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To Launch a *Kehilla*, "Opening" the *Kabbalat Shabbat* "Script"

1. Script-opening devices:

* Overview of *kehilla* in need of renewal, and own goal of innovation
* Identify the existing script
    - *Shema* & *Amidah* preceded by Psalms; Biblical passages; concluding prayers
    - Traditional *nusach*, favored melodies; assume that rabbi conducts, cantor sings
* Text "openings"
    -Substitution of varied, more "personal" Psalms/poems
    -Use of English, either as literal or emotive equivalent to Hebrew
    - Shortening prayers or omitting; editing for content; using only phrases
* Musical "openings"
    - De-Orientalize; use array of beats and melodies in congregational songs
    - Balance inherited music with the contemporary, electric instruments, drums
* Briefly, other script modifications: Use of space, decoration, costuming, props

2. *Minhag* and *halacha* considerations

* Seek out what is *minhag* vs. *halacha* in script
* Establish halachically valid "opening" techniques
* Role of the rabbi
    - *Shaliach tzibbur*
    - *Mara d'atra*, responsible for "fulfillment" of mitzvot

- Institution builder and membership recruiter

* Survey recent trends and past responsa

3. Post-opening analysis

* Note changes in *kehilla* interest and participation

* What we tried, and how the decisions impacted *kehilla*

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, in *The Art of Public Prayer*, writes about liturgical "scripts." A script guides multiple individuals to shared peak moments. Liturgic formulae lead to transcendence or powerful emotion. (*Art of Public Prayer*, p. 24) A prayer script creates affinity between individuals, and opportunities for dialogue with God. Rabbi Hoffman notes that scripts can be "open" or "closed." (*Art*, p. 28) Closed scripts employ a set of prescribed words and gestures, set to traditional choreography and song. The progression of a Shabbat morning service, for example, is complex and very carefully plotted: *Psukey d'Zimrah, Shema, Amidah, Torah, Amidah*, etc. By contrast, an open script tolerates a certain amount of innovation. Open scripts are exemplified by the services we present for *Yom Ha'atzma'ut* or *Yom Hashoah*, which can mix *Hallel* Psalm sequences, Israeli popular songs, and children's poetry. We even light candles as part of the service, or dance. Clergy has little to offer that improves on bringing up a person to offer eyewitness testimony on the Holocaust or the birth pangs of modern Israel.

Both approaches to the scripts can touch us to the emotional and spiritual core but each has their drawbacks. Closed scripts can prove boring and turn the ritual of worship into a routine. Closed scripts also put off those unfamiliar with the script, since worship will appear to be the domain of the educated Jew. The mere discussion of openings and closings may strike some Jews as unnecessary and pretentious. Hoffman suggests that worries about keeping each element in place out of fear of God are also an outgrowth of the fear of change. (*Art*, p. 149)

I will use the first person in this thesis, since it essentially describes my nine month effort to open the *Erev Shabbat* script of the Actors' Temple, a Conservative synagogue in midtown Manhattan I was given three Friday nights to lead each month. I believed that creating the right script would revitalize the kehilla, which had dwindled below minyan. Nine months later, I now see 25 to 40 Jews and their friends (including non-Jewish spouses) on any given Friday night. We have added one member a month in the past six months, and dropped our average age from 70 to 40. I trust that our direction is a promising one.

By even attempting to open the script I expressed my own aesthetic and spiritual preferences to the *kehilla*. Criticism or praise greeted each musical innovation or textual substitution. But the congregation and I have found compromise after compromise, and next year I will lead traditional scripts on *Shabbat* and holidays as the new senior rabbi. It is in the nature of my own goals to mind the halachic quality of any variation to the script. A Conservative *kehilla* cannot leave behind all reference to the halachic criteria for a valid *Kabbalat Shabbat* service. Therefore in the pages that follow one finds examples of openings to the script and the relevant halachic discussions of each. What issues arise in introducing a drumbeat on the second and fourth beats? What must or mustn't we translate as we pray? Have we invalidated our prayer if we dial up different Psalms instead of the sequence found in *Kabbalat Shabbat*, numbers 95-99?

I introduced opening techniques without always knowing what was halachically acceptable. I had to put something up on the *bimah* almost immediately after my hire, and there was no well-defined *minhag ha'makom*, congregational custom for songs, since the cantor had been singing solo and the tiny number of worshippers did not sing out. Hebrew texts were read silently and any English was simply the translation found on a facing page of *Siddur Sim Shalom*. It seemed correct to look around the Jewish scene and locate *minhagim* to draw on for our *"minhag ha'makom."* North American denominations seem to always be renewing their *Erev Shabbat* scripts. *Minhag* changes run the gamut from sitting in a circle, to the introduction of tunes from contemporary composers, to

using Hebrew or conversely, more English. Dancing has become popular in some congregations . Each of these has ideas to offer in the way of a new *minhag* for *Kabbalat Shabbat* at Actors' Temple. Furthermore, many halachic minds of the past millennium have written about the dialectic of regional practice and individual *kehilla*, and they tolerate a certain amount of evolution and iconoclasm in their Codes and Responsa. But other halachists limit altering the script or setting it to song or instrumentation. I confess that I opened the script for one final reason: to make the service interesting to lead as rabbi. I wanted freedom to change from week to week. I sought to bring African-American music and "alternative" culture into the script. The service has tolerated the addition of folk rock and acoustic instruments and the hand drum. But can it absorb the music of modern America: R&B, rock, reggae, blues, jazz; electric guitar, bass and drums? As for texts, I wanted to edit the service to include words that showed that the Actors' Temple was aware of its need to be more loving, more tolerant, more enlightened. This might appeal to new people, and bring them into our kehilla and Judaism in general.

We come from a tradition that has always changed in times of freedom as much as in times of crisis, as when we lost the Temples, faced massacres and expulsions. We should note that prayer services themselves are not just an adjustment to the existing national religious script--the Temple cultic practice--but a wholesale rewrite of the script. The Talmud (BT Ta'anit 27a) hints at the origins of our service. In the setting of the *ma'amadot,* as these gatherings were called, they fasted and read the Creation story from scripture. From that unlikely script we have another one in our hands, completely different but an possessed of the same spiritual capacity to bind Jews and our God, as in the earlier practice. Influenced by that spirit, we will explore script modifications and their halachic justifications below.

In the end, one doesn't want to of undermine Judaism through overly localized practices, leaving our congregants outside the general norms. *"Al tifrosh min hatzibur,"* do not distance yourself from public practice, warns Hillel in Mishna Avot 2:5. On the other extreme, we can say that any religious variant, especially done in innocence and done with the intent of following the

halacha, can be tolerated. In his comments on the permissibility of Jews drinking Gentile wine, the Noda B'Yehudah, Rabbi Ezekiel Landau (Poland, 18th c.) cites BT Pesachim 66b, where Rabbi Hillel declares of a dubious Jewish practice, that the community in question is to be tolerated, not censured. Hillel defends them with the stirring phrase, "If not prophets, they are the children of prophets." This is our timeless Jewish balancing act: to change what one must, but not so much that an individual or congregation is one of a kind. One more halachic point must be evaluated as we consider script opening, and that is the rabbi's role as *Mara d'Atra*--the halachic authority and teacher. Whatever else a rabbi may be--scholar or preacher or ritualizer--a rabbi is also seen by some as *Mara d'Atra*. But how ancient is this individual authority, and how is the authority to be applied in prayer?

The authority of today's rabbi, especially regarding something so prominent as the nature of *Kabbalat Shabbat* prayer, relies on congregational dynamics, especially as conveyed by one's Board. I asked for their vision of my service. I discovered they were deeply divided, ranging from feminists and gay liberation activists to Jews who were holdovers from the Orthodox days at Actors' Temple, which ended about 20 years ago. The board members are non-regulars, so it was difficult to check in on the nuances of script experiments. There is no operational ritual committee. I was instructed to be both traditional and yet reach out to the young and affluent all around us, the theater community too. There was room to step back and worry about who might be turned off by our efforts. But I decided to lean towards the liberal, identified Jews (perhaps with non-Jewish spouse) who does not want a Conservative shul that already exists. I looked to my role models on the left-wing of Conservative practice, which would be Ansche Chesed or B'Nai Jeshurun. I began with the openings they have brought to the *Erev Shabbat* script. These techniques include a meditative, therapeutic rabbinic presence; a song-oriented, instrumentally-supported flow, including chants, electric keyboards and guitar, drumming and music with Western song structure and harmony. Women and if possible, gay Jews would feel welcome by the context and text of the service. Guided

by the model of Rabbis Strassfeld, Matalon and Bronstein, I felt I could be topical, timely, hip, personal, funny and even a bit edgy. I could recast my job too, and step into a role as one who facilitates collective expression. We would not pigeonhole singers, speakers, players, teachers and davenners. Must cantors sing and rabbis call out the pages and sermonize? My pleasure at learning and teaching drew me to the rabbinate. If anything, as I stand on the *bimah*, I seek good places to stop, to break the fourth wall, and address the davenner directly with a point of information, a bit of history, or a *kavannah*. It makes each service a bit unique, and as a student of Judaism, I look forward to finding ways of exposing a wide-range of sounds, words and feelings in our script. I am conscious that for many Jews, Friday night service is the primary communal moment of the week, and possibly the only occasion for learning, *Talmud Torah* is the essential Jewish behavior according to the Sages. (Mishna Peah 1:1; BT Shabbat 127a) Renewing the service and opening the script call for thoughtful preparation for each Shabbat and a level of engagement in what each service might "mean." Thus, the congregation would experience my Jewish sensibility in the process of opening, and perhaps I would connect with their spiritual aesthetic.

The Actors' Temple is 80 years old and down to a handful of members, yet it is set among block after block of new luxury high rise residences in Hell's Kitchen, I sought to make this *Kabbalat Shabbat* service a calling card for the thousands of new, yuppie families in the greater neighborhood, which encompasses the headquarters of many Fortune 500 corporations and the national recording, television and broadcast media. To my knowledge, we had no members from that world. Also, I knew that the Theater District setting, just blocks from Times Square, and the congregation's name can draw visitors who might want something with the energy of the neighborhood. But what we started with was a few difficult elders and a few odd artists from the neighborhood.

Prior to my arrival, the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service was sung by a very traditional Conservative cantor in his mid-70s, and a rabbi who preached, called pages and stage directions. His performative role in the "real" praying was unclear, since he only added English translations. He never substituted any words of English (his own or from the world of poetry) in lieu of the Hebrew original. The *Siddur*

Sim Shalom has little transliteration. Congregants without Hebrew skill waited patiently for the songs to end. Almost all of the Psalms were read in silence, with only Hebrew *petichot* and *chatimot*. Not one verse of the printed prayers for *Kabbalat Shabbat* went unrecited.

We will not blame the Sages for the closed script that was in use at Actors' Temple. Those pages and pages of murmured words and were not mentioned in their literature. According to Abraham Millgram's classic, *Jewish Worship* (Millgram, p.27), only the *Shema* and *Amidah* are essential; all else is not. Rabbi Millgram writes of the dissent even this limited "fixing" of script caused when Gamliel II instituted it. Mishna Berachot 4:4 and BT Berachot 28b caution that, "If a man makes his prayer a fixed task, it is not a (valid) supplication," defining the term "fixed" as "like a burden to him." The *Amoraim* seem to have understood the negative effects of a closed script.

Walter Jacob, the outstanding modern halachist, sets out the "basic" script in responsa number 133 in *Contemporary American Reform Responsa* (pp. 196-77):

- the Shema and its benedictions

(based on Mishna Tamid 5, Mishna Berachot 1, BT Berachot 1a and following)

- the Amidah, including Shabbat and holiday benedictions

(based on Mishna Berachot 6:3, Mishna Ta'anit 2:2, BT Berachot 33a, BT Rosh Hashana 32a)

- Tachanun (except on Shabbat)

- Torah readings on Shabbat, holidays, Mondays and Thursdays

- Concluding prayers and Kaddish

(based on BT Pesachim 50a, Sifrei to Deut. 306, and BT Berachot 3a)

There are some additional guidelines on how these texts should be prayed, including choreography of standing respectfully, and especially not interrupting, a sin which I'm afraid every rabbi who announces pages or attempts *kavannot* violates at one point or another. The rabbinic sources discuss music, either to protect it or eliminate it.

We learn that fundamental prayers could be said in translation, or as BT Berachot puts it, "In any language one understands." (BT Berachot 40b; Sotah 7:1-2 and BT Sotah 32b; parallel discussion of scriptural readings in BT Megillah 3a). This means that a Sage believed the halachic requirement were met by praying the *Amidah* and *Shema* in any language one understood. In time, more of the script became fixed through midrashic statements, but essentially the worship script was subject to enormous local *minhag* or custom until the era of the Babylonian *Geonim*. (Millgram, p. 162) These authorities undertook to organize and explain prayer material in *"Siddurim,"* and that of Rav Amram Gaon of Sura, c. 856, proved especially influential. Ultimately it was the *Geonim* who canonized dozens of aspects of the Friday night script, including the recitation of *"Vayechulu,"* a new ending for *"Hashkivenu"* and *"Magen Avot."* (Millgram, p. 162) Certain *Geonim* wished to fix the newer religious poetry, the *piyyutim*. Sa'adia Gaon included them in his Siddur. Millgram quotes Sa'adiah's rationale: "People are accustomed to recite them." (Millgram, p. 174) The eminent 18th c. German *posek* Rabbi Jacob Emden called piyyutim "mere gibberish" and "ludicrous in style, without sense," and among many other authorities, took them *out* of the script. (Millgram, p. 172) Less can be more, even to those who understand the Hebrew, and like Rabbi Emden, will use halacha to protect the worshipper from a barrage of non-mandated text. And the emphasis on vernacular, to enhance the davenners comprehension, survived among even the most pietistic rabbis, such as Judah the Hasid (France, 11th c.). (Jacob, *Contemporary American Reform Responsa*, p. 198.)

At this point I should be able to launch into the specific ways I attempted to open the script for *Kabbalat Shabbat*. After all, halachically speaking, I am only obligated to do the *Shema* and the *Amidah*, and perhaps *Alenu* and *Kaddish*. But *minhag* can be an authoritative script closer, serving as de facto *halacha*. We have this idea encapsulated in a phrase used in halachic works, *"Makom she'nahago"*, "it is their practice to do in this place." In other words, the law is local custom, expressed as, "A *minhag* of Israel is in the category of Torah," by Rabbi Judah of Molin, the Maharil, in the 14th c. (Millgram, p. 373) It is not a purely geographic *"makom"* that binds Jews into common schools of practice. We have powerful *minhagim* that serve as halacha for different

formations of the Jewish populations, including the various American denominations, Ashkenazi vs. Sefardi, etc. Rabbi Judah of Molin, by declaring *minhag* equivalent to *halacha*, "Even extended the principle to the melodies of the prayers," writes Millgram in *Jewish Worship*. The custom of each locality assumed a permanence never dreamed of before." (Millgram, p. 374)

In the mind of traditionalists, there is no need to spot or understand the difference between *minhag* and *halacha*, even as in the example cited above, we are not halachically bound to pray in Hebrew or maintain more than a small core of essential prayers. In truth, we are descended largely from non-scholarly immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe. We possess their love of tradition. Various foods, melodies and prayers are "supposed" to be as they were given to us. It matters little in this context that the Talmud (BT Berachot 29B) demanded we say something new each time we pray, and to not feel that prayer is a burden. What happens too often is we leave the service as is, and the congregant goes elsewhere to do something new or feel unburdened. This walkout factor, too, is well established by Jewish practice, for as Ismar Elbogen reminds us in *Jewish Liturgy*, "The sages were not always happy to have to interrupt their lectures in order to attend the synagogue....Some recited their prayers in the house of study....Some sages even carried on with their studies during the synagogue service itself," as recounted in Berachot 7b. (Elbogen, p. 207) Rabbi Judah the Prince is described in Berachot as reciting a one line *Shema* and recounting the Exodus by "putting his mind to it" while lecturing on a related topic. Then the reverse occurred: the professionals--who were the only ones with texts--lengthened the demands of prayer, says Elbogen: "Unlike preceding centuries in which short prayers were considered the best, this generation found no harm in lengthy prayers; on the contrary, these were even thought desirable." (Elbogen, p. 211)

Isaac Klein's monumental work of the early Seventies, *The Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, is understood as the halachic code for Conservative Jewry. It is the reference work Conservative clergy may look to most frequently for Conservative positions on the various liturgical scripts, including home rituals, lifecycle rituals and other experiences of Jewish living. Although written in English and elegant in its simplicity, few Conservative congregants are aware that all of those

"supposed" questions can be recovered from a simple reference book.

Isaac Klein, in our Guide, points to precedents in the medieval Tosafot literature that indicate that Jews have permission to change all but deeply rooted standards. Rabbi Klein suggests that actual Conservative practice is its own source of authority, if done in a congregation under rabbinic supervision. To come to this outlook, Rabbi Klein builds on a ruling by Rabbi Moshe Isserles, the "Rema," (Poland, 1525-1572), in the *Shulchan Arukh*, that custom is its own source of halachic authority. (Klein, *Guide*, p. xxiv) Rabbi Klein says we are part of that chain of authority-making. We are following the principle of *"halacha k'vatrey"* that the Rema cited, which means "following what is done of late," even if this should be a more permissive halacha. So the congregation is its own authority, and we must decide having, as Klein states, "taken into consideration the customs, conditions, and new factors that are operative in our time and place." (p. xxv) This might be a motto for the entire script-opening endeavor, which in turn, may lead to saving the Actors' Temple from further decline, while building a new *kehilla*.

Significant sociological considerations have become part of the halachic process, in the view of Klein. Among "modern" developments that he accepts on a very limited basis: instruments may be used on Shabbat. (Klein, p. 85); a congregant may drive to shul if necessary (Klein, p. 86). From a modern time-management perspective, which he mentions explicitly, Rabbi Klein permits the venerable *Amidah* to go unrepeated beyond the *Kedusha* (Klein, p. 24-25)

Ultimately, the script of *Kabbalat Shabbat* makes the members of the new *kehilla* experience themselves, one another, and the Shabbat in a meaningful and positive way. Ritual scripts that speak loudest in our age self-fulfillment and cynicism want to suggest they are authentic. But what are the origins of authenticity? It might be something from our own lives, a service at camp, in childhood, somewhere, that opened us up, brought us insights, or glued us back together. The perfection may have emanated from a beloved being in the room, or being at camp, or at the Wall. Lawrence Hoffman shares a lovely story of an Asian Lama and his pet cat. The cat is no more than a play thing, peripheral and even annoying to the monks in the monastery. The distracted monks take to tying

the cat to a railing during prayer, to keep it from prowling about. Gradually the string frays and breaks. It is replaced with a colored ribbon, which after a time is embroidered. The Lama dies, but successive Lamas insist the cat be tied before each service begins, a chore that eventually becomes a sign of honor. Finally the Lama's old cat dies. It is lovingly replaced with another cat, for without a Sacred Cat, prayer would be impossible. (Hoffman, *Art*, p. 38)

Should we start shaping a new script by casting a cat for our service? Of course not. The process must be organic. It may be the small things that open up and revitalize the shul in the long run. A Jewish equivalent might be the importance attached to sitting in the same seat each time we go through the script. In acknowledgment of such subtle but meaningful rituals, Jewish practice suggests that a Jewish mourner changes his or her seat to show all is not well.

The script has actors as well as words and gestures which raises questions about the rabbinic role. The job profile of a rabbi has changed radically over the past 200 years. Formerly, a rabbi might have only preached before Pesach and Yom Kippur, according to the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (*E.J.*, Vol. 13, p. 1445) in an article on "Rabbis." The article states that while the title Rav or Rabbi ("great one" or "master") has been with us since the generation of Hillel, it has evolved, and even fallen into disuse over the centuries in favor of titles such as *"ga'on."* "The rabbi of the Talmud was completely different from the present-day holder of the title. The Talmudic rabbi was an interpreter and expounder of the Bible and the Oral Law, and almost invariably had an occupation whence he derived his livelihood. It was only in the Middle Ages that the rabbi became...the teacher, preacher and spiritual head of the Jewish congregation or community." The key elements of the job included scholarship, judgeship, and "social-spiritual leadership." (*E.J.*, Vol. 13, p. 1442)

It is extremely important to me to note what the job did not include. The article states that the title, "Never carried priestly or semi-priestly authority or functions. Prayer and leading in prayer, blessing of the people, and officiating in marriage and burial ceremonies never became an integral part of the conception of rabbinical office until the beginning of the 19th century, with the Reform movement." (*E.J.*, Vol. 13, p. 1445) Thus even while Orthodoxy resisted Reform innovations,

the role of the rabbi in "high" Orthodox synagogues is like that in Reform synagogues. The rabbi conducts the worship.

Actors' Temple's rabbis were expected to mix a tradtional script with non-tradtional devices like sermonizing mid-service, announcing pages and congregational choreography, using a microphone, praying with back to the ark. We have the possibility of reciting only a few "new" prayers in English, such as the prayer for the United States. In the slim *Siddur Sim Shalom* , one has a script that presents facing pages of English and Hebrew. This is a simple and important breakthrough. English is obviously easier to understand for the new davenner, if less precisely able to convey the meaning of a word of Hebrew. *"Shema"* has been translated as, "obey," "hear," and "listen," for example. Hebrew poetics resonate in a way that transcends simple comprehension. Hebrew is tribal, holy, effective in ways that translations never duplicate. Hoffman's model script would need some Hebrew for a sense of authenticity, for mystery, for intimations of eternity, even if halacha allows davenning in translation.

Perhaps a difference between Judaism and other religions is that Judaism expect the same ritual conduct from laity and clergy. We are expected to be exemplars of the tradition, and in some way to justify our authority and our paid professional status. But it is the *"shaliach tzibbur,"* who directs the service. Who is the rabbi during the presentation of the *Kabbalat Shabbat* script from the *bimah,* especially in the absence of other clergy? My power, I felt, was to empower others to influence the script. I wanted to see what would happen if we built a script along with the kehilla. One of my first desires was to the hire adventurous musicians and also to use congregants to present a variety of readings. I used my presence on the bimah to frame the prayer moments in small ways, such as asking someone to come forward and "reveal the Torah" rather than "open the ark." I would ask congregants to, in turn, say aloud the names of those who needed healing, near the conclusion of the service, and introduced a healing prayer. If I am not a priest on the bimah, I might be a shaliach tzibbur, song-leader and instructor. But am I the *mara d'atra,* "master of the locality?" From the authentic ring of the phrase I had always assumed that this was an early rabbinic role, which

meant that all script changes were done according to my understanding of halacha; in turn I was responsible for maintaining halachic minimums, if not norms. I was surprised to learn that the *mara d'atra* is a 14th century development, according to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*. (*E.J.*, Vol. 13, p. 1447) Haredi circles reference *halacha* from their *roshey yeshivot* in this day and age, rather than a local rabbi. Hasidic circles have derived correct ritual practice from the behavior of their *tzaddik*.

Not every local rabbi is in charge of the congregational script. At some synagogues a ritual committee decides ritual practices, but the Actors' Temple had no such committee. I was given some leeway as both *shaliah tzibbur* and the halachic leader of the congregation. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* concludes that we have in America, "For the first time in the history of the rabbinate, a priest ordering the prayer service and leading it." (*E.J.*, Vol. 13, p. 1448) Wolfe Kelman writes that there has been a parallel strengthening of a pulpit rabbi's halachic standing. The local rabbi is often the most visible and well-known Jewish professional in a given community.

Beyond the dual roles of *shaliach tzibbur* and *mara d'atra*, the Board expects me to recruit a whole congregation of dues-paying members, and to excite visitors with our Jewish practices. Many of these new people will likely judge the opened up script as if it was a show, and support it if it entertains. Will donations increase? Will membership rolls grow? What will be lost through exceptional focus on my salesmanship? There is a risk of a personality cults, of passive worship, of diminished emphasis on skill-building in the congregants. I do not want to sell holiness or Judaism. We have come a long way from the Talmudic rabbis who skipped services altogether if they were busy teaching, as so famously recounted about Rabbi Judah the Prince in Berachot 13b. The modern congregation would not brook this. They come for a perfect, deeply meaningful service, and at Actors' Temple it is presumed that this requires a rabbi who leads with distinction. The bar was set quite high.

In the next section we will move through the challenges that derive from "opening" the script through introduction of new music and instruments, and matters arising from translating and editing of the service.

Opening the Sounds and Texts of Psalms

The Friday Night Service consists of *Kabbalat Shabbat* and the *Ma'ariv* with Shabbat additions and variations. The form includes an elaborate introduction using Psalms like the familiar *Psukey d'Zimrah* of the morning service. Following this, there is *Barchu*, the *Shema* and her blessings, two Torah excerpts as brackets around the *Amidah*, a recap, and several *Kaddish* transitions. Finally, the service concludes with *Alenu* and Mourner's *Kaddish* and perhaps some anthems. It might be hard to imagine from this lineup, but no service is more open in Jewish scripting than *Kabbalat Shabbat*. (While technically *Kabbalat Shabbat* is the name given to Psalms 95-99, Psalm 29, *Lecha Dodi* and Psalm 92, I will use it to discuss both the whole service as well as this Friday night *Psukey d'Zimrah*-style sequence.) The introductory sequence was introduced by 16th century Kabbalists and quickly spread worldwide. More than any other service, Jews in urban New York and perhaps elsewhere consider *Kabbalat Shabbat* the most accessible, stirring, and singable prayer service Judaism has to offer. The busier the person, the more likely that this is the first Jewish "check in" since last Shabbat, which means we want it to be inviting and beginner-friendly.

What may we say or sing and still fulfill the *Kabbalat Shabbat* experience, halachically and spiritually? Looking around, I saw a variety of models in halachic settings: at B'Nai Jeshurun they opened the service by dancing midway through, employed a band with percussion, electric keyboard, and used only pieces of Psalms to stand for the whole. At Ramath Orah on the Upper West Side, the opening comes through innovative harmonizing and Carlebach's *"Yakar" Nusach*, plus intense *"klopping"* or banging of pews. Both maintain the Kabbalistic sequence, Psalms 95-99, Psalm 29, *Lecha Dodi*, Psalm 92. Can we innovate a Psalm selection or set of our own? What is an "appropriate" Psalm? Finally, if we are singing congregationally, may we leave behind the ethnic

sounds of an Old Country we never knew? There are countless American flavors of music, yet most Psalm settings are gypsy-flavored or Hasidic.

Let me start with the musical aspect. In *The Art of Public Prayer,* Hoffman delineates four types of music which we must share in a successful liturgical script: music of majesty; music of meditation; music of meeting; music of memory. (*Art,* p. 192) A perfectly opened script would come to each of these four types of music in a workable way each Shabbat. I might add, we would not want the selections to stagnate and become routine. (Hoffman, *Art,* p. 192) Adding fresh instrumental possibilities beyond simple folk guitar or organ helps to open the service to modern ears. Unfortunately, adding instruments heightens the risk of spoiling the service for more traditional congregants. I have worked with a modified "rock" lineup--bass, drums, jazz vocalist, electric guitar--which added insult to injury to those who felt hostile to instruments at all. What does halacha tell us to do about instrumental support for our script? Talmud Ta'anit tells us of Rabbi Shimon Ben Elazar's proclamation that not only was instrumental music of equivalent importance to the the Kohanim in the Temple cult, but that it was also that instrumental music was more popular than vocal music in Temple worship. We know that Psalm 150:4 says, "Praise him with timbrel," and Psalm 33:2-4 declares, "Give thanks unto the Lord with harp/Sing praise unto Him with the harp of ten strings/Sing unto Him a new song/Play skillfully amid shouts of joy." There is some tension in reading the very Psalm of the Sabbath Day, 92, which speaks of "music of the lute, melody of the harp." We know the Talmud rejects use of instruments in prayer. How is it that Psalm 68:26 speaks of "damsels playing upon timbrels," while BT Betzah 10b states bluntly that there is to be no drumming, ever?

The halachic ban on instruments comes out of two lines of thought. Some Sages hold that we mourn the Temple's destruction this way. Others worry that instruments would be repaired on Shabbat. Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman in *The Way Into Jewish Prayer:* "Music is essential to Jewish worship. Temple sacrifices were accompanied by a levitical choir and an orchestra. When the Temple

fell, however, a conscious effort was made to mark off synagogue services from the worship of the surrounding pagan cults. Since these cults featured instrumental music, instruments were banned from the synagogue. Eventually other reasons for doing without instruments were found: it was a way of mourning for the Temple, or it was an attempt to follow Sabbath work regulations." (Hoffman, *Way Into Jewish Prayer*, p. 93) Millgram holds that the ban on music lasted from 70 CE until the Third Century, when, "Abstention from music was widely disregarded, especially in Babylonia. (Millgram, p. 363) Rabbi Isaac Klein, writing in the *Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*, cites the discussion of the Tosafists, commenting on Betzah. In Klein's comments he says they dismiss the repair excuse as not sufficiently cogent. (Klein, p. 85) But they did not lift the instrumental ban. "The reason for instituting it (a danger of forbidden repair) has ceased," writes Klein, making this line of opposition to using instruments, "untenable as a general principle." (Klein, p. 85) But the ban on music might stand, Klein suggests if "the practice is deeply rooted and stable" because we, "are usually able to find new meaning in it for our day."

Which instruments are better and which are worse is a matter of taste. "Baby boomers" enjoy folk guitar. Some synagogues want an organ precisely because it conveys a sort of hauteur that one associates with religious music. I decided on rock instrumentation because I felt that for any potential congregant 50 and under, this music was the music of energy, engagement and *"bittul,"* loss of self-consciousness and merger into the group's energy. What I wanted to avoid was the inoffensive Conservative splitting of the difference between music and no music, which means polite instrumentation behind songs that are traditional or folky. This works in many congregations, but it would not help the Actors' Temple distinguish itself from far more pulled together Conservative synagogues in the area. As a veteran of 20 years of rock music, I felt I could communicate with an electric guitar, to play in the vocabulary of jangled, scratched or powered chords which speak volumes in the language of the American cultural experience. I could use effects pedals abstractly, to color the atmosphere behind texts or melodies. I could even even bend notes in a keening, bluesy solo break. All of these sounds (in very select applications) make for memorable non-verbal moments.

We have a deliberate map of building energies locked within the shape of *Kabbalat Shabbat,* and we attempted to match that with careful preparation along the lines of a putting on a show. We sought a good mix of fast and slow songs, major and minor modes I received a small amount of money to hire personnel, and recruited exciting young musicians with no prior clergy experience. Remarkably, the musicians proved idealistic and inexhaustible. The original lineup has held from last August until present. We take care to distribute hand percussion to any davenner who wants to play along, and many adults and children seem to enjoy keeping time to their own singing. The passion for making a room rock with sound is essential to creating a room rocking with soul. Even the ultra-Orthodox who may not use instruments, let loose with noise and motion, and bang or dance with passion. But I am not shooting for references to Orthodoxy, especially Hasidism, as is the case with many Renewal *kehillot.* Last weekend we had a jazz trumpeter, certainly tolerable to the worship described in II Chronicles 29:27, but something I've never heard in shul before. The haunting, human-like voice evoked strong emotional reactions.

What about real drumming, the kind the Psalmist alludes to in Psalm 150? Surely the sound of Levitical drumming was not exotic to a Judean. These were the favorite beats and rhythms of the best musicians in the land. I am not sure that we have a true correspondence in the dumbek and tambourine players we find in Renewal-influenced services, for they are not playing "our" American rhythms. The preferred, African-American derived backbeat sits on the two and four beats. This is the "groove" of rap, rock, pop and jazz. This is the rhythm we started seeking in our music, and expanded from using congas and hand percussion to the more popular "set" of high hats and bass drum. A few senior congregants stopped attending the Friday night service because of what they disparaged as the "bongos." Many new congregants have started coming because of the music. With the strong percussive component, it is easy to hand out small egg-shakers to congregants, granting everyone who wishes the joy of that Levitical timbrel player. Kids like playing percussion and become involved in the service. While most beats we use are are Americanized, we also build on the inherited musical script. For example, the drums support the waltz-time of the popular *Magen Avot*.

Melodic content raised similar halachic questions as we underwent a similar opening of song selections. We now mix *Nusach*, some traditional and some Camp Ramah melodies into a pool of tunes that include original compositions in reggae, rock or R&B feel, and also several adapted selections from the Spanish and Portuguese songbook. I favored songs that featured major chords and uplifting, anthemic, rather than dark melodies. I used Carlebach's tunes from the outset, and introduced several of Rabbi Shefa Gold's chants, each built on a few words, to *Kabbalat Shabbat.* They are contagiously simple and like all great *niggunim* weld strangers into a congregation right from the start. Rabbi Millgram shares a ruling of the the Rema, Rabbi Moses Isserles (Orach Hayyim 619:1) which instructs us that a *hazzan* may only introduce his own musical ideas in texts that are not *chatimot.* The citation continues, "One must not change the *minhag* of a place in any matter even in regard to the introduction of melodies which people are not accustomed," in Millgram's translation of the Rema. (Millgram, p. 524) If there is no custom at Actors' Temple, I have tried to make common cause of a new catalog of melodies by stepping outside the traditional *Kabbalat Shabbat* script and teaching a new tune every few weeks. We break down the parts, rehearse the congregation, and then sing the whole thing. We try to make the whole segment of learning and singing fun and concise. Thus we have been able to build a songbook for Friday Night worship.

For further guidance, I looked at *A Treasury of Responsa,* a work edited by Reform halachist Solomon Freehof. He brings one of the earliest encounters between post-Renaissance European sensibilities and Jewish prayer. It revolves around a ruling of Rabbi Joel Sirkes (Poland, 1561-1640), known as the "Bach" for his work "Bayit Chaddash." Rabbi Sirkes ruled on church-influenced music in synagogues. As background, Freehof writes: "The Jews of Italy were greatly influenced by the Renaissance, and even their religious life was affected....They spoke Italian; they wrote Italian; they were in constant contact with Christians, and even their public worship was affected by the artistic mood of their environment." Freehof notes that, "The Renaissance did not spread into Christian Poland and the lives of Jews. It is surprising to learn that....Church melodies find their way into the synagogues of Poland." (Freehof, *Treasury of Responsa* , "Church Music in the Synagogue," p. 157)

Freehof retreats to the role of translator for Rabbi Joel Sirkes, who wrote this responsa. The text reads: "As for the fact that they sing in the synagogues the melodies that are sung in the churches, it seems to me that one can only prohibit such melodies as are specifically part of the worship (i.e. traditionally or characteristically part of the Christian ritual) since such melodies have become regularly part of the (synagogue) ritual. This case is just like that of the *matzeva* (the stone pillar) which was prohibited everywhere because the Cannanites made it a part of their idolatry." Sirkes references Sifre (on Deut. 16:22) which bans stone pillars, while the Patriarchs are described as erecting such pillars with great piety. How could this be? Sirkes, via Sifre, comments that such monuments were ours first, and only became sinful when adopted by idolators. So it is with the type of singing heard in churches--it was ours first! Sirkes mentions Rabbi Judah's ruling that we should do nothing that is derived from Gentile custom, but the law tilts to the Sages, who made the point in Sanhedrin 7:3, that we continue to do beheadings since we invented this execution, even though the Romans do it, because we did it first. In sum, Sirkes believes that some melodies are impermissible, if they belong to Christian worship in some ritual way, whether or not they learned from us, and no matter if we are instructed to do whatever it is in the Torah. To state it in terms of the freedoms I sought, this responsa concludes that if the "Christian" songs are not part of Christian worship, there is no prohibition.

Freehof also brings the responsa of Rabbi Judah Leon of Modena (Venice, 1571-1648), a contemporary of Joel Sirkes and a *posek* confronting the same issue. His responsa works through the possibility of making any music at all, vocal or instrumental, in the synagogue or outside it. (Freehof, *Treasury*, p. 160) According to BT Gittin 7a, there is a give and take between Mar Ukva and petitioners who wanted to know, "Is music forbidden? He (Mar Ukva) drew a line and wrote to them, 'Rejoice not, O Israel, among the nations"--quoting from Hosea. Rabbi Judah Leon states, "We learn then that the oral music is also forbidden." Rabbi Judah finds later authorities too, namely the words of the Tur (Rabbi Yehiel ben Asher, Germany & Spain, 1370-1430) who states in Orach

Hayyim 560, "They forbade all kinds of singing, both by instrument and by mouth," as well as Responsum 370 by Maimonides (Egypt, 11th c.), as quoted by Freehof, which cautions, "Even by mouth it is forbidden and even at a banquet, and it makes no difference whether the song is in Hebrew or in Arabic." In typical responsa form, Rabbi Judah presents all the views that would challenge his own. He supports the ban on instruments. But vocal music, "To rejoice in the Law or to learn the art, or at the command of princes and rulers, and of course for a mitzvah, all of the authorities will grant that it is permitted. Our decision depends upon the reason for the music. The prohibition (against music) was due to the destruction of the Temple...and to the exile....How can we rejoice? It is with this in mind that they said in the Talmud (BT Sanhedrin 101a): 'The ear that hears song will be uprooted, and song in the house means destruction in the end.'" Rabbi Judah concludes, as regards music, "Even a lad can write,' the principle that it is totally permissible." He again cites the Tur, Orah Hayyim 338, who says, "It is permitted on Sabbath to tell a Gentile to play on instruments, songs at wedding parties."

Rabbi Judah of Leon notes that Rambam and the Tur, will permit song and praise at the banquet, while Alfasi (Morocco, 11th c.) limits Mar Ukva's ban on vocal music to, "Only human love songs, rejoicing in human beauty....but no Israelite need refrain from words of song and praise and recollection of the kindness of God." We must share our musical gifts, writes this Italian rabbi, citing Proverbs, "Honor the Lord with thy riches," which according to *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* as cited by Freehof, meant if God has blessed one with a beautiful voice, one must use it to honor God.

We are not suggesting a return to actual Temple music. That sound is lost. With or without instruments the very Psalm texts call into sharp relief our permanent exile Temple days. But we have recovered our desire to play and sing before the Lord. Solomone Rossi, the great Renaissance music figure, published this very responsa of Rabbi Judah Leon of Modena as a preface to a published music book. What Rabbi Judah of Leon is doing is informing Jewish opinion, giving useful comment and ultimately, permission to de Rossi to introduce this music. Indeed, Rossi composed Jewish music as well as court music for the aristocrats of Tuscany. (Freehof, *Treasury*, p. 162)

We have established that it may be permissible and appropriate to use instrumentation and secular song styling in our script. We now move to the question of content, specifically selecting Psalms for *Kabbalat Shabbat.* In the rabbinic literature, *Kabbalat Shabbat* is not parallel to *Psukey d'Zimrah,* although both are clearly a Psalm-based introduction to the service. For the purpose of this study, it seemed like the opinions on Psalm usage in *Psukey* would fall closest to our concerns.

The 19th century Orthodox code, the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* by Solomon Ganzfried, does not even mention any *halacha* applying to any part of *Kabbalat Shabbat* in his Chapter 76, "The Laws of Prayers on Shabbat and Yom Tov," and even Rabbi Joseph Karo, writing as a rough contemporary of those very Kabbalists who invented the service, does not mention *Kabbalat Shabbat,* or opinions that apply to the introductory psalms of Friday Night. Only a commentator on the *Shulchan Arukh,* the Magen Avraham (Abraham Gumbiner, Poland, 1637-1683), writes a rationalization for inclusion of the Kabbalistic (or any extra-halachic) service, saying that it was "Nothing more than the recitation of piyuttim and pizmonim (songs) such as those that had been arranged by the Rishonim."

We treat the Friday night Psalm lineup therefore as non-halachic, and eligible for editing. Lawrence Hoffman notes that a range of up to 31 different Psalms appeared in the *Psukey d'Zimrah* of the Cairo *geniza's* siddurim, and today's siddur has 20. The most represented of all Psalms is, we might say, "Ashrey", but in fact we see that it was re-edited for precisely the purpose we might re-edit a Psalm text. The anonymous editor has attached the phrase "Ashrey" from the prior Psalm in order to build up a motif. Thinking in terms of *Kabbalat Shabbat* Psalm sequence as needing to retain a motif, then, we might hold onto the Kabbalistic *minhag* of sequencing six consecutive Psalms, representing the days of the week, culminating in a seventh and final Psalm, 92, "Song of the Sabbath Day." The real issue is opening up the first service of each Shabbat day to the power of poetic lyrics and emotive sounds, and building our *kavanna.* Yet *Kabbalat Shabbat* has emerged over

the past centuries as having a "closed" script. It is hard to grasp that a service that was purposely designed as a ceremony to be done *outside* of the confines of the shul, is now halacha by minhag, and within the shul service!

The halachic silence on the matter of *Kabbalat Shabbat* was unknown at the time we began to shuffle the Psalm material in our lineup from week to week. Berachot 31a tells us we must praise before we pray, and Rav Simlai, citing the example of Moses, repeats the command. But it is not clear that he means *Psukey d'Zimrah,* our most appropriate analog for *Kabbalat Shabbat.* The Tur, Rabbi Yehiel ben Asher, (Spain, 1270-1340) is quoted by Marc Brettler in *Minhag Ami* as connecting Moshe's praise of God to *Psukey d'Zimrah,* for he writes in the *Orach Hayyim* 51, "Therefore they legislated (*tiknu*) them before prayer and fixed one blessing before them and another after them. (*Minhag Ami, Vol. 3,* p. 24) However the Kabbalists innovated, they did not invent blessings for their introductory service of Friday night. Doing *Psukey d'Zimrah,* according to Rabbi Joel Sirkes, means, "receiving a great reward in the world to come. And since it is not obligatory, there is no reason to establish a blessing." The benefit is inverse to the non-commanded nature of our praise. Marc Brettler contrasts the view of the Rema, in the *Shulchan Aruch,* Orach Hayyim 53:3 who suggests a humble status for the introductory Psalms. Even if we've finished praying them, we are supposed to stop the service and wait up to half an hour for a minyan to show up. The halachic part of the service is undiminished by the enormous pause, or *"hefsek."* (*Minhag Ami, Vol. 3,* p. 26) We are also allowed to greet one another during introductory Psalms according to a variety of halachic sources on *Psukey d'Zimrah* that Daniel Landes provides, including the *Shulchan Aruch,* Maimonides in a responsa , and even the *"Iggrot"* or Letters of Moshe Feinstein, a 20th century American Orthodox *posek.* (*Minhag Ami, Vol. 3,* p. 26)

Naively, our intention in shuffling Psalms and fragments of Psalms was to create musical opportunities, but since I was working with a new supporting cast of musical hires, we didn't have a repertoire of tunes for the Psalms. We quickly mastered a few of the favorite "standard" selections for *Kabbalat Shabbat.* But the issue of creating a "hip" and one-of-a-kind *kehilla* pressed me to avoid

mimicry of the the service at other area synagogues. The ensemble of musicians and I began working out new melodies and Psalm treatments with the congregation, and we adapted others. And rather than use Psalms 95-99, we considered and used all Psalms and Psalm-like mood-setters, including *Mah Tovu, Hine Mah Tov, Hashivenu* (from Lamentations), wordless *niggunim* and other material not associated with Friday night. I came to count all of them towards the total of six read or sung Psalms that are said to represent the six days of creation. We always closed with the Psalm of the Sabbath, Psalm 92. Although all of *Kabbalat Shabbat* is non-halachic, there is, of course, the question about importing other prayers out of context. Rashi mocks those who use Hallel Psalms as secular songs, and suggests that it is disrespectful, but not evil. And even a code like the 19th c. *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch,* which is quite traditional, which does not ask davenners to say *Elohay Neshama* beyond morning prayers at *Shacharit,* permits us to recite it if we so wish. (*Kitzur,* 7:6) We chant it.

To take but one example, I did not know of any existing congregational melodies true to the lyric, *Lechu neranena,* which is the very first line of the *Sim Shalom Kabbalat Shabbat* service. This is the first line of Psalm 95 and means, "Come let us sing." Most settings I knew for *Lechu Neranena* were elaborate and used a great many of the Psalm's words. This is the antithesis of inviting the davenners to join in song. Reflecting the message of *Lechu Neranena,* we wrote a simple three chord melody and it has stuck. In some cases, we approach a melody reverentially, like Louis Lewandowski's *"Tzaddik Katamar."* The sound is beautiful, noticeably Western, deeply familiar to even occasional davenners.

Chant, as opposed to linear singing, is an opportunity to master new music quickly in service. A minimum of words builds atmosphere. The mind wanders as the body becomes settled in. We have opened services with a fragment of Psalm 23, which is sung, by *minhag,* at the Third Meal or *se'udah shlishit* in some circles. Rabbi Shefa Gold has composed a trio of motifs around the phrase *"Kosi r'vaya."* It might be introduced with a *kavannah,* such as becoming aware of contentment. Can we let go of the week, stop doing, and just be satisfied with what is already around us.

We tried some Psalms for content. I was especially eager to use creative English renderings of various Psalms, like Psalm 8 for its descriptions of evening as well as the direct challenges to the divine scheme: "What is man that you are mindful of him?" and "We are but little less than divine."

Sometimes I sought content that resonated with a particular *Shabbat*. We added Psalm 30 (superscripted "a Psalm of Dedication") when a congregant opened her new bookstore. We included a snippet of Psalm 22 after the Twin Tower tragedy. Paul Simon has a lovely setting for the words, "Lord, why have you forsaken me?" It is the coda of his early song, "Blessed."

The Great Hallel, Psalm 136, contains a Hebrew refrain that makes for energizing back and forth between *shaliach tzibbur* and *kehilla*. I found the *Siddur Kol Haneshama* rendering eliminated the war imagery and left the Hebrew phrase in. Every other line ends with *"Ki l'olam chasdo"*, "God's love is everlasting," so that the original Temple chant, its beat, its mysterious syllables, emerges from the dim past and touches us. I will then remark on how we "did" what they "did", showing the continuity of script even as we open it up. Using Psalm 150, with its *"hallelu"* chorus, builds what Hoffman calls the "network effect", where individuals pool their energy in a way that becomes conscious. We distribute percussion as we present lyrics about instruments and percussion. Hopefully, it becomes evident that Jewish worship integrates both in the now and with our tradition.

By and large, the experiment has been successful. People come forward at the start of the service to select a piece of hand percussion. People sing. It was never the Psalm selections or melodies that raised issues, but rather the instruments that drew the heavy criticism. I believe that by addressing directly from the pulpit the nature of *Psukey d'Zimra*h and the origins of the Kabbalistic sequence that I was able to suggest that we too had the ability to innovate song and poetry-based openings to *Shabbat* liturgy.

Opening the Text By Using Poems in Lieu of Prayers

A great problem with Jewish worship is language. We have so many words in *Kabbalat Shabbat,* as in any traditional service, that new congregants are stymied. Some have never learned to read or comprehend Hebrew. We began by transliterating (via xeroxes) transliterations for everything we would say or sing in Hebrew. I also use liturgical translations from an array of *siddurim* and *machzorim,* which reveal a range of poetic freedom. (Rami Shapiro in *Kol HaNeshama* and Richard N. Levy in *Wings of Awe* are particularly free and insightful.) I cannot help but see the Conservative congregation as authorized to present a Psalm or any other prayer text in any English rendering that re-awakens inner meanings as well as the literal.

Liturgic Hebrew is a universe apart from any English analog, no matter how deft the translator. Lawrence Hoffman, a translator himself, writes of the symbolic power of the scripts elements, that, "Symbols don't stand for anything, they just symbolize." So a Hebrew word is important as itself, its sound, without reference to exact meanings. Sound and rhythm are made in the body and thus have a "feel." Also, we sometimes try too hard to make the original language say something it never intended.

Hebrew may feel authentic, but it is not halachically mandated. In fact, we are told in the Talmud to pray in a language we understand. (BT Brachot 2a, Brachot 6a; BT Megillah 17a) If one draws on the example of scripture readings, one was not to go more than one sentence without translation. (BT Megillah 23b) There is an issue of linguistic comprehension, and there is the matter of cultural relevance; both are barriers between words and the davenner. Millgram reminds us that Rambam wanted all prayer to occur in Hebrew not to make the prayer sacred, but to create cultural unity among the Jewish diaspora. (Millgram, p. 61)

Sometimes the best translations are literal, sometimes the opposite. Exciting moments have occurred when the real actors, residents of Theater District, electrify the kehilla with, to pick just

one example, Psalm 29 as rendered in blunt JPS *Tanakh* language. Using the actors' instrument, voice, gestures, pacing, the congregants have moved one another, and sometimes themselves, with their declamations. Not only are we rid of the King James styling that plagues even the Silverman siddur, the Thees and Thines. The raw and vivid description of a land torn asunder by God's mere presence ought to scare us all. The final couplet, "May God bless his people with peace," sounds desperate, not smug. Already, we have acknowledged that there is no such thing as a "pure" translation, but can we substitute something based on its evocation of a similar mood? Suddenly all the world's poetry and our own is potentially on tap for our service--if we believe that the mood, and not the strict language, is the essence. While it is easier to add poetic *kavannot* between items of a fixed script, here we speak of poetry that replaces the prayer itself.

I experimented with poetry about Nature's Order and God's Love, before the Shema, concluding with Hebrew *chatimot* in *nusach*. I did the same with the theme of Redemption afterwards. Thus selections like Rabindranath Tagore's, "Where Will I Find God?" and interpretive renderings of *Shema* and her *berachot* by Leila Gal Berner and Rami Shapiro from *Siddur Kol HaNeshama*, and Richard Levy's work in the Hillel Machzor *Wings of Awe* are used to vary the pace and Hebrew/English balance of the service. But rather than lock in to this model, and in some way "close the script" all over again, we reserve the right to return to a sung *Ahavat Olam*--using a jazz shuffle as the rhythm, but a lovely melody familiar from Camp Ramah. The general tendency is to substitute interpretive material for passages that speak to Jewish election, God's masculinity, sacrifices, and the punishment of enemies. Hebrew and English renderings of the *Amidah* include the matriarchs. Again, by teaching the structure of the *matbeya* allows conscious opening of the script, and gives the substitute text the intention or *kavannah* associated with the original.

The abbreviating and interweaving of Psalm texts is part and parcel of *Psukey d'Zimrah*, according to the historical record of genizah fragments, says Lawrence Hoffman. (*Minhag Ami: My People's Prayerbook, Volume 3*, p. 8) It seems that the fragmentary quality was intentional from the outset. This poses the question: What did the Sages mean when they spoke of "completing" Psalms?

Methodology in Action: How To Open a Conclusion

A recent Dror Yikra "project" is typical of the process of opening the script. That one young family asked if there was a new piece that their daughter, a 12 year old violinist, could play in a Shabbat service with our shul's band. I suggested Dror Yikra because of its rhythmic and melodic exoticism (the famous Yemenite melody) and the "ta'am" of Shabbat that it conveys.

It also happens that a similar song of Shabbat, *Shalom Aleichem,* is in the service, and she already plays this on the violin as our concluding anthem Erev Shabbat. From a stage manager's perspective, it is convenient to group a guest artists contribution into one place, rather than bring her up to the bimah repeatedly. I dropped *Yigdal* and/or *Adon Olam,* and added *Dror Yikra* as the next to last hymn. Like *Shalom Aleichem,* I believe it can be sung very early or late in the service, and it can be sung at home or in synagogue

To get to my resolution of the challenge included these steps:

1. Ascertaining who the author Dunash ben Lavrat was in Jewish history, and what does his text represent emotionally and theologically? Is it "us"?

2. Consider: Why do most Jews use a different "Golden Age of Spain" composition, Yigdal or Adon Olam? What is it about that period of theology and poetry? What does halacha demand for the end of the service?

3. How do we translate *Dror Yikra*? The lyrics in a dozen siddurim are not recognizable as the same song. I attempt my own lyric, and try to make it "scan" with the melody.

4. I edit, primarily shortening the song for time, but also to eliminate stanzas wishing for destruction of enemies. We should find a blend between some English and original Hebrew in a final shaping of our *minhag*.

5. The Yemenite tune has an Oriental rhythm that borders on cliche--but we have nothing else like it in our lineup of songs.

6. How do we set the text into our siddur to signify that it is now part of our "minhag?"

Here is the transliteration and my translation, to be included in a handout that will be distributed in a service where we intend to sing *Dror Yikra.*

DROR YIKRA - Traditional, AT

Dror yikra l'ven im bat
v'yintsorchem k'mo vavat
ne'im shimchem v'lo yushbat
sh'vu v'nuchu b'yom shabbat

Elohim teyn bamidbar har
hadas sheetah b'rosh tidahar
v'lamazhir v'lanizhar
Sh'lomim teyn k'meh nahar

De'ey chochma l'nafshecha
v'hi cheter l'roshecha
N'tsor mitzvat kedoshecha
Sh'mor shabbat kodshecha

We declare God's children free
Like fruit that buds from ancient roots
The kindness shown along our way
Come and praise this Sabbath day

Grant to mountains without trees
Acacia, cypress, evergreens
Hear my song in all that's good
May blessing flow down over me

Understanding if we seek

Like a crown upon our heads

Hear and speak in holy word

One day of peace restores the week

Does this work? I know that it has been reduced to the pacifistic as opposed to the militant stanzas. The English is very free, but after scrutinizing other English translations, my take on *"V'yintzorchem kemo ba'vad"* is as singable as anybody else's translation. With fewer lyrics, it is feasible to double up, and sing one stanza in both Hebrew and English. Also, the violinist has the opportunity of guiding us through instrumental stanzas. The melody and groove are classic, and widely known, so that visitors can join in. One week we had four dancers take themselves Yemenite-style up and down the long, single aisle of the sanctuary. It is the first dancing anyone had ever seen at Actors'. The space is narrow and long with the one passageway, unkind to circle dancing which I tried once, during Sukkot, to no success, in part because the one volunteer, a woman of about 50, had no partners in the mostly elderly assembly.

An Oneg Thought: More on Relating in Synagogue Space

We have barely touched on the use of space, which is as much a part of Hoffman's script as words, music and the like. There is a flow from *bimah* to *kehilla* and back, hopefully. Working from the reality that I face the congregation, I like to think it is meaningful to the script to have me re-direct and rotate towards the ark for *Barchu, Amidah, Alenu* and similar moments of addressing the Source. We all draw face God or at least the Torah in the same manner when it matters.

But how do we explore forming a *kehilla* when I am the only one who can see everybody's face? And there is more than creating true relationship than putting chairs in a circle or dancing in a

circle, neither of which is feasible in our long, narrow sanctuary. I see the *oneg* as the only moment that truly brings us together on Friday night. I omitted the *kiddush* recited during