired poetic imagination, the melody had an even deeper effect. Melody was more than a memory aid. In the conversation quoted above,

17. Meir Ávrahám MUNK, *Életem története* [The stories of my life] (Budapest etc.: Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 2002), 51. Munk’s autobiography, written originally in Hebrew, was translated by Simon Arday and Miksa Fábian to Hungarian and published in 1942. The Hebrew original has not yet surfaced, and the Hungarian was reprinted with slight adjustments. Translations of the texts from Munk’s book are mine and are based on the modern Hungarian edition.

18. The photograph “Teacher and students in a cheder in Lublin, Poland, in the 1920s” is a moving account. The photograph transmits a sense of love, the teacher appears to be warm and patient, but the faces of the children betray discomfort and confusion. Photographer Alter Kacyzne (killed in a Nazi pogrom in 1941): <<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/gallery/pre-war-jewish-life-europe>> (accessed 19 March 2019).

19. MUNK, *Életem története*, 32–35.

20. Itzig MANGER (Czernowitz 1901 – Israel 1969), *Di vunderlekhe lebensbashraybung fun Shemuel Aba Abervo. (Das Buch von Gan Eden)*, originally published in Varshe: H. Bzshoza, 1939; paper reprint: Tel Aviv, 1983, digitalized: Steven Spielberg Digital Library, No. 00159, Amherst, MA: National Yiddish Book Center: <<https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/yiddish-books/spb-nybc201537/manger-itzik-di-vunderlekhe-lebensbashraybung-fun-shemuel-aba-abervo-dos-bukh>> (accessed 19 March 2019). József PATAI (Gyöngyöspata, 1882 – Israel, 1953), *A középső kapu – Egy kis gyermek és egy nagy könyv élete* [The life of a small child and a big book], originally published in 1927; reprint: New York etc.: Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, 1997).

after explaining how children recited prayers without understanding the meaning, Fóti added:

The idea was that you should *feel* the meaning of the text from the sound of the words. A child is not sufficiently mature to descend into the depths of these texts and process them intellectually and emotionally. When you are ready, you will understand. Because the meaning ... the *real meaning* ... the essence of a prayer ... cannot be translated or explained – it is something inexpressible ...²¹

The melody was able to draw one toward this “real meaning...the essence.” The words were believed to hold an essence of profundity, but without the melody, they could not reach down to it. The sound – the melody – was able to touch those innermost terrains of the soul that the words were meant to reach but that, in fact, they often obscured.²²

In this milieu, life is experienced in a polyphony where entities exist in parallel, collide or merge. The heterophonic soundscape of the synagogue²³ is a metaphor for the chaos of the cosmos – and also for its order. A similar cosmic chaos, so to speak, occurs also in the mind. The completely internalized and, by the time of adulthood, spontaneously performed *davenen* contains myriad layers of memories and knowledge: the memory of the original experiences of the time-before-speech; memories of moments of intellectual understandings or misunderstandings; interpretations and associations; melodies and singing styles heard from others carrying their own meanings – revealing the inexpressible depth of the words or perhaps running parallel or counter to the words – and the sensation of the present moment.

Here is how Abraham Cahan describes the long nights, when as a child he studied the Talmud with his friend, Naftali:

It is with a peculiar sense of duality one reads this ancient work. While your mind is absorbed in the meaning of the words you utter, the melody in which you utter them tells your heart a tale of its own. You live in two distinct worlds at once. Naphtali had little to say to other people, but he seemed to have much to say to himself. His singsongs were full of meaning, of passion, of beauty. Quite often he would sing himself hoarse ... Regularly every Thursday night he and I had our vigil [of studying] at the Preacher's Synagogue, where many other young men would gather for the same purpose. We would sit up reading, side by side, until the worshipers came to morning service. To spend a whole night by his side was one of the joys of my existence in those days.²⁴

21. NIRAN FRIGYESI, *Writing on Water*, 182.

22. This idea had been developed and became essential in hasidic thinking.

23. See note 9.

24. Abraham CAHAN, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (New York: Penguin Group, 1993), 35–36. See also <<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/2803/pg2803.txt>> (accessed 19 March 2019).

In this mental polyphony, according to the narrator's account as a young Talmud scholar, the melody does not "express" the text but runs parallel to it telling "the story of the heart." But this does not mean that one would not study the text. The melody brings into – or perhaps above or alongside – the text another mental–emotional universe. Most remarkable in Cahan's story is the fact that he speaks about these nights of study without sleep as being "one of the joys" of his existence. This joy came from the "passion" and "beauty" of the melody – the "heart's story" – even though the melody of Talmud *lernen* consists of a few simple motives.

Munk recounts an instance when his name was the first to be called in the weekly exam in the yeshiva of Galgóc:

I was terrified when I heard that he called me to be the first at the [weekly] exam. But I answered: here I am. And he ordered me to come closer, and said: tell me, do you know ... And I answered with strong voice and the melody of the learning, I was like a man who [sang] in his drunkenness, and I brought all his teaching [of the week] in front of him, every detail, that he paid so much attention in the Talmud, in Rashi and the Tosafot.²⁵

Munk's analogy of a "drunken man" in describing his impassioned explanation of the Talmud is remarkable. In the context of a sacred teaching, he does not view this comparison as blasphemous: to be carried away by the passion of singing indicates enthusiasm for the teaching itself.

Perhaps no other writer captures children's experiences with *lernen* with more grace and humor than Joseph Patai. In his book, *The Middle Gate*, he describes how deeply he was moved by the melody when, at the age of six, he began learning a famous legal dispute of the Talmud (see *Plate 1*):

What is there to be emotional about two men quarreling about a piece of cloth or about a camel? They argue and squabble about who should have it. And we [six-year-old children] were reciting the different opinions, what this authority says and what the other one says – and we sang all this with a heartbreakingly beautiful melody. The case is not important, and we did not care much for the rabbi's opinions either, it is not the text but the melody, the fire, the enthusiasm, the flames. There were some phrases that had to be sung with their special motive, like for instance the phrase "And then they asked," this had such a beautiful melody that we got completely carried away, one had to raise one's voice and make a snapping sound with the fingers, we were repeating over and over almost with an aesthetic delight "And then they asked." Our faces burned

25. MUNK, *Életem története*, 131. Translation mine.

with enthusiasm and the little school room became filled with melodies; it was as if little singing angels would flap their wings in the air, and would lift us up to an invisible fairy world.²⁶

This passage, as Patai's book in its entirety, captures the child's world of imagination and enthusiasm. It is not the meaning of the text but the melody that transports the souls of the little children to their imaginary, magical fairy land. Similar

PLATE 1 The page of the Talmud that the children study in Patai's story



26. PATAI, *A középső kapu*, 19–21. Translation mine.

to Cahan's account, in Patai's story, the melody does not "express" the meaning of the words. The melody tells more: that deeper story that really matters.²⁷

Again, we face the problem that arose after reading Cahan's text. What is it in the melody to get so excited about? The traditional melody of *lernen* contains a few motives, each based on four or five main pitches. How could these simple melodies elicit such "aesthetic delight" and enthusiasm?

4. Creativity and the Angel of Forgetfulness

In *lernen* and *davenen*, the basic melody is simple and the musical rules rudimentary, yet the possibilities for invention are endless. The result is a veritable composition, improvised on the spot. The musical ideas (more typically in *davenen* than *lernen*) are often amazingly original and creative: surprising combinations of motives, unanticipated shifts in tonality and rhythmic style, liberties in the melodic outline, and effects in voice quality.²⁸

The uninitiated might hear *davenen* and *lernen* to be boring or comfortably eventless. This is because creativity and complexity occur on the micro-level, while the macro-level – the melodic phrases and the overall form – is balanced and stable. Analysts can discover the structural complexities only when descending into the details – when analyzing *davenen* as they would analyze a twentieth-century minimalist composition. When viewed from a micro-structural perspective, the musical ideas appear strikingly modern and experimental. For the initiated participant in the ritual, these minuscule musical ideas have profound meaning. The motive with a minimal deviation from the norm, the minuscule elevation of the pitch and some added snapping sound transported children in Patai's description to a fairytale world.

During *davenen* in services – that is, within the ritual place and time – musical ideas come spontaneously. I heard astoundingly unusual and imaginative melodies and forms; I witnessed beautiful voices from people whom I never imagined could sing, I heard heartrending compositions. All these disappear the moment the service is over. Sound recording is forbidden during services.

Yet it is precisely the transience of the experience that renders these musical compositions powerful. The inspiration and passion of the moment brings forth unique musical ideas and the atmosphere of the moment endows them with unique

27. It should be noted that this passage also has a fair amount of irony.

28. The complexities of the microstructure of *davenen* (and also of *nusah*, which is the system of the prayer melodies) is described in the chapter "Serenity" in NIRAN FRIGYESI, *Writing on Water*, and ead., "The Unbearable Lightness of Ethnomusicological Complete Editions: The Style of the *ba'al tefillah* in the East European Jewish service," in *Studies in the Sources and the Interpretation of Music. Essays in Honor of László Somfai on His 70th Birthday*, ed. by László VIKÁRIUS and Vera LAMPERT (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 7–18.

meaning. This experience is impossible to sustain, or even recall, and it would be meaningless out of context.²⁹ Those few motives of the *lernen* melody in Patai's book would never again be as magical as they were for those children – there and then.

I once heard an exceptional prayer leader during one Shabbat. We scheduled a recording session to take place in his home, on a weekday, in order to record his *davenen*. However, in this setting – outside of ritual space and time – he was a completely different person. I wish to emphasize that the difference was not merely the issue of less inspired performance. He was unable to produce a musically acceptable Shabbat *davenen*. The melodies, the tonality, the phrases, the rhythms – the entirety did not make sense musically, nor did it accord with the tradition.³⁰

There is a Jewish belief, originating with the Talmud, that in the womb “a light burns above [the unborn child's] head” so that “it looks and sees from one end of the world to the other” and thus the child is “taught all the Torah from beginning to end” in its mother's womb, before coming into this world. Following the teaching, the Almighty demands the unborn child to adhere to the commandments: “Let thy heart hold fast my words, keep my commandments and live.” But at the moment of birth “as soon as [the newborn child] sees the light, an angel approaches, slaps it on its mouth and causes it to forget all the Torah completely.”³¹

At this story's foundation lies the belief that, although knowledge is acquired through disciplined and continued learning, there exists another higher level of knowledge that demands a different kind of learning. This higher knowledge is hidden in the subconscious: it is truth that one had known but that had disappeared from the conscious mind. Learning in the higher sense means digging out this forgotten truth from the depth of the subconscious – learning is also recollection.³² In this concept, creativity and learning act together: one understands, sometimes suddenly and unexpectedly at the moment of inspiration that which one had already known and which had been stored in the subconscious terrains of the brain and the soul.

This belief underscores the musical creativity in *davenen*. In the realization of prayer chant, memory and creativity, originality and tradition, copying and innovation are not contrasting ideas. It is not that sometimes we copy and at other

29. NIRAN FRIGYESI, *Writing on Water*, 15, 73–74, 96–97, and 162–165.

30. This *ba'al tefillah* was Avrohom Tzvi Erbst. For his life and his conception of *davenen*, see “Only Woods” in NIRAN FRIGYESI, *Writing on Water*, and ead., “The unbearable lightness.”

31. Talmud Bavli, Niddah 30b, original page (pdf): <<https://www.torah-box.net/torah-pdf/talmud/niddah/30.html>>, Hebrew transcript of the page: <<https://www.sefaria.org.il/Niddah.30b?lang=he>> (accessed 19 March 2019). English translations: <http://www.come-and-hear.com/niddah/niddah_30.html>, <<https://juchre.org/talmud/niddah/niddah2.htm#30b>>. It is interesting to note that Manger's humorous book mentioned earlier uses this myth for the framework of its story.

32. It is impossible to discuss the philosophical dimensions and reverberations of this idea. For instance, it is somewhat similar to what Plato states in connection with Socrates in *Phaedo*. Plato makes Socrates contemplate that knowledge is not empirical but comes from a divine insight, and is achieved by recollection rather than through observation or study.

times we create. There is rather a continual and complete fusion of memory and forgetfulness. Forgetting is the prerequisite for understanding as it is the prerequisite for creation.³³

It is perhaps not a coincidence that this idea was crucial in the twentieth-century composer Morton Feldman's aesthetics:

One of the compositional quirks I'm most lucky about is the almost total state of amnesia immediately after completing a composition. There is not one of which I could sit down and recall a note except the opening of those oscillating *D-flats* the piano plays in *Piano and Orchestra* – how could one forget that. I write that I'm fortunate about this (the Talmud refers to an Angel of Forgetfulness); what I mean to say is that this broken memory makes possible the never ending stopping of my pen. *It is that which you repeat not from memory but from the lack of it which is the "substance" that interests me most.*³⁴

In another source, Feldman writes:

Sound is all our dreams of music ... And those moments when one loses control, and sound like crystals forms its own planes, and with a thrust, there is no sound, no tone, no sentiment, nothing left but the significance of our first breath.³⁵

In this sense, there is no end or resolution: "As in a dream, there is no release until we wake up, and not because the dream has ended."³⁶

It is as if Feldman described musical invention during the traditional East-Ashkenazic service. At the end of the service a sense of "total amnesia" remains, akin to waking suddenly from a dream – and not because the service had ended. The other ideas in the above quotations could also be interpreted in the context of *davenen*, but I focus here on one aspect: prayer chant as musical composition. The capacity of the prayer leader to create his inspired composition in the framework of *davenen*, and the community's capacity to comprehend, feel and experience prayers through such a composition, are facilitated by the Angel of Forgetfulness. Broken memory enables the experience of prayer as if it were an instantaneous creation. That which moves us is not the identifiable, neither is it the completely unknown, but a sense of awakening to a lost memory.

33. The inspiring conference *Of Copies and Copying – An International Interdisciplinary Symposium* (Princeton University, 1994) made me first realize that this phenomenon occurs in many cultures.

34. *Musica Nova, Third Festival of Contemporary Music in Glasgow*, 1976, program book, 15. Emphasis mine.

35. Morton FELDMAN, "Sound, Noise, Varèse, Boulez," in id., *Give my Regards to Eighth Street. Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, ed. B. H. FRIEDMAN (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 2000), 2.

36. FELDMAN, "The Viola in My Life," in id., *Give my Regards*, 91.

5. *Davenen* as Personal Utterance, *Davenen* as Body

What, then, can we record and use as the source for our analysis of this music? How shall we analyze and systematize this “material,” and draw from such an analysis a coherent argument?

Even though it is far from the experience of the chanting during the services, the material recorded in interview settings and preserved on tapes is extremely complex. On the tape we hear the *davening* of an individual. He recites the text as it is written in the prayer book for a melody based on a few notes. Seemingly, there is nothing difficult about this. It is easy to make an approximate transcription of the main notes of the melody. Nevertheless, if one tried to memorize this recorded *davenen*, and subsequently attempted to chant it exactly the way the person chanted it for the recording, one would fail. I struggled through this process numerous times, as did my students over the course of many years – to no avail.

This is because one is not able to recite the prayer in the manner of someone else. The situation is aggravated by the fact that one cannot learn *davenen* at a later age in the same way as those who were raised in this tradition. Furthermore, attempting to copy this recitation as if it were a “musical piece” in the sense of Western music would contradict the *raison d’être* of *davenen*. Such a copy would lack essence, that is, it would not emerge from the subconscious memory of *davenen* and *lernen* as the first great experience, enthusiasm and mystery of early childhood. An outsider will never be able to *feel* the notes of a melody the way people brought up in the culture of *davenen* and *lernen* do.³⁷

In a previous article I have defined the governing principle of *davenen* as *continuous experimentation with realizing fundamental emotional gestures in sound, through a consciousness that does not recognize the separation of music and speech*.³⁸ People in this milieu have an unimaginably *deep and intimate relationship with the simple notes* – a capacity rooted in the experience of childhood. Listening to the melody on the tape carefully, one realizes that the four pitches are not four pitches, and perhaps they are not pitches at all. When one listens carefully, one realizes that every note has its own character and story. In one note the voice trembles through a range of microtones, in another the pitch slips, in yet another the rhythm is rushed. Each of these “effects” stems from, and evokes, an emotional state – each note is a minuscule dramatic scene. The sonority of the Hebrew letters and the meanings and associations the words evoke become part of the pitches: a strong consonant or a suddenly awakening memory of an interpretation may make a pitch slip and become “distorted.”

37. I was explained this whenever I tried to imitate *davenen*, even though, at the end, my praying style was accepted by the communities. See NIRAN FRIGYESI, *Writing on Water*, 197, 211–212, and 159.

38. “Toward an Aesthetics of Traditional East-Ashkenazic Prayer Chant,” *Shofar*, publication forthcoming.

As mentioned previously, these processes occur in the universe of miniatures, so to speak. It is impossible to conceptualize these minuscule effects during the service, yet they are felt by the community. These vocal fluctuations and melodic ideas endow the melody with an inner vibration. When one listens to such a *davenen* one hears *the gestures of the soul*.

People in a traditional community did not *learn* to daven – they *davened*. They *davened*: recited the prayers, the same prayers with their melodies and texts repeatedly, three times every day of their lives. In their prayer, they did not seek to become original or creative – they became original and creative because they continuously imitated the ways of others, until the words, sounds and styles were internalized, and in the process even forgot from whence this knowledge came. Such a manner of learning is comparable to Japanese calligraphy: in aspiring to master calligraphy, the apprentice copies calligraphies of the great masters diligently and faithfully. Throughout the years of such discipline, one conquers the craft to the extent where it is possible to be expressive, creative and original.

What makes *davenen* culturally unique and differentiates this practice from the example of calligraphy, is that it belongs to everyone. Imaginative and exciting musical solutions are appreciated, but they are not required from the congregant, and often not even from the prayer leader. In every traditional community the creative and musically talented pray alongside those who are less gifted. The difference is noticed, of course, but devotion and sincerity are more important than musical inventiveness. Traditional communities, however, believe that devotion and sincerity have the power to create inspired and beautiful melodies in *davenen*. As Roth stated in a quotation above: “We never spoke about dates and melody and origin. Only one thing mattered: devotion, *kavvanah*, *kavunes*. The *kavunes* brought out the melody.”

It is permissible to *daven* in a simple manner, for instance by repeating the same melodic pattern. Concurrently, it is allowed and, in fact, taken for granted that each believer modify the style, rhythm, phrasing, and other aspects of the basic *davenen* pattern according to his or her physical abilities and character. The child internalizes *davenen* and *lernen* before (s)he comprehends its meanings and functions. *Davenen* and *lernen* and the child grow up together and upon reaching adolescence, *davenen* has its history and memory hidden within the character and attitudes of the person. Through the passage of time, *davenen* becomes one’s body, akin to breathing, talking, walking, and gesturing.

Hameiri describes that his grandfather’s relation to learning and praying did not resemble anything that we might call religion. Learning and praying and Hebrew culture were, in his words:

his skin ... his living and organic skin, nourished by his blood – a skin that grows and suffers together with the culture, that, if it gets damaged, the culture will suffer and if it gets seriously damaged the culture could even die. It was this *skin* that grandfather nourished with such unbelievable love that I have never seen anywhere with anyone.”³⁹

Originality is born from an entirely personalized *davenen* – created at the moment of inspiration. Everyone has a singular and personal *davenen* style, and creativity becomes apparent in countless idiosyncratic forms and patterns. In *davenen*, an individual is not bound by a preconceived musical system. The conventions of *davenen* are merely a framework to make self-expression possible – almost anything is acceptable provided it is sincere. Yet sincerity in prayer is crucial and it is noticed. The community is aware of the believer’s authentic voice and genuine emotion. “You have to be yourself within the prayer, you have to be real.”

6. Conclusion and The Issue of Being “Real” in Prayer

In summarizing the unique characteristics of *davenen* and *lernen*, I want to stress three points. First, it is impossible to separate music and words and meaning and emotions in this culture. The phenomena of *davenen* and *lernen* are “music–word–idea–meaning–gesture–emotion–personal character–memory–momentary space/time” – all which constitute an inseparable whole. Second, although inseparable, these aspects, nevertheless, have their unique processes through which a “polyphonic composition” is created in the mind. Finally, the determining factor of both the audible outcome and the lived-through experience is the individual’s being “real” – being with one’s self – in prayer. Accordingly, the analysis of the “music” of the prayer cannot follow a preconceived methodology. The scholar must approach the *davenen* of each person differently, creating appropriate methods and asking particular questions that are relevant to that particular individual’s *davenen*.

What does it mean to be “real in prayer?” The communities and the people with whom I became acquainted during my research held strong opinions regarding who “prayed with *kavvanah* (devotion/concentration),” or as it was often said, simply, who “was in the prayer.” Although I have never heard anyone explaining the criteria on the basis of which such judgments were made, they were not arbitrary. I can compare this situation to what we feel when listening to a musical performance: in some cases, we feel that there is something “made,” while on other occasions we feel that performances are authentic and honest. It is possible to misjudge, and perhaps those communities were also erroneous in their judgments

39. HAMEIRI, *A daloló máglya*, 13. Translation mine.

of certain members of their community. Nevertheless, even if it is not possible to precisely define what honesty in *davenen* is, it is clear that, as Roth said, the devotion – *kavvanah* – and the audible (musical) outcome are connected. After years of experience, I still cannot identify what makes a melody sound “real,” but I remember clearly that, during services, I was moved by the *davenen* of some people and left indifferent by the *davenen* of others. There are *davenen* in which it is possible to hear the presence of a personality and that it was created by an inner fire.⁴⁰

In order to illustrate the power of this tradition, I would like to conclude this essay with quotations from *Azarel* by the Hungarian writer Károly Pap. This partly autobiographical novel describes the unhappy life of a young child whose parents send him to live with his fanatically religious grandfather who gradually loses his mind. The child is in a state of constant terror, and does not comprehend the frantic prayers of the dying old man:

The theory is nothing. But for grandfather Jeremiah, all this became his blood and flesh. It is impossible for me to remember those feelings his hymns [meaning: *davenen*] evoked in me. I could not understand their meaning, only the sound touched me – some naked feeling that surrounded my life, together with the suffocating heat of the hay and the smell of the dry sheepskin from which our tent was made. Time could not erase this feeling, but it could not reach its depth either. These morning hymns [*davenen*] – it was as if they were coming not even from the past, but from an ambiguous distant depth, from times unknowable.⁴¹

There are few works that express the mental–physical reality of the world of the traditional East-European Jews more precisely than Pap’s work. In this milieu, theory amounted to naught. What mattered was a life: theory transfigured into life. This is not the same as following a teaching: *davenen* is not merely the fulfillment of a religious command. It is the tangible experience of the mysteries of the universe within one’s body. “I could not understand their meaning, only the sound touched me – *some naked feeling*,” writes Pap, later thus continuing: “they were coming not even from the past, but from an ambiguous distant depth, from times unknowable.” *Davenen* is the inexplicable bond between the intimate – the “naked” ego – the unknowable depth of the past and the forever elusive mystery of existence: “Time could not erase [this feeling], but it could not reach its depth either.”

40. For more information, see NIRAN FRIGYESI, *Writing on Water*, 94–97, and 156–159.

41. Károly PAP [Sopron, 1897 – Buchenwald or Bergen-Belsen, 1945], *Azarel* (Budapest: Nyugat Kiadó, 1938), 14–15. Musically speaking, there are no “hymns” in the traditional weekday communal morning service. When one prays alone, it is even less likely, and would be against the norm to sing song-like strophic pieces that we would associate with the word “hymn.” From Pap’s numerous other descriptions of “grandfather’s hymns,” it is clear that what he meant by “hymn” was *davenen*.

After his grandfather's death, the child is returned to his middle-class parents. It takes time to forget his grandfather, but as he matures he realizes that nothing will ever be true and real the way his grandfather's prayers were:

At long last, grandfather Jeremiah died in my head. But from that moment, from the moment his spirit no longer bothered my little mind, ... there came another torture: boredom. How deadly motionless my life had become, my whole life! The little corners and niches were empty, and the shades and the objects and the people were all frozen. And in vain did I search the rooms, the rooms of my father and mother, and the living room: there was nothing that would have had some secret; there was no hidden mystery and no music. Everything was clear, motionless, and definitive.⁴²

For Pap's child protagonist, wholeness disappeared, and with it, life disappeared. Grandfather Jeremiah, though disturbed or even mad, was nevertheless real. For him, there was no separation between murmuring his prayers and the trajectory of the stars. There was a mystical connection between all things – and melody, more than anything else, was able to connect to this mystery. In the child's new world of middle-class existence, people are frozen into roles. Everything has its place and the borders are fixed. In this world, text, learning, secrets, emotions, and music are separate categories, neatly disconnected. "How deadly motionless my life had become, my whole life!"

In a Hassidic tractate, the rebbe Shmerl cites a passage in the name of R. Menahem Mendel of Bar. This passage teaches that it is impossible to learn with the help of observation how one person balances on a rope, that "when he moves the rope here he must balance his weight over there. If one would imitate what one had seen, one would fall."⁴³

Could music ever be understood "from the outside," merely by learning and listening, without having been brought up within its nurturing culture? Here Felix Mendelssohn's words come to mind:

People often complain that music is ambiguous, that their ideas on the subject always seem so vague, whereas everyone understands words; with me it is exactly the reverse; not merely with regard to entire sentences, but also as to individual words; these, too, seem to me ambiguous, so vague, so unintelligible when compared with genuine music, which fills the soul with a thousand things better than words.⁴⁴

42. PAP, *Azarel*, 38–40. Translation mine.

43. Rifka Schatz UFFENHEIMER, *Hasidism as Mysticism: Quietistic Elements in Eighteenth-Century Hasidic Thought*, transl. by Jonathan CHIPMAN (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 238.

44. Mendelssohn's letter to Marc-André Souchay, Berlin, 15 October 1842. Quoted from *Letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy from 1833 to 1847*, ed. by Paul and Carl MENDELSSOHN BARTHOLDY, transl. by [Grace Jane] WALLACE (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1863), 298.

It is impossible to explain the meaning and transmit the feeling of *davenen* to those who were not raised in this culture – including the author of this essay. But even though *davenen* can be really understood and experienced from within the life in which it was created, the sound of *davenen* has power and meaning also for those who came to this culture later in life. I believe, despite all, that the sound of *davenen* discloses a depth in our souls that we are able to understand intuitively. In my research, I was guided by the words of Menahem Mendel of Bar as much as by those of Felix Mendelssohn.