

איזה שיר חדש? *Which New Song?*

Applying Theories of How Music Carries Meaning to the Selection of New Melodies for Congregational Singing in Modern Congregations

1. Introduction.

For many Jews, and many Modern Congregants¹ in particular, music makes Jewish communal prayer more meaningful.² The performance of communal prayer with music, and specifically, the performance of prayers by congregational singing, adds richness to the experience of praying in two senses, meaning and emotion.

First, music causes Modern Congregants to associate the prayer with one or more “meanings” - i.e., semantic meanings. When the congregant does not understand the meaning of the words of a Hebrew prayer, as is often the case with Modern Congregants, meanings that the congregant derives from the music are more likely to have a significant impact on the meaning that the congregant associates with the prayer. An obvious example of what I mean here by “the meaning of a prayer” would be a conception of a subject of the prayer (e.g., the *Ashrei*³ is a series of statements praising God and praising the act of praising God). Another example of the meaning of a prayer would be a function of the prayer (e.g., when we sing the “*Ashrei*” we are praising God). Less obvious, but not necessarily less potent, examples of the meaning of a prayer would be actions that the congregant associates with the prayer (e.g., the “*Ashrei*” is the prayer where I close my eyes and sway in a happy way), or thoughts that the congregant is reminded of that are only coincidentally related to the prayer (e.g., the “*Ashrei*” reminds me of the way the Cantor closes his eyes and sways when he sings it). A congregant may associate a single prayer-song with a number of different meanings and different layers of meaning - e.g., the main subject of the “*Ashrei*” is praising God, *and* its acrostic structure means that the topic of God’s praiseworthiness is comprehensive.

¹ In this paper, the term “Modern Congregation” refers to non-Orthodox congregations in America, and “Modern Congregant” refers to a congregant of a Modern Congregation.

² While I am sure that music adds meaning to prayer for congregants of Orthodox congregations, I am limiting the scope of my analysis to Modern Congregations. Although the principles by which music affects meaning are probably universal, music is only one factor in determining the meaning of communal prayer. I suspect that Modern Congregants, on average, engage in communal prayer less frequently and find less meaning in the words of the liturgy and activity of communal prayer than the average Orthodox congregant, and that music’s impact on meaning of communal prayer would be relatively smaller for the average Orthodox congregant.

³ I.e., the recitation of the end of Psalm 144 and all of Psalm 145 that is part of many services in the typical Conservative liturgy.

Music can add a semantic meaning to a prayer, or reinforce another semantic meaning of the prayer that was established by the text or the context - e.g., if the *Ashrei* were sung to a melody that evoked the idea of majesty, the “*Ashrei*” could be about praising God in a way that acknowledges His majesty. If, for particular congregants, the meaning of the text itself is not prominent, and the acrostic structure is not noticed, the meaning added by the melody, whether it is majesty or joy or sadness, or whatever meaning can be attached to a congregational melody, can be the dominant meaning of the “*Ashrei*” - at least until that dominant meaning is effectively challenged by insertion of a new semantic idea, or a new context, or a new melody.

Second, music also can add “meaning” to prayer in the sense that it can make the act and prospect of performing the prayer more emotional. It makes the prayer more “meaningful,” whether or not it provides a semantic meaning. How music evokes emotion is not clear. In fact, there is more than one mental mechanism through which music can evoke emotion, and more than one mental mechanism may be active at the same time. Hearing or singing a song can evoke an emotion when the song has a semantic meaning that, in turn, evokes emotion (e.g., the song reminds the participant of a happy time, and thinking of the happy time makes the participant emotional). Music also sometimes evokes emotion directly, without invoking any semantic meaning, or perhaps, invoking a semantic meaning so directly or at such a primitive or non-cognitive level that the participant is not aware that she has been reminded of something. Perhaps such an emotion that is not associated with an idea that carries emotion might be called a “mood” as opposed to an emotion. But, whether the music evokes a mood, or indirectly evokes an emotion, that feeling (i.e., that mood or emotion) may become associated with the prayer.

The choice of the music used for the performance of a particular prayer affects both the semantic meanings that occupy the minds of congregants in Modern Congregations during the performance of the prayer, and the type and depth of the emotion that they feel during the performance of the prayer. In particular, the choice of the melody used for congregational singing of a prayer affects the ideas and emotions that the prayer evokes in the congregants, and by changing the melody, a Prayer Leader⁴ can change the semantic and emotional meaning of the prayer for the congregants.

This paper will: (1) review the work of scholars who have theorized about how music evokes ideas and emotions; (2) consider how Prayer Leaders in Modern Congregations might apply these findings in choosing melodies for congregational prayer; and (3) discuss the conflict between the desire to apply music’s power to evoke emotion by changing melodies used for congregational singing and the desire to maintain tonal traditions that have developed in connection with Jewish communal prayer.

When “traditional melodies” (as defined below) are used for congregational singing of Hebrew prayers by congregants in Modern Synagogues for whom the words of the liturgy that

⁴ In this paper, the term “Prayer Leader” refers to the Rabbi, cantor or other person or persons who control the content of a communal prayer service.

are being sung do not strongly evoke any meaning, the melodies tend to cause congregants to focus on ideas of (a) Jewish tradition and (b) self-identity as a Jew and as part of the congregation. The emotions evoked by congregational singing are attached to these same ideas. When the participant does not understand, or is not focusing on, the semantic meaning of the words of the prayer that is being sung, the impact of other aspects of the experience, and, in particular, the impact of the melody being sung, in evoking the ideas with which the emotion of the experience is associated becomes particularly important.

While evoking and attaching emotion to the ideas of tradition and identity promotes some important goals of communal prayer in Modern Congregations, there are other ideas (e.g., the literal meaning of the piece of liturgy that is being sung, or the idea that by reciting that piece of liturgy the congregant is personally communicating with God) that could be brought into focus that promote other important goals of communal prayer. When “non-traditional melodies” are used for congregational singing during communal prayer services there is an opportunity to get congregants to focus on, and attach emotion to, ideas other than Jewish tradition and identity.

For purposes of this paper, a “traditional melody” is a melody that evokes the idea of participation in a particular tradition, i.e., the Jewish tradition of participating in prayer services. This is a subjective concept - each participant will respond differently to any melody, based on their own past experiences and psychological tendencies. And, each participant will have different conceptions of the Jewish tradition of the congregation. But congregants in Modern Congregations have been conditioned to recognize traditional melodies, and to respond to them by thinking of, or focusing their thoughts on, the Jewish traditions that they share with their fellow congregants. Other variables of the experience of a traditional melody affect this response: the location (being in a synagogue sanctuary), the other people present (being with other *Ashkenazim*⁵), the time (*Shabbat*⁶ morning), and the words (traditional liturgy). Characteristics of the performance of the melody can also affect the response: the tempo of the melody (e.g. the tempo is in the range of tempos that is familiar to the participant), dynamics (e.g., *ritardandos* and pauses occur in familiar places in the song). In general, a melody will be a traditional melody for a participant if the participant perceives that the melody has been used in Jewish communal prayer services, or seems similar to a melody that has been used for a long time by the congregation in the performance of Jewish tradition.

2. How Music Evokes Meaning and Emotion.

The effects that music has on people has been the subject of theory and research by a number of academics, and there is a substantial body of writing trying to describe and explain the nature of this effect and the mechanisms that underlie it. The most remarkable aspect of music’s

⁵ *Ashkenazim* is a Hebrew term that refers to Jews from Europe whose heritage derives from places outside of medieval Spain. *Ashkenazi* means of, or pertaining to, *Ashkenazim*.

⁶ *Shabbat* is Hebrew for the Sabbath, which runs from Friday night to Saturday night.

power seems to be its ability to evoke emotions. “From Plato down to the most recent discussions of aesthetics and the meaning of music, philosophers and critics have, with few exceptions, affirmed their belief in the ability of music to evoke emotional responses in listeners.⁷ Of particular interest to theorists is the phenomenon in which listening to instrumental music evokes an emotional response in a listener for whom the music does not bring to mind an emotional situation or story, the thought of which could account for the emotional response.

Recent brain studies have demonstrated some specific neurochemical responses to musical stimuli, confirming that music’s effect on emotion is not just in our minds⁸⁹...or, rather, that it is, at least partly, in our brains. However, there is no definitive or widely accepted description of the biological mechanism by which music evokes emotion;¹⁰ only theories as to how emotional sensitivity to music could be a trait that would be propagated by evolution. For example, people sing, and play happy, and sometimes sad, music to infants, possibly as a step in the development of the infant’s capacity to form social relationships.¹¹

There is one familiar neurological mechanism that can partially account for many instances where music evokes emotion - the mechanism that underlies symbolism, whereby one thing (music) reminds us of something else.¹² Music often reminds us of things other than music, such as a story, real or fictional, or a person, place or object, or a situation, past, present, dreaded or aspirational. Thinkers in the field often speak in terms of music carrying “meaning” and I think that music’s ability to remind us of something else accounts for a large part of this “meaning.” If the meaning which a piece of music calls to mind for us evokes emotion in us, then it seems extremely likely that the mechanism for “reminding” or symbolism has been activated. If the meaning that is symbolically evoked carries emotional significance, and if the music evokes that meaning very clearly, then the music is very meaningful. This is fairly similar

⁷ Leonard Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press Publishers, First publication 1956. Print, p. 6.

⁸ Salimpoor, Benovoy, Larcher, Agher and Zatorre, “Anatomically distinct dopamine release during anticipation and experience of peak emotion to music.” *Nature Neuroscience 14*, 257-262, (2011)

⁹ S. Norman-Haignere, N.G.Kanishwer and H. McDermott, “Distinct Cortical Pathways for Music and Speech Revealed by Hypothesis-Free Voxel Decomposition.” *Neuron*, p. 1281-96 (Dec. 16, 2015). The article describes finding of certain neurons located in a particular location in the brain that are discriminatorily stimulated by music.

¹⁰ See Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, *supra*, p. 3. “...despite the ubiquity of emotional responses to music, it seems that, for a long time, such reactions have defied psychological explanation.”

¹¹ Isabel Peretz, *Listen to the Brain, a Biological Perspective on Musical Emotions*, printed in Patrik A. Juslin and John A. Sloboda, *Music and Emotion - Theory and Research*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001. Print., p. 114.

¹² A description of the brain mechanism or mechanisms that account for cognitive recall through “reminding” is beyond the scope of this paper. I have not attempted to research this topic, but assume that the “reminding” mechanism is reasonably well described, including as it applies to musical stimuli. See, <http://www.human-memory.net>.

to other types of stimuli (other than music) that clearly evoke emotional ideas, such as the image or feel of an object associated with a deceased loved one. But unlike most other types of stimuli, music has a place in Jewish communal prayer, where it is shared by all of the congregants and serves other functions in the performance of the prayer service¹³, aside from its symbolic effect.¹⁴

Emotion, itself, is generally mysterious. Particularly enigmatic is the mechanism by which emotional behaviors are evoked by various stimuli that have no apparent impact on the well-being of the person affected, such as music and other types of art. For example, people experience emotions when thinking of situations that do not affect them, including stories that they know to be fictitious. That music evokes this type of “sympathetic” emotional response is one theory that has been posed to account for all of, or at least the bulk of, music’s emotional power. Clearly, music can remind a listener of an emotional story, that, in turn, evokes an emotional response. When I hear the theme song to the tv movie, *Brian’s Song*¹⁵, I often feel a profound sadness. If we accept that a sympathetic response to a story is a way that music can evoke emotion, then music’s symbolic association with a story explains at least some of the instances where music evokes emotion.

Musicologist, Leonard Meyer and psychologists, Patrik Juslin and John Sloboda have written resource books that compile and critique research and theories by various writers with credentials in musicology, psychology, neuropsychology, anthropology, and philosophy on the connection between music and emotion, and also offer their own theories about how music evokes emotion.^{16 17} Much of the writing on the topic of “meaning and emotion in music” focuses on the question of whether and how music directly evokes emotion, without symbolizing a nonmusical idea that carries emotion, such as a sad story or a happy occasion. This is a fascinating question, and I will devote some space in this paper to it. However, in the context of Jewish communal prayer, music often plays a symbolic role and evokes various emotion-laden thoughts, such as family-members, happy and sad occasions, self-identity, etc.

¹³ In communal prayer, music serves as a vehicle for liturgy that makes the liturgical text easier to learn and more interesting and aesthetically pleasing than non-musical or silent recitation.

¹⁴ It would be interesting to analyze other differences between the intensity and other aspects of a particular meaning when it is evoked by music as compared to the same particular meaning when it is evoked by other stimuli. One theory posits that the abstractness of some musical associations, as compared to a more concrete associations, cause us to associate music with intangible things, such as the Divine.

¹⁵ *Brian’s Song* depicts the story of Brian Piccolo, a professional football player who died of cancer at age 26, and I watched it when I was around 10 years old.

¹⁶ Leonard Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, *supra* at footnote 6.

¹⁷ Juslin and Sloboda, *Music and Emotion*, *supra* at footnote 10.

The various theories of how music evokes meaning reflect two main lines of thought that can be referred to as “non-referentialist” and “referentialist.”¹⁸ The non-referentialist theories try to account for musically evoked meaning without the need for reference to anything other than stimuli that are part of the musical experience. If music evokes emotion in a non-referentialist way, then the music expresses the emotion through its intrinsic characteristics: i.e., the meaning of the music lies in the relationships of elements within the music such as tone, rhythm and timbre, and “that these same relationships are in some sense capable of exciting feeling and emotions in the listener.”¹⁹

The referentialist theories try to explain musically evoked emotions as resulting from a symbolic connection between the music and some non-musical idea that, in turn, evokes the emotion. Meaning evoked according to a referentialist theory lies not within the relationship of the tones, rhythm, etc., but in the meanings already in the mind of the listener to which those musical elements and the relationships among them refer. The emotional content of music is a function of the emotional content of those extrinsic meanings. When different subjects experience the same emotion from a particular piece of music, it is because the music evoked the same meaning in each subject, either because each subject had learned from prior experience to associate that music with that meaning, or because there is something intrinsic in the music that evokes that meaning for each subject.

Meyer, in *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, concludes that none of the various schools of theories he delineates describe how music evokes emotion completely, and that the schools are not exclusive, and together help to describe the entire phenomenon. Clearly, just as it is possible for a single musical experience to have more than one meaning for the same subject, a single musical experience could evoke meaning according to more than one of these theories. It seems to me that this combination of extrinsic and intrinsic effects could account for music’s power to heighten the emotional power of an extrinsic idea by simultaneously referring to the extrinsic idea and intrinsically evoking emotion. This one-two punch could be what makes music a useful tool to achieve important goals in communal prayer.

¹⁸ Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, p. 1.

¹⁹ Meyer identifies another school of “formalist-nonreferential” theorists who assert that “the meaning of music lies in the perception and understanding of the musical relationships set forth in the work of art [i.e., the relationships between variables within a musical experience, such as the tone, rhythm, timbre and volume of each sound and combination of sounds], and that meaning in music is primarily intellectual.” Meyer describes this school as more of an aspirational concept subscribed to only by serious musicologists. It applies only to modern, art music and is intended to urge serious composers to put aside emotional effects and treat music as an intellectual pursuit because there is such a rich world of intellectual meaning to be found in musical relationships alone, there is little point in considering any emotional effects of music that are evoked by any sort of primal emotional response. While few people can relate to this sort of purely musico-intellectual focus - and I doubt it has any application to congregational singing - it does demonstrate that the allure to isolating a pure, universal effect of music, instead of treating every musical experience as the combination of musical and non-musical experiences that it usually (and perhaps always) is.

While Meyer does not claim that a single theory can account for all non-referential musical emotion, he does endorse a single theory that he believes describe many instances where music intrinsically evokes emotion. Meyer's theory begins with a psychological description of emotion as a response to the resolution, or lack of resolution, to the mental tension created within a person's mind when she is unable to carry out tendency. Here, a "tendency" means a person's behavioral response to recognition of a pattern. Recognition of the pattern could be innate or conditioned. Recognition of the pattern creates tension because the tendency is anticipated. Positive emotions (e.g. joy or joyful love) are elicited when the tension is resolved by her being able to fulfill the tendency, and negative emotions (e.g. sadness or forlorn love) when she is not able to fulfill the tendency. According to Meyer's theory of musical emotion, music evokes emotions because a listener anticipates being able to fulfill a tendency in response to a musical pattern. The tendency may be based on intrinsic properties of the music or based on extrinsic experiences of the listener. As the music conforms to or deviates from those expectations, the individual can or cannot fulfill the tendency, meaning is created for the listener and feelings of satisfaction, disappointment, surprise, etc. are evoked.

Evaluating Meyer's theory, Juslin and Sloboda assert: "the interplay of tension, release... does not amount to a full-blown emotion. It is better characterized as a proto-emotion because it has a strong tendency to grow into emotions through the addition of further mental content (e.g. appraisal valence)... What is needed to turn the structure-induced proto-emotions into full-blown emotions is semantic content. They need to be about something. Theory and evidence suggest two sources of content- iconic and associational. Because they both refer outside the music, we call these sources extrinsic."²⁰

Juslin and Sloboda use the terms "iconic" and "associative" to describe the two main ways that music can refer to extrinsic meanings. "Iconic relationships come about because of some formal resemblance between a musical structure and some event or agent carrying emotional tone."²¹ "So, for instance, loud and fast music shares features with events of high energy and so suggest a high energy emotion such as excitement."²² Empirical studies have shown that iconic relationships may specify particular emotions, and that they thus supply emotional content to the non-specific sensations of surprise, tension, and arousal engendered by the listener's engagement at the purely structural level of the music."²³ "...[T]he resemblance between a musical event and its non-musical referent is, in some sense, obvious to anyone who is familiar with the non-musical referent... recognition of iconic emotional meaning does not seem to require specific musical training."²⁴ "Iconic relationships contribute to the ebb and flow of

²⁰ Juslin and Sloboda, *Music and Emotion*, p. 93.

²¹ *Ibid*, citing Dowling & Harwood 1986.

²² *Ibid*.

²³ *Ibid*.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 94.

music-entrained emotion.”²⁵ An interesting example of a theory of how iconography in music can evoke emotion in a listener is that the music evokes a mental construct of someone composing or performing the music who is feeling an emotion and expressing it through the music. The listener sympathizes with the imagined experience that the composer or performer is displaying through the musical performance. While this theory seems like a plausible account for some situations in which music evokes emotion in a participant, it - like most theories on this topic - is critiqued as not a satisfactory account for the entire phenomenon.²⁶

“Associative sources of emotion are those that are premised on arbitrary relationships between the music being experienced and a range of non-musical factors which also carry emotional messages of their own.”²⁷ “Experiences which carried strong emotion are particularly subject to being evoked by arbitrarily related stimuli, such as music. *However, “such emotions tend to lead attention away from the present music onto the remembered past event”*²⁸ (emphasis added). This tendency has implications with regard to the usefulness of a piece of music’s associative relationships to evoke emotion in a new context. In the context of prayer music, it describes the way that associative relationships (e.g., romantic love associated with popular music) can distract a congregant from new emotional connections that might be result from the use of music in prayer.

Meyer’s theory of how music evokes emotion - referred to by Juslin and Slobodan as “tension and release” theory - requires a source of tension, either from within or without the music itself. A commonly identified source of tension that may be universal (across all people and perhaps all organisms that can distinguish pitch) is the conformity of tonal patterns in a piece of music to the prominent tones in a harmonic overtone series. Tonal patterns are found in tone sequences (melody) and in simultaneous tones (harmony).²⁹ The harmonic overtone series is a natural phenomenon in which all tones are accompanied by a series of many tones at higher frequencies (“overtones”). The vibrations that comprise every tone (a “fundamental tone”) also generate a theoretically infinite series of higher overtones at frequencies (which we perceive as a series of higher pitches) that are perfectly consistent, relative to the fundamental tone, and at diminishing amplitudes (which we perceive as diminishing volume) as tones in the series goes up in frequency. Higher frequencies decay more slowly than lower ones, and depending on the physical characteristics of the immediate environment in which the tone is generated (e.g., the vocal chords and throat of a singer, or the musical instrument that produces the tone) and the larger environment through which it travels (e.g., the room), the amplitudes and relative amplitudes of the fundamental tone and overtones can differ. In most environments, listeners

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid* at 95.

²⁹ Juslin and Slobodan, *Music and Emotion*, p. 56.

(experiencers) consciously recognize only the fundamental tones, but can perceive one or a few overtones if they focus their attention on them. However, the most prominent overtones, according to these theories, comprise a natural template of tones against which the listener compares the pattern of tones in a piece of music. According to this theory, listeners perceive when the notes of a piece of music fit within the overtone template of a fundamental tone (the “tonic”), and have a natural tendency to experience a mental state of stability in moments in a piece of music where the notes fit very securely. This theory accounts for the common perception that a musical phrase has reached a resolution – which occurs, according to the theory, because the tones of the piece, which had deviated from a tonic template, return, securely, to the tonic’s overtone template. In fact, music that is in a major mode fits the overtone template very well (the tonic, fifth and major third are the three most prominent notes in the overtone series), but music in a minor key (which makes use of a minor third in place of a major third), does not.³⁰

As the listener listens, he or she compares the characteristics of the departure from the tonic, the route back to the tonic and the stops along the way, to the more direct routes that might have been taken. In a longer piece of music that includes variations on a theme, the listener compares the later routes in the piece to the earlier routes. The theory also accounts for the almost universal tendency of Western music to be in major or minor modes, and to resolve to either major or minor chords, because both of these chords include both the tonic and the fifth scale degree tone, which is the second most-prominent tone in the overtone series after the tonic – i.e., these chords fit solidly in the overtone template.

Heinrich Schenker, a music theorist in the early 20th century (Jewish, born in Austrian Galicia), developed a system for analyzing music known as Schenkerian Analysis. A Schenkerian analysis of a passage of music shows hierarchical relationships among its pitches, and draws conclusions about the structure of the passage from this hierarchy.³¹ Schenkerian analysis is based on a premise that a piece of music (typically it is applied to a complex Western composition, such as an orchestra score) is “governed by an “Ursatz,” a paradigmatic background framework that successively generates elaborations in middle ground and foreground, by combining an upper voice (“urlinie” or fundamental line) and lower voice (“Bassbrechung” bass arpeggiation, I-V-I, regard both harmonically as chords on tonic and dominant, and melodically as an arpeggiation of the tonic triad.)” While Schenkerian analyses require a deep familiarity with musicological conventions that are beyond the scope of this paper,

³⁰ Schenker wrote: “Any attempt to derive even as much as the first foundation of this [minor] system, i.e., the minor triad itself, from Nature, i.e., from the overtone series, would be more than futile. [...] The explanation becomes much easier if artistic intention rather than Nature herself is credited with the origin of the minor mode.” 1906 *Harmonielehre* - 1954 *Harmony*, transl. by Elisabeth Mann Borgese, edited and annotated by Oswald Jonas. Quote found on Wikipedia entry for Schenkerian Analysis.

³¹ “Schenkerian analysis,” Wikipedia, [en.Wikipedia.org, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schenkerian_analysis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schenkerian_analysis)

they reflect the principle that a piece of music, and each section of a piece of music, can be perceived based on its relationship to a standard, possibly universal (at least Western) paradigm.

German music critic and theorist, Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904) focused on an inherent meaning in music, as opposed to music as an attempt to promote cogency of verbal ideas.³² Hanslick asserted that music does not specify specific emotions; rather it specifies the dynamic characteristics of emotion. Cultures group behaviors that are associated with these characteristics and equate the groupings to the emotions. For example, “loss” is an emotion that is elicited by the mental perception that a beloved person, or a beloved way of thinking or feeling (e.g. youth), or a beloved tv show, etc., is no longer available to the one feeling loss in the way it had been. “Pity” is an emotion that is elicited by the mental perception that a person or a group of people or an animal or a (anthropomorphized) sofa is unduly suffering. “Sadness” is a mood that can be elicited by feelings of loss or feelings of pity, but also by many other things that are not linked to an object, like a cloudy environment. Music is perceived as “sad” through one or more of the theoretical mechanisms that I am about to discuss. In this terminology, unspecified “happiness” is a mood, and empathetic “happiness for” someone or something is an emotion. Using this terminology, the music that one hears may, intrinsically, evoke a “mood,” not an emotion, except in the case (probably an unusual case) where that music is the (personified) object of an emotion.³³

Whether the paradigm against which music is perceived and evokes meaning and emotion is inherent or is based on universal phenomena or personal experiences, the apparent fact that music can evoke emotion is useful in the context of the music of prayer.

Juslin and Sloboda identify a good deal of experimental research that has been done to try to learn about the nature of the relationship between music and emotion, but conclude that all of the research seems to be insufficient to draw any broad conclusions. They posit that this is because the topic itself is so complex and not clearly understood that the research has been too simple and targeted at only small parts of the larger phenomenon. However, Juslin and Sloboda assert that there is evidence that there is a reliable relationship between the intensity of emotional responses to a piece of music and certain structural features in the music.³⁴ Research studies by Sloboda found that certain musical structures elicit behaviors associated with emotion.³⁵ “These are syncopations, enharmonic changes, melodic and other musico-theoretical constructs which have in common their intimate relationship to the creation, maintenance, confirmation or

³² Juslin and Sloboda, *Music and Emotion*, p. 47.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 58

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 91.

³⁵ Ostensibly, the researchers used behaviors, rather than subjective reports, in order to obtain more objective results.

disruption of musical expectations.”³⁶ This supports the theory promoted by Meyers, discussed above, that music’s intrinsic power arises from the way music fulfills or does not fulfill expectations. The source of the expectation may be innate - e.g., when a series of notes consistently falls within the lower part of the harmonic series (e.g., all of the notes in a long series of notes are the first, fifth and third degrees of the diatonic scale), the next note will also fall within the lower part of the harmonic series; or when a musical phrase consisting of ten tones and a distinct rhythm has occurred earlier in a piece of music, if the first six notes are played, the rest of the phrase will follow - or the source of the expectation may be learned - e.g., when the first six notes of a familiar ten-note musical phrase heard on a popular tv commercial are played, the rest of the phrase will follow. But, only with regard to the intensity of the emotional response.

Turning back to my main topic, it seems to me that when selecting melodies for congregational singing, Prayer Leaders in Modern Congregations should be mindful that congregational singing can do several things that influence both the meaning and the intensity of emotion that congregants experience. The experience of congregational singing reminds congregants of extrinsic meanings that enter their minds from things they have experienced and things they have been taught. Changing the melody or other characteristics of the music of congregational singings can open the door to new meanings for prayer - both desirable and undesirable. Congregational singing can also add or enhance the emotion attached to the symbolic meaning of the prayer.

By using melodies that evoke particular ideas, we limit what congregants think about during prayer. And while our familiar prayer melodies may be effective in evoking emotion during prayer, the emotions end up being attached to the same ideas. If we want prayer to evoke an emotion in the context of different ideas, we should consider trying different melodies.³⁷

3. Application of Theory of Meaning and Emotion in Music to Goals for Communal Prayer.

Lawrence Hoffman’s book, *The Art of Public Prayer, Not for Clergy Only*³⁸ is a good starting point for insights into matters concerning Jewish communal prayer in Modern Congregations. As Hoffman argues, ultimately, music is a tool that serves communal prayer. The tool makes demands and imposes some limitations of its own on the prayer service.

³⁶ Juslin and Sloboda, *Music and Emotion*, p 91.

³⁷ It is a musical experience that evokes ideas and emotions, and not a melody, per se. Often, a change in a different aspect of a congregational song, such as its tempo, can evoke a new idea and avoid evoking an idea that is associated with its usual melody.

³⁸ *The Art of Public Prayer, Not for Clergy Only, 2d Edition*, Lawrence A. Hoffman, Skylight Publishing, Vermont, first printing 1999, at p. 181

Congregational singing requires at least some congregants to sing along and interferes with some congregants' desire to meditate. If a prayer is being sung to a happy melody, it will interfere with any congregants' desires for a somber experience of the prayer. If a prayer is being chanted in a drawn-out fashion, it will interfere with congregants' desires for the prayer to proceed at a faster pace. Congregants like and come to expect certain music and it sometimes becomes part of the ritual, foreclosing other possibilities.

Many Prayer Leaders have an opportunity to try to shape communal prayer services to promote whatever goals they choose - after giving a great deal of weight to the preferences expressed by the community. Communal prayer is an important ritual to many congregants in Modern Congregations and congregants are notorious for expressing their preferences with regard to the conduct of communal prayer, and, in particular, a preference for continuity of existing practices. But, while continuing Jewish prayer traditions remains a universal goal of Modern Congregations affiliated with the Conservative movement, close adherence to traditional Jewish communal prayer traditions has not been maintained. It is not reasonable to believe that whatever goals are achieved by maintaining Jewish communal prayer traditions are being achieved congregations that only maintain a fraction of those traditions.

It falls on Prayer Leaders in Modern Congregations to establish goals that the congregation would, ideally, achieve through communal prayer services ("Prayer Goals"), consider which Prayer Goals are being achieved (or undermined) through the congregations' communal prayer services, whether their other Prayer Goals might be achieved through communal prayer services, and what changes (if any) can be made to communal prayer services to achieve a balance of the various Prayer Goals.

One way that leaders of synagogue prayer services can influence the meaning and emotion of prayer services, in the short run, is through music. As discussed above, music elicits emotion through processes that combine emotion and cognition. When a positive emotional vector of music is attached to a prayer concept, the power of the prayer concept is enhanced. Too much of the emotional energy of congregational singing is directed to the concept of tradition.

When the music selected is the same or very similar to the music that was used last week and the week before in the synagogue or the community, etc., the meaning added is that this prayer, sung this way, is traditional for the synagogue or community. That meaning is conveyed to congregants who have heard the prayer sung that way before, especially if they have heard it many times before. Meaning is also conveyed about the prayer-performance by the behavior of the congregants at the service. The way they participate conveys (to attendees who take note of it) a level of emotional engagement, and possibly even a particular emotion - like joy or sadness. The attendee may do different things with this meaning: She may ignore it. She may scoff at it or resent it. She may feel it herself instantly. She may be intrigued or attracted by it. She may look forward to experiencing it again.

Tradition may be the ideal and overwhelmingly most important emotion that music can add to the performance of a prayer. Or not. Other meanings might be achieved, alongside or in place of tradition, such as: this is happy, or this is sad, or this connects me to God, or this connects me to the congregation, or this connects me to my Jewish identity. My thesis is that prayer leaders can determine the meaning that they convey through the selection of melodies for congregational singing, and choose meanings, and can use a wider palate of meanings than the “this is traditional” meaning that is so often conveyed.

What follows is my effort to identify the Prayer Goals services that I believe can and should be significantly furthered through communal prayer, and through congregational singing in particular. My list of Prayer Goals is largely a reflection of my own personal values and goals as a soon-to-be cantor, and my own ideas about the nature of Modern Congregations and about Judaism. I believe that it furthers the coursework and other training I experienced during my five years as a student at the Academy for Jewish Religion, and would be endorsed (at least in its broad strokes) by many clergy-persons of Modern Congregations.

1. Promoting congregants’ personal connections to God
2. Promoting congregants’ personal connections to the community of the Jewish People, or a subset of that community, such as the synagogue congregation
3. Promoting congregants’ personal connections to their existing sense of Jewish identity
4. Transmission of Jewish tradition (and the tradition of Jewish communal prayer in particular) to congregants’ children.

As discussed below in the section entitled “*Traditional Communal Prayer versus Communal Prayer in Modern Congregations*,” long-held Jewish tradition has its own logic that I am not challenging here. In a service where long-held traditions, including musical traditions, are being closely maintained, the issue of when and how to use this tool (i.e., music), is straightforward: music should be used when and how it is used in accordance with the tradition being followed. But, many Modern Congregations are not cleaving to a long-held line of tradition in their prayer services.³⁹ For these Modern Congregations, if the tradition of communal prayer services is to be maintained, it makes sense to look closely at the effects that music has on prayer - as Hoffman puts it: how the music performs in prayer⁴⁰ - and make changes to the music in order to serve the broadest goals of the services.

³⁹ From a modern perspective, it may not be possible to enunciate a convincing basis for discriminating between older traditions and newer traditions, or newer developments in a line of tradition. However, I suspect that individual congregants in Modern Congregations are not as likely to feel intellectual or emotional attachment to a particular tradition if they are aware that it is a recent innovation - especially if they are not familiar with any theological underpinnings. However, supporting this suspicion is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴⁰ *The Art of Public Prayer*, p. 181.

In a chapter of *The Art of Prayer* entitled “The Script of Prayer: Words Sung,” Hoffman makes some important observations about the functions of music in prayer in Modern Congregations. He writes, music can “rescue prayers [that are meaningless to the congregants] from their ordinariness. Once set to music, people look forward to them. They associate them with the feeling tone of the music to which they are set. Liturgy that is hard to read may more easily be sung.”⁴¹

Music is only one part of the larger, multi-faceted production of prayer - its role is not as small as the background music piped in at a restaurant, and not as large as the live music performed on stage at a concert. When considering music in the context of prayer, Hoffman urges clergy to focus specifically on how music performs in prayer. Music’s power to transcend normal experience is universally known, but whatever it is that makes music sacred is too subjective and tied up in a participant’s personal history to have a reliable effect on a varied group of congregants.⁴²

Hoffman further rejects the notion that music that is recognized as having a sacred quality is necessarily suited to the sacred act of prayer. Even if one adjusted for differences in culture and personal taste, Hoffman asserts, music that is considered sacred may not be good for worship. “Here as elsewhere, worship seems stubbornly intent on advancing its own agenda.” But is there something objectively present in a piece of music that carries or rejects a particular agenda? If a congregant recognizes a piece of music as sacred, and that music carries with it no other strong associations for that congregant, what agenda might it conflict with?

Hoffman considers how music supports several particular parts of the experience of prayer: “Music As a Support System for Words;” “Music As Structuring Time;” “Music As Communal Bonding;” “As Knowledge of God;”, and “As Emotion.” Music does not occupy all of these roles for all people or in every prayer or in every prayer service, but these are some of music’s most prominent functions - music’s fortes, if you will. Hoffman’s categories are not just things that music is good for: they are elements of Hoffman’s agenda for worship. The categories are ideas that Hoffman thinks are worthy of invoking during prayer. (Or, in the case of “Music as a Support System for Words,” the idea of the words of the liturgy is the agenda item, and music supports it) . Particular music becomes a trigger that evokes these particular ideas because individual congregants have been trained to associate *these* ideas with *that* music.

Hoffman writes: “The most significant innovation of our time is the music of meeting, the music that invites the stance of reaching out to one another, holding hands or otherwise connecting with God not on high, or even within, but through the miracle of community. Most of us have years of experience with majesty and at least some experience with meditation. But

⁴¹ *The Art of Public Prayer*, p. 179.

⁴² *The Art of Public Prayer*, p. 174.

only recently have we discovered that God may be known through meeting.”⁴³ “The single greatest need for worship is to connect individuals in community that they may know the mystery of genuine meeting, and thereby the presence of God among us. Our single greatest lack is music of meeting. Musical experts within each faith who truly know their art will consciously develop a rich repertoire of music of meeting; they will teach these melodies and sing them, even if they are not as sophisticated as the accustomed repertoire of tradition. Without the ambiance of meeting, regularly satisfying worship will not occur, because the certainty of God among us will be wanting.”⁴⁴

Hoffman is establishing, for himself and for his students, that “knowing God through meeting,”⁴⁵ is a high priority item on his agenda for community prayer services. Congregational singing is a preferred tool to promote the goal of meeting. This is a fascinating and very compelling idea. As Hoffman points out, it reflects the relational theology of Martin Buber, a powerful voice in non-traditional Jewish theology.⁴⁶ The act of congregational singing exercises a connection to our fellows that is an experience of God. That experience of God is a goal of communal prayer. Hoffman goes on to cite music’s power to evoke memory through the use of traditional melodies. These memories, according to Hoffman, also connect congregants in Modern Congregations to God. This is the sort of thoughtful attempt to use the power of music to evoke meaning and emotion that I think should be encouraged.

In many congregations, over the last 50 years, Prayer Leaders have introduced melodies composed or popularized by Shlomo Carlebach as congregational melodies. This is a good example how a Prayer Leader can take advantage of the way that a melody used for congregational singing invokes both meaning and emotion. Since Carlebach melodies were composed only in the last 50 years, it is unlikely that, for many adults of today, these melodies were passed down through even a single generations. However, for participants who don’t know of this recent vintage, many Carlebach melodies evoke the meaning of participating in a very traditional version of the liturgy being sung; while for others who perceive the Carlebach melody

⁴³ *The Art of Public Prayer*, p. 193-194.

⁴⁴ *The Art of Public Prayer*, p. 195.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 194.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

as non-traditional, singing a prayer to that melody is more likely to evoke a different meaning.⁴⁷ There are probably several reasons that Carlebach melodies evoke the idea of tradition, including the presence of modes that are also prominent in other Jewish prayer music. What determines the meaning that the melody evokes in a participant in any particular experience of that melody is determined by the totality of their past experiences with the melody and with melodies that they perceive as similar based on a combination of musical features such as mode, tempo and distinct motifs. It would be interesting to try to identify the particular musical features that control the response of Jews in Modern Synagogues to particular prayer melodies, although any findings might be limited to a particular generation.

In every Modern Congregation that I know of, frequently achieving a sense of joy during communal prayer services is a high priority goal of *the* director and of practically the entire congregation. For many (but not all) congregants, the experience of singing certain of Carlebach's melodies evoke a sense of joy and are associated with communal celebration, for example, by dancing or by using the melody as a *nigun* (a wordless song) in order to extend the song and to include congregants who aren't familiar with the Hebrew words of the liturgy.

Although attaching emotion to other ideas would seem to be a valuable goal for communal prayer, using new melodies to achieve that goal raises several problems, aside from the challenge and potential expenditure of congregational goodwill involved in teaching new melodies. For instance, many congregants feel that the use of non-traditional melodies deprives them of their opportunity to connect to Jewish tradition. Also, when non-traditional melodies are used they supplant traditional melodies and possibly deprive congregants of the apparent benefits and any unapparent benefits that traditional melodies provide. Furthermore, use of non-traditional melodies conflicts with established Jewish norms for prayer melodies (e.g., *halakhic*⁴⁸ rules and local *minhagim* (traditions) that call for the use of certain melodies or modes). While Modern synagogues frequently do not observe many traditional Jewish norms, they often do consider them when considering proposals for innovation.

⁴⁷ A good example of a melody having different meanings based on individual congregants' past experience is intrafaction of commonly used prayer melodies - i.e., the setting of a prayer to a melody that is commonly used for another prayer, especially when there is no strong thematic connection between the prayers. In many Modern Congregations, a part of the *Shabbat Shacharit K'dusha (titgadal v'titkadash...)* is sung to the melody that is widely used for *Shalom Alekhem*, which was composed by Rabbi Israel Goldfarb in the early 20th century and published in his Jewish Songster in 1918. *Shalom Alekhem*, a song composed in the 17th or early 18th centuries, is thematically connected to, and traditionally sung on, Friday night in connection with services and home rituals. For most congregants, the melody does not evoke a meaning of Friday night ritual - either because they don't recognize the melody's original context or because the connection between the melody and Friday evening was never strong or is overshadowed by its connection to Saturday morning or other contexts. For other congregants, the connection is strong and the use of the melody evokes an association to Friday evening rituals that is incongruous on a Saturday morning.

⁴⁸ *Halakhic* means derived from *halakha*, which is a Hebrew term for Jewish religious law.

Each experience of listening to, or performing, music does not occur in a timeless vacuum and our subject, congregational singing, occurs in the context of participation in a communal prayer service that has the potential for great meaning and many variables. And, each person who is having a congregational singing experience has their own innate and developed capacity and predisposition to participate and to appreciate the experience. With these compelling disclaimers acknowledged, I proceed.

Garnering interest in the use of new tunes is a challenge that requires some attention. Aside from the presence or an instant intellectual and emotional connection to tradition or some other valued concept, some Modern Congregants are concerned with the pedigree of a melody. Put more generously, they are more interested in investing their time and attaching their spirituality to a melody that is likely to further their knowledge and understanding of a common body of music used for Jewish prayer.⁴⁹

Many examples of song being used in connection with communal connections to God can be found in Judaism's canonical texts. וְכַנְרֹת, וְבָצִי בְרוּשִׁים; וְכָל כְּלֵי מַשְׁחָקִים לְפָנָי יְהוָה, בְּכֹל, עֲצֵי בְרוֹשִׁים; וְכַנְרֹת, וְבָצִי בְרוּשִׁים, וְכָל כְּלֵי מַשְׁחָקִים לְפָנָי יְהוָה, בְּכֹל, עֲצֵי בְרוֹשִׁים. (And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord with all manner of instruments made of cypress-wood, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with sistra, and with cymbals. 2 Samuel 6:5.) In *Arakhin*⁵⁰ 11a it says: תָּנוּ תַחַת (The omission of the song invalidates the sacrifice.” אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלהיך בשמחה ובטוב לבב איזו היא עבודה שבשמחה ובטוב לבב הוי אומר זה שירה (R. Mattenah said: [It is derived] from here: Because thou didst not serve the Lord thy God in joyfulness and with gladness of heart. Now which service is it that is ‘in joyfulness and with gladness of heart’? — You must say: It is song.) *Baraitot* (certain statements attributed to Rabbis of the *Mishnaic* Period - 2nd c. B.C.E. to early 3rd c. C.E.) in the *Talmud* recognize the connection between music and serving God (in this case, via the Temple sacrificial rites), and of course, debate the existence and features of a requirement of song (and also instrumental music) during sacrifices.

Scrolling forward in time and westward in geography to the *Ashkenazi* community of the 13th century, we find a written statement that demonstrates the concern that the forebears of today's modern American congregations had about the meaning and emotional content of music used for prayer. “When you pray, use those tunes that are pleasant and sweet in your eyes... which will draw you after what is spoken from your mouth. For supplication, use a tune that readies the heart. For praise, use a tune that gladdens the ear, so that your mouth be filled with a love and joy for the One Who Sees your heart.⁵¹ This statement reflects the idea that a melody

⁴⁹ Juslin and Sloboda, p. 97.

⁵⁰ *Arakhin* is a tractate in the Babylonian *Talmud*, which is a compilation of Rabbinic statements on *halakha* and other Jewish traditions that was compiled in the 3rd to 5th centuries that was and continues to be a seminal work in the development of Judaism.

⁵¹ *Sefer Chasidim*, 15:8, attributed to rabbi Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg.

can have an emotional quality that is independent of the purpose for which it is being used - in this case, the prayer being sung to the melody. It also reflects the corollary idea that the emotion carried by the melody can support, or conflict, with the desired emotion of the prayer and the melody chosen should support the desired emotion of the prayer.

If the *Ashkenazi* poskeners had ended the line of thought concerning the association of prayer and melody here, Prayer Leaders might have had an easier time choosing melodies that directed their congregants to attach emotions to prayer as they (the Prayer Leaders) saw fit. But some poskeners, most prominently, the MaHaRIL, Rabbi Yaakov HaLevi, had more to say about prayer melodies, and applied the religious imperative that Jews within a community preserve that community's Jewish traditions to synagogue melodies. This significantly narrowed the range of acceptable melodies for subsequent generations. This imperative to continue to use traditional melodies was frequently not strictly enforced, as can be deduced from recorded complaints concerning violations in which secular tunes were contracted for use as prayer melodies. But the notion stuck and has become part of the mind-set in traditional and modern Jewish communities, alike.

It is possible that the MaHaRIL's preference for traditional tunes is not a significant factor in the preference of many modern Jews (who do not feel bound by *halakhah* or other norms of traditional Judaism. This preference may be essentially a function of tradition in general, and the nature of attachment to ritual acts, as opposed to Jewish tradition and Jewish prayer rituals, in particular.

But, some modern Jewish communities have either ignored or re-interpreted the MaHaRIL's dicta and its progeny⁵² and, ignored or managed any natural tendency to use only traditional melodies, and have re-set parts of the liturgy to non-traditional melodies. It may be fruitful to try to ascertain the emotional impact of these non-traditional melodies with respect to the liturgy and to specific ideas associated with the liturgy.

The responsibility to promote important Prayer Goals through communal prayer fell on religious leaders in all periods of history. However, in times and places where adhering to well-defined and detailed norms of communal prayer of the larger community and/or of the particular congregation was a goal of the great importance to prayer leaders, there was little impetus to consider what other goals were or were not being achieved through communal prayer service. Changes to communal prayer services inherently tend to undermine the goal of adhering to existing norms for communal prayer services. So the desire for change would have been, in general, very low. As or more important for Prayer Leaders in traditional communities was resisting pressure to make changes to the congregation's communal prayer service - particularly pressure coming from congregants who wished to insert things that they had experienced that originated outside of their Jewish community (e.g., popular melodies). While there are norms for

⁵² E.g., the gloss of the ReMA (Rabbi Moshe Isserles) to *halakhic* code, *Shulhan Orekh*, O.H 619:1, "One should not digress from the customers of the place, even with regard to tunes...that are used."

the musical component of traditional communal prayer, prayer music is not as clearly or extensively defined as other aspects of communal prayer, such as the liturgy. In traditional congregations, changes to the liturgy have occurred, but at an extremely slow pace. Changes to the music of communal prayer, not being as bound by clearly defined norms, have occurred at a faster pace. There is a lot of evidence that the origin of these changes was congregants' experience of music that originated outside of the Jewish community, such as folk songs or church music. At times, the outside musical influences were adopted as the result of a thoughtful process designed to achieve particular Prayer Goals of the prayer leaders for the community, such as the desire to increase the level of orderliness and decorum in prayer services in keeping with a theology in which orderliness and decorum reflect sanctity. But often the process of adoption was more the result of capitulation to the desires of congregants and prayer leaders to make communal prayer services more aesthetically appealing. Some of these musical changes were eventually widely adopted and became a focal point and an important part of the tradition of communal prayer in many communities that would be considered, and that would consider themselves, very traditional.

5. Traditional Communal Prayer versus Communal Prayer in Modern Congregations.

Jewish communal prayer is part of a system of Judaism that involves multiple activities at different times. In traditional communities, the system plays a prominent role in many behavior patterns that play out over various cycles of time, such as daily, monthly, annual and whole-life cycles. In modern communities, the system of Judaism of which communal prayer is a part plays a subtler, and in some cases negligible, role in each of those cycles. Nevertheless, communal prayer is an institution that has been a central and important element in Judaism for most of its existence, and has been performed according to traditions that date back to the time of the Second Temple.

In the face of the changing environments in which Jewish communities have existed, these communal prayer traditions have probably never been entirely consistent for long periods of time, and they continue to be in development today in most, if not all, Jewish communities. However, numerous rules concerning communal prayer were established enough to be the subject of detailed parsing and analysis around 2,000 years ago that is preserved in the *Mishna*⁵³, a central canon that informs the Judaism of practically all Jews of today, and continuously parsed and analyzed, but essentially preserved, over the succeeding centuries in subsequent published *halakhic* commentaries and codes that have played a significant role in establishing norms of behavior for most Jewish communities.

Ashkenazi communal prayer-music traditions are neither uniform across communities nor static over time. However, there is a fairly discreet set of conventions over and above the

⁵³ The *Mishna* is a compilation of statements on *halakha* and other Jewish traditions that are attributed to Rabbis of the *Mishnaic* Period - from 2nd c. B.C.E. to early 3rd c. C.E.

particular rules described in the *Mishna*, that specifies various features of communal prayer services, including the frequency and timing of services, the liturgy for each service, physical postures and gestures to be used in certain parts of each service - the *nusah*. Included in these conventions are the performance mode for each part of each service and the tonal mode or melody for each part of each service that is chanted or sung. The *nusah* varies across Jewish communities - typically along lines that reflect the Medieval geographic roots of the community. The differences in the performance mode conventions across Jewish communities is very noticeable to those familiar with Jewish communal prayer, and the tonal and melodic aspects of these conventions vary dramatically, so that they would be noticeable to a first-time observer. However, within communities, many aspects of these conventions are steadfastly observed, some to a high degree of detail and consistency, in the prayer services regularly conducted in Traditional communities in America.

The view that the use of traditional prayer-melodies for communal prayer is a religious imperative dates back at least to the early 15th century, when it was reflected in the recorded opinions of the MaHaRIL, who promoted delineating and preserving a broad range of uncodified traditions of European Jewish communities that were not being kept well in his time. The rules that have emerged from the MaHaRIL's writing mandating the use of traditional tunes are not very narrow and allow for a good deal of flexibility in the choice of melody for most of the liturgy. In short, the rules mandate that a small number of sections of the liturgy be set to particular tunes whose roots harken back to the melodies used for those sections of liturgy since ancient times, and perhaps to the music used in connection with sacrifices in the days of the Temple, and have a perpetual, sacred place in the hearts of Jews in *Ashkenazi* communities. However, there is also an overriding principle that insists that essentially all melodies should be traditional, because melodies that are not will distract the congregants from their *kavana* (i.e., their intent, or their mental focus, during prayer).⁵⁴

This principle seems ripe for reevaluation as it applies to Modern Congregations whose knowledge of and devotion to traditions of communal prayer in general, and melodic traditions in particular, are much weaker than the communities that the MaHaRIL served and the traditional communities of today. However, a number of modern-day cantors in Modern Congregations believe, strongly, that the use of traditional musical *nusah* in communal prayer is highly desirable and an important component of the tradition.

Modern Congregations observe many traditional conventions, but fewer of them than Traditional congregations, and often with less consistency. Many Conservative synagogues today apply a variant of the traditional *Ashkenazi nusah* that involves fewer services and less liturgy. The Conservative version of the *nusah* is less demanding in terms of ability to recite the Hebrew liturgy and other special skills that congregants need in order to actively participate in all

⁵⁴ See, Cantor Sherwood Goffin, *The Music of Yamim Noraim*, published online at <http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/728281/cantor-sherwood-goffin/the-music-of-the-yamim-noraim/#>, p. 36.

parts of the service where active participation is called for. The deviations from traditional *Ashkenazi nusah* are significant enough to justify the characterization that Conservative synagogues have developed a discreet variant of *Ashkenazi nusah* that is more flexible than the Traditional version. Alternatively, one might say that Conservative synagogues have stopped maintaining many of the conventions that make up Traditional *nusah*.

The prominence of congregational singing during prayer services is a relatively recent phenomenon. In *Ashkenazi* communities of the late 19th century, congregational singing played a much less prominent role than it does today. Outside of the Reform movement, congregational singing in synagogues only got its start circa 1910 to 1915 and was uncommon until the late 1960's and mid-1970's.^{55 56} According to Cantor William Sharlin (1920-2012), in the past Jewish prayer was, and in traditional settings of today Jewish prayer continues to be, an essentially private phenomenon, in spite of the communal setting. Even the instances in traditional prayer services when the congregants sang the same extended group of words to the same melody - which took place mainly during singing of *piyutim* (Jewish religious songs) - the conduct was really a continuation of the fundamentally private prayer, as evidenced by a greater tendency toward imperfect unison in tone and rhythm than is typical today.⁵⁷ So, if congregational singing is predicated on an intent to achieve a high degree of coordination in rhythm and tone, then, according to Sharlin, there is no congregational singing at all in traditional *davening* (recitation of Jewish prayers).

Very early on in my course of study at the Academy for Jewish Religion to become a cantor, I was assigned to read an essay written by Abraham Joshua Heschel, entitled "The Spirit of Jewish Prayer," based on a lecture he gave at a conference of the Rabbinical Assembly of America in 1953.⁵⁸ In the essay, Heschel laments the general state of decay of Jewish prayer in American synagogues at the time. The urgency of Jewish prayer, according to Heschel, had given way to a ceremonious quality: attendance was high and increasing, but *kavana* was low and descending. This article has colored my attitude and thinking around synagogue prayer.

⁵⁵ ^See, Goffin, *On the Proper Use of Niggunim for the Tefillot of the Yamim Noraim*, published online at <http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/759536/cantor-sherwood-goffin/on-the-proper-use-of-niggunim-for-the-tefillot-of-the-yamim-noraim/>, p. 1.

⁵⁶ See, also, "From a Conversation with Joseph Goldfarb," published in *The Synagogue Journal* (of the Kane Street Synagogue) 1856-2006, and Henry D. Michelman, "Israel Goldfarb (1879-1967) Rabbi, Cantor and Influential Composer," article in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, both republished online at http://kanestreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/hjbinder06sacred_music.pdf.

⁵⁷ William Sharlin, "Congregational Singing Past and Present," originally published in the *Central Conference of American Reform Rabbis Journal* (Spring 1994), reprinted in *Jewish Sacred Music and Jewish Identity, Continuity and Fragmentation*, edited by Jonathan L. Friedman and Brad Stetson, Paragon House, St. Paul 2008, p. 23.

⁵⁸ *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America, Fifty-Third Annual Convention, June 22 - June 27, 1953*, Volume XVII, p. 151 published online at <http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-ideas/cj/classics/9-7-11-b2school/heschel-1953.pdf>.

Heschel's authority as an observer of Judaism who was able to eloquently reflect both modern and traditional sensibilities is very powerful, and his observations in this regard ring true to me. (I consider my own sensibilities to be essentially modern.) As a congregant in Conservative synagogues for the last 40-odd years, I perceive that some of the ceremoniousness that Heschel perceived has receded, but it seems to me that I see fewer congregants in Conservative synagogues who appear to be very focused on their prayer. Attendance at Conservative services over this period has been decreasing.

There are probably many ways to describe Heschel's "urgency" or its lacking. A plausible explanation is that this urgency is a reflection of one or more of the Prayer Goals for communal prayer that I have identified, above. Accepting my view, set forth above, that it is the responsibility of prayer leaders in the community to try to promote those goals through the communal prayer services they lead, it seems to me that communal prayer leaders should be giving serious thought to what accounts for this difference between the sense of urgency in communal prayer services of Traditional and Modern congregations, and whether and how they can promote this sense of urgency in their own congregation's communal prayers. Can this urgency be reproduced in Modern communal prayer by altering conditions within the control of Prayer Leaders? In particular, can congregational singing, which benefits from the emotional power of music, and seems to have become an important fixture in Modern congregations' communal services, be altered to achieve more urgency in communal prayer?

I think that the answer to any of these questions could be, "no," or perhaps, "yes." Nevertheless, the effect would be fleeting or ultimately inconsistent with one or more Prayer Goals. Yet, the experiment is, I think, very worthwhile. So, how would that be accomplished? I have come across several suggestions that relate to the music of communal prayer services that address this question.

Recently, I came across the writings of Cantor Sharlin with his observations on the state of Jewish prayer, roughly a generation after Heschel. Sharlin, like Heschel, was raised in an Orthodox household and community and went on to become an important leader in less traditional communities, and is able to describe both the sensibilities of traditional and modern Jews with respect to communal prayer. The writings of Sharlin, a cantor, address synagogue prayer, and specifically, the phenomenon of congregational singing, which I took as the subject of this paper.

According to the accounts of Heschel and Sharlin, the traditional *davening* of that time was a more profound experience than that of today's Conservative and Reform synagogue prayer services. *Davening* was driven by a desire to pray, in contrast to modern prayer which takes place in a secularized context, in which the desire to pray "becomes secondary to a greater need for communal, ethnic gratification and reinforcement of identity."⁵⁹ In Sharlin's view, the old-

⁵⁹ William Sharlin, "Congregational Singing Past and Present," *supra*, p. 20.

school *davener* prays “out of the deepest personal needs. His davening is natural, disciplined, second-nature, intensive, daily, potentially spontaneous and even creative.” On the other hand, the typical *davener* of the day (circa 1994), i.e., a person who *davens* almost exclusively on Rosh HaShannah-Yom Kippur or even on *Shabbat* - is not *davening* out of a need to pray, but out of a need to be part of a community, which she finds in a synagogue prayer service. This change in the nature of the *davener*’s relationship to prayer could be an important factor in the decline in the quality of prayer generally observed by Sharlin.

Traditional *davening*, which still goes on in many Orthodox communities where prayer has not been secularized, had deeper intellectual and emotional intensity than the version of prayer practiced today in Conservative and Reform congregations. Heschel and Sharlin did not attribute this loss of intensity to the onset of congregational singing. They attributed this loss to far more profound differences in the world-views, beliefs and lifestyles of modern Conservative and Reform Jews and those of their traditional forebears. I think Sharlin described the phenomenon aptly when he wrote: “...congregational singing in the *Ashkenazi* tradition enters a vacuum left by the decline of the power of davening, and in many places, its demise.”⁶⁰

While Sharlin lamented the decline of *davening*, I don’t believe he lamented the rise of congregational singing. The decline of *davening* occurred, according to Sharlin, as a result of fairly fundamental changes in the conditions under which Jews live. The freedom and tendency to not believe in God or to minimize the presence of God in one’s own existence, and the freedom and tendency to choose to not participate in the thrice-daily regimen of traditional Jewish prayer are, in a nutshell, the underlying causes behind the decline in the power of *davening* noted by Sharlin. Congregational singing is not a cause of the decline of *davening*, it merely occupies the time left open when the devaluing stopped. Congregational singing has its charms and purposes (to affirm congregant’s Jewish identity and connection to their congregation), but, as communal prayer goes, it is inferior to the powerful experience of *davening*. Without congregational singing, the traditional *davener* was freer to express her own thoughts and feelings in prayer because she was less encumbered by the singing and group dynamic of the other congregants. Actually, many assert that hearing the unsynchronized droning sound of other *daveners* did support the *davening* of the individual *davener*, and put her in community with the other *daveners*, but in a way that was less restrictive than congregational singing, and was still very profound.

In the traditional *davening*, as recalled by Heschel and Sharlin, there was no shortage of meaning or emotion for the congregants. The liturgy itself carried its textual meaning, including poetic use of language and layers of meaning in the references to scriptural, Rabbinic and historical subjects. Today’s congregants, who often have only a vague conception of the meaning of the liturgy, can only glean a fraction of its meaning from English translations and comments in footnotes in the page margins of the siddur. Given that many modern congregants have a less concrete belief in God and God’s role in their lives than their more traditional

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 19.

counterparts, the act of saying these vaguely understood prayers, which focus heavily on God, generates a lot of intellectual ambivalence or indifference or annoyance, as opposed to urgency. In the past, even for those congregants whose understanding of the text of the traditional liturgy was minimal, the act of praying and the act of praying with a congregation had layers of meaning, which included fulfilling *halakhah*, fulfilling communal and familial expectations, petitioning God for particular benefits, and making a sacred connection to God. Prayer services also meant connection to one's synagogue community and to the Jewish people and one's Jewish identity, but for most people, those meanings were found in more of their other activities than is the case for today's congregants. For most Modern Congregants today, communal prayer does not mean fulfillment of *halakhah*; and communal and familial expectations require only once-a-year-or-so attendance at communal prayer service.

I think many Modern Congregants would be surprised at the notion implicit in Sharlin's statement that congregational singing, at least in the amounts and manner that it is typically done at *Shabbat* and High Holiday services in Modern Congregations today, represents a relatively impotent form of prayer. Portions of the service that consist of congregational singing are, for many, the most powerful parts of the service. Aside from a few English readings, which are typically recited without musical tonality or rhythm, congregational singing is the only part of the service during which they feel they are actively participating in the prayer service. However, it seems to me, that the sort of congregational singing that goes on during synagogue services is a less intense way of praying than the individual *davening* (often accompanied by *shuckling* (back and forth swaying of the upper body while standing place) I have witnessed over the years and that I think is the model against which Heschel and Sharlin judged the prayer services about which they wrote.

While for many modern Jews, intense traditional *davening* and *shuckling* has been seen as not an appropriate or authentic way for them to express themselves in prayer, participating in services by listening to the leader recite prayers has also been unsatisfying - even when the leaders were gifted singers who might have been inspirational to traditional *daveners*.

Congregational singing in more than small amounts was not part of the centuries old tradition of communal prayer that has been so important to the Jewish people in *Ashkenazi* communities. Given its tenuous place in the world, it does not seem unreasonable to believe that Jewish prayer traditions were necessary for the survival of the Jewish People, as a people with Judaism as their religion, and have a particular potency. Significant deviations from this long-lived tradition, such as the shortening and reduction in number of prayer services, the use of vernacular in place of Hebrew, and, of course, the introduction of additional congregational singing, reduce the effect of the tradition. Many cantors and other writers on the topic of synagogue music have noted the departure from traditional *nusah*, both in the sense of the musical modes to which certain parts of the traditional prayer service are traditionally sung, and in the traditional balance of three performance modes of prayer traditionally used in a traditional service: (1) solo chanting by the *hazzan* (the cantor), sometimes with harmonic accompaniment by a choir or musical instruments, which was, at its best, beautiful, highly emotional and evoked

a sense of being in the presence of God, (2) congregational murmuring, which could act as a response to, and derive emotional content and sense of being in God's presence from, the *hazzan's* solo performance, and (3) congregational unison singing, which included, mainly, call and response chanting led by the *hazzan*, as well as some sung-through congregational songs.

“[B]y the 1990s, fine singing by a leader had been replaced by the entire group singing in unison. In Conservative Judaism, this trend had presumably been started by the national movement's Jewish camping program (Ramah) of the 1950s and 1960s. Its Tsunami-like effects apparently came in a series of waves that were felt most strongly when former campers, who had married and were raising children of their own, had reached leadership age in synagogues.”⁶¹
 “Rather than chanted *hazzanic* interpretation, we get a non-stop chain of simple melodies designed to keep people busy.”⁶²

Even if changes are well-intentioned, and even if they are a rational response to changes in the way congregants think and feel about their Judaism and changes in their preferences and lifestyles, they are not effective replacements for what has been changed. This pessimistic view of change is not in any way limited to congregational singing. It applies to any change, to any long-standing tradition.

Traditional *Ashkenazi* prayer, as it is still practiced today in traditional communities, was, as a rule, done with a congregation whenever possible, but consisted mainly of (1) personal *davening* (i.e., chanting, speaking, mumbling or silent recitation of prayers by individual *daveners* without attempting to utter syllables in temporal unison), and (2) *davening* (solo singing or chanting) by an individual prayer leader. Congregants would come to the same place in the liturgy at a number of points during the service, when all would listen to the leader perform a particular phrase, and when all would pronounce, as a group, a few specific phrases in the liturgy (such as the communal response to the *Bar'chu*, the *Sh'ma* and the *K'dusha*⁶³). But in between these points in the liturgy, traditional *daveners* did not, in general, synchronize their prayers. They did not offer their prayers in a coordinated song, which requires conforming them syllable by syllable and note by note to the group, and were freer to experience their own, personal affect, rather than being influenced by, or conforming to, the communal affect of the group.

How does observance of the musical *nusah* in particular, promote my Prayer Goals? One effect of wide maintenance of *Ashkenazi nusah* is that prayer services are similar enough across communities - including communities that are distant from one another - is that a person who

⁶¹ Benjamn Tisser, “Preserving Nusah in the 21st Century Conservative Synagogue,” published online at http://www.bentisser.com/uploads/1/5/4/1/15410790/jsm_may_2014.pdf, p. 3.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁶³ The *Bar'chu*, the *Sh'ma* and the *K'dusha* are three discrete sections of the traditional liturgy, versions of which have been maintained in the prayer service of many Modern Congregations.

becomes familiar with the prayer services in one *Ashkenazi* community will be familiar with the prayer services in another *Ashkenazi* community. By learning the same *nusah*, American Jews can actively participate in prayer services in communities far from their own.

Traditional communal prayer, according to Heschel and Sharlin, involved a lot of personal expression by the *davener* to God. The words of prayer are either largely or entirely fixed, which seems to work against the idea of personal expression, and for many traditional *daveners*, *davening* may be very impersonal, with all of their focus devoted to pronunciation of the words read off the page or devoted to memory. But, for others, the fixed words do not prevent their minds from experiencing personal expression or even outpouring of the soul. Some Jews who have committed the liturgy to memory are able to focus on their own thoughts and feeling, while reciting the prescribed liturgy. These thoughts and feeling may be directly related to the text, and consist of moment to moment insights on the text. Or, the recitation may be just a background for the *davener's* thoughts to move to another place, which, if her mood is prayerful and she is not distracted by other thoughts, will be directly related to her relationship with God. Congregational singing, which requires coordination with other congregants, seems less likely to generate the same degree of personal expression.

In Conservative synagogues today, it is normal for congregational singing to comprise a significant percentage of the total time in *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*⁶⁴ services devoted to prayer. In many Conservative synagogues, the bulk of the liturgy that is recited (some is skipped over), is recited in the traditional Hebrew and Aramaic renderings. If we consider that many Conservative Jews are focusing on something other than prayer at times in the service that are devoted to prayer in Hebrew and Aramaic, congregational singing occupies a very high percentage of the prayer.

The efficacy of any innovation is never a sure thing and the wisdom of deviating from a component of a tradition (i.e., traditional *Ashkenazi* prayer melodies) that has evolved over centuries is particularly questionable because it deprives those who adopt the innovation from the potential benefits of the tradition. The performance of large parts of the liturgy through congregational singing is a relatively recent innovation that doesn't qualify as an ancient part of *Ashkenazi* prayer tradition, but is used a lot in many congregations because it is an effective way of engaging congregants during the parts of prayer services that are comprised of Hebrew liturgy. Thoughtful, innovative if necessary, application of the power of music is a worthwhile endeavor, or at least a worthwhile experiment.

For congregants who do not understand the literal meaning of prayers that are performed in Hebrew, what is the meaning or emotion they experience during performance of Hebrew liturgy? This is a very complicated question with many possible answers, and the answer will vary from congregant to congregant. Whether or not a congregant understands the literal

⁶⁴ *Yom Tov* is a Hebrew term that refers to certain, important Jewish holidays. Modern Jews are more likely to attend prayer services on *Shabbat* and/or *Yom Tovs* than on other days.

meaning of the prayers, the act of being present during the service has meaning and evokes emotion. This meaning and emotion are shaped by past experiences and learning that take place over many years of Jewish life, but for many of today's Conservative Jews, the experiences and learning are too thin, and traditional prayers are too unfamiliar, for the meaning to consistently be: "I am praying and it is important that I do it in a focused way." The meaning and emotion of prayer services are also affected by conditions in the immediate past, such as the congregant's mood and mindset before the prayer service begins.

Sharlin posited that the long survival of the Jewish people in the face of many challenges may be largely attributable to an "ability to sustain and reconcile two contradictory attitudes. One is to preserve and rigidly freeze, the other is to be flexible and adapt."⁶⁵ Clearly, in any specific instance in which there is pressure to make a change to tradition, only one of these attitudes can prevail – either the change is approved and the tradition compromised or the change is disapproved and the tradition is preserved – for the moment. In the long term, both the approval and the disapproval have the potential to do great damage to the tradition, which is at risk of either sliding into extinction from one too many approvals, or plunging into extinction from one too many disapprovals. Judaism has, somehow, struck a balance between approvals and disapprovals. The good changes take hold and the bad ones do not. On the whole, while innovation plays an important role in Jewish prayer, the precedent over the long haul of Jewish history appears to be for innovations to be accepted slowly. Rapid innovation is much more likely to have a short life-span.

Today, in Conservative synagogues, congregational singing is in demand. Many congregants place a higher value on congregational singing than other commonly used prayer performance modes – particularly when they know the words and melodies well. Many congregants, and also clergy, would like to replace more of the prayer in other performance modes with congregational singing. The main reason for this is that many congregants don't feel engaged, or as engaged, during parts of the service when the leader is chanting or singing the liturgy, or when congregants are praying individually – the two other performance modes that, along with congregational singing, comprise the part of the service devoted to prayer. While it would be easier to add congregational singing by adding English songs, the prevailing view in Conservative congregations is that the desire to use English prayer should be resisted, in large part, because it is not traditional. Congregational singing is typically used for parts of the traditional liturgy that are in the traditional Hebrew and Aramaic.

The collection of and composition of melodies for use in congregational singing has been going on for a long time. Until recently, composers of new synagogue songs (at least ones that became popular) generally used melodies that had characteristics similar to existing prayer melodies. The melodies were typically in minor keys and in a consistent 3/4 or 4/4 meter. Melodies that are part of a Jewish synagogue melody tradition, or that have the same melodic

⁶⁵ From notes of William Sharlin, published in Friedman and Stetson, *Jewish Sacred Music and Jewish Identity, Continuity and Fragmentation*, p.62.

characteristics as traditional melodies, convey an association with the larger aspects of Jewish tradition and to Jewish identity. In this way, a song upholds a melodic tradition of communal prayer, and furthers the goal of promoting congregants' connection to Jewish tradition, more generally. The prime example of melodies that adhere to a traditional synagogue sound is *intrafaction*, in which an existing melody used for one piece of liturgy (i.e., another prayer song, a *nusah* motif or a cantillation trope) is used as, or as part of, the melody of a song whose lyrics are a different piece of liturgy. A sense of tradition is also maintained by *contrafaction* of melody from a Jewish folk or Israeli pop song that is used for a prayer song.⁶⁶ Some composers regularly incorporated motifs from the *nusah* that would be used by the leader in a traditional service for chanting the same piece of liturgy. Each of these melodic choices add to the meaning of the song as an expression of Jewish tradition, as asserted above.

According to one way of thinking, congregational singing is an ideal form of Jewish prayer, on a par with, or even better than, *davening*. The tradition of praying as congregation is a fairly central tenet in Jewish prayer traditions, and is considered a religious obligation for Jews who are conforming to *halakhah*. Congregational singing requires the congregants to perform their prayers in a coordinated way that brings them into a special, more palpable, form of community than merely *davening* on one's own in the presence of the congregation. Congregational singing is more likely to be experienced as a joint effort to praise or to petition God, especially if the sound that is jointly produced is particularly spirited or aesthetically pleasing, and therefore may be more appealing or inspirational to the Audience, i.e., God. One might even argue that the halakhic requirement of a minyan, forcing Jews to pray in the same room with each other, exists in order to encourage this sort of coordinated prayer in which congregants combine their prayers in a coordinated way that would not be possible if they were not in the same room. I believe that this call for coordination of the community's prayer is a mandatory part of the *Ashkenazi nusah*, but only in the few brief passages where the tradition is for the community to respond, as a unit, to invitations or introductions from the *shaliah tzibur* (i.e., with respect to a prayer service or section thereof, the person (traditionally, a man), who leads the congregation in reciting prayers, and recites certain prayers and phrases by himself, in accordance with conventions that are part of the *nusah*).

Also, the traditional Jewish liturgy includes many phrases that are exhortations to sing and to praise God with joyful noises. There is the sense that when a Jew praises God loudly and with spirit, she is fulfilling a commandment for which God created her, and gave her a voice. Biblical texts describe the singing and performance of instrumental music by large numbers of Levites in the Temple, and one might argue that the coordinated Levitical music in praise of God, or at least its spirit, is something for Jews to emulate today. For Jews who do not understand the liturgy, and are not familiar with the scope of ideas and emotions it portrays and the powerful, largely tragic, history it embodies, nothing much is lost in engaging in joyful, congregational singing and either skipping or paying little attention to parts of the liturgy that are not sung praise

⁶⁶As other Jewish folk songs or motifs have been incorporated into prayer services in many congregations over time, Jewish folk songs or songs in the style of Jewish folk songs generally sound like prayer music.

of God, or even in joyfully singing parts of the liturgy whose textual meaning expresses other emotions.

Congregational singing also can promote a sense of being part of the Jewish People, which is another central value in Judaism, although not as directly connected to prayer. And congregational singing can bring out a sense of connection to one's Jewish heritage. In particular, for Jews who do not take part in many other Jewish communal activities or have little regular connection to their Jewish heritage, there may be value to the sense of connection to the Jewish People and Jewish heritage that congregational singing evokes.

But, more to the point, for congregants who are not able to *daven* because they haven't developed competence in uttering the extensive liturgy, congregational singing is, by contrast, a communal activity in which more congregants feel competent.

Since the beginnings of the Conservative movement, there have been many changes to the prayer services at non-Orthodox synagogues that would seem to increase opportunities for engagement for congregants who are not familiar with the traditional service and do not understand the Hebrew liturgy. These include the inclusion of English translations and commentary in *siddurim* (prayer books), the recitation of English translations or adaptations of traditional prayers, guidance and commentary provided by the Rabbi or other leader(s) of the service, and the substitution of chanted or silent recitation of Hebrew prayers with congregational singing, in Hebrew. Today, after these changes, most Conservative Jews only infrequently attend synagogue prayer services, and when they do attend, many still wish they were more engaged. In the absence of additional practice, education or some other change in the lives of congregants that makes the concept of praying more compelling to them, it seems unlikely that more Conservative Jews will feel engaged at services, unless more changes are made to services.

One purpose of Jewish prayer is as a way for the person praying to experience a connection to God. I think that the value of connecting to God through prayer is broadly accepted across Jewish denominations and traditions. Among less traditional Jews, who do not value halakhic observance highly, connecting to God is a key purpose of prayer, including communal prayer in the traditional and common synagogue setting. But experiencing communion with the congregation and the Jewish people and connecting to one's Jewish identity are also purposes of the prayer service that probably have much greater significance for non-traditional Jews than for traditional Jews.

Congregational singing can be a way a congregant can access a connection to God that he or she rarely feels in his or her religious or secular life. If not a direct connection to God, congregational singing can give a congregant a sense of direct connection to the congregation, or to the Jewish people, or to the congregant's personal Jewish roots or Jewish identity. Through these connections to more palpable elements of Judaism, congregational singing can fulfill the purpose of connecting the congregant to the (less palpable) Jewish God.

For some congregants, congregational singing may be their most powerful connection with God during prayer services. This can be in stark contrast to the indifference or boredom that many of these same congregants generally feel during prayer services, or imagine that they would feel if they attended a prayer service.

Having laid out various virtues of congregational singing, it seems that most of them could be achieved by coordinated chanting, or tuneless recitation, or even coordinated body movements, without music (or with only the minimal tonality required for simple modal chanting in unison). Using a vernacular version of the traditional liturgy (or replacing it with a new, vernacular liturgy), or shortening the traditional liturgy would result in more congregants being competent at performing it actively. By chanting or reciting the new liturgy rhythmically, a coordinated congregational prayer could probably be achieved, producing the same sense of community as congregational singing.

Congregants wish for, and demand, that they have the opportunity to participate in prayer services, and not merely by listening to others around them chant prayers in the traditional *nusah* - no matter how expert or beautiful that chanting might be. There are several meanings to prayer that make it potentially engaging for most (adult) congregants: connection to one's own synagogue community, connection to the Jewish people around the world, connection to one's place in Jewish history, and connection to God. Congregational singing is naturally suited to establishing a connection to the synagogue community, since a singing congregant is engaging in a coordinated activity with the other members of the synagogue community, or at least the subset of the community that is singing together. Congregational singing is also naturally suited to making a connection to a congregant's Jewish identity, particularly if the song being sung has a meaning of tradition, which is typically the case if the congregant associates the melody with tradition. In my view, Conservative synagogues, have focused too heavily on those meanings. When new tunes are introduced, additional meanings are added to the congregationally sung performance of the prayer, including that something new is happening with the performance of this prayer. This is not a welcome meaning for some. But, more important than this arguably superficial "newness of performance" meaning is the opportunities it presents: to use music's power to hold meaning in order to attach new meaning to the prayer; and to use music's emotional power so that the performance evokes a powerful emotional affect. The introduction of a new melody can be used as an opportunity for the prayer leader to suggest a particular emotion that will afterwards be attached to the melody and/or the prayer. At the risk of defying the call to preserve the remaining traditional elements of (musical) *nusah*, new tunes might be used for parts of the liturgy that are not already being preformed by congregational singing. Another way of thinking of this is as an exercise in which congregants are told to take a new look at the prayer, and then seal the new look with a new melody. This could be a way to add meanings to the experience of prayer.

The use of new melodies is obviously not a new idea. I'm not sure anyone has tried to analyze why and how new melodies change the meaning and emotion of prayer. I think many

proponents of new melodies would say that they “invigorate” or “reinvigorate” the performance of a prayer. My thesis is that this happens because the new music re-opens the meaning of the prayer, and the emotional impact of the music attaches to the prayer, with its new meaning. There are many ways to accomplish this same result - e.g., through education and/or meditation. In fact, I would think that, if implemented well, a program of education or meditation on a prayer or a service would have more impact than a new tune on congregants who pursued the program, and would not be changing existing prayer traditions, which is an obvious drawback of new melodies. However, the different approaches are not necessarily in conflict. Rather, it is a question of resources (including congregants’ time) and where congregants’ enthusiasm lies.

6. Conclusion.

The European predecessors of today’s Conservative Jews, in general, lived as part of a Jewish community that imposed Jewish traditions on them in a way that made Jewish tradition a central aspect of their existence. As a natural effect of this life, a typical Jew felt connected to God and to the Jewish community. His or her sense of Jewish identity was so strong as to be unquestioned, and traditions were passed from generation to generation with relatively little change. There was no need to make radical adjustments to traditional communal prayer to achieve them. There was relatively little congregational singing and melody choices were primarily important to preserve tradition, with enough flexibility to avoid alienating progressives who were influenced by outside culture.

However, for today’s Conservative Jews, the Jewish community is less imposing and less central to their life. Today, the goals of connection to God and community (two of my own Prayer Goals) are not met naturally through community life, and communal prayer is an important way to achieve them. Today, when most people do not have the ability to *daven*, we have a lot of congregational singing, and prayer leaders need to shape congregational singing to achieve Prayer Goals. For instance, melody choices should be made with Prayer Goals in mind.

Achieving Prayer Goals includes emotional affect and intellectual meaning, and music has the ability to evoke both emotion and meaning. Choice of melody alone may move people toward achieving both the emotional and intellectual meaning in Prayer Goals.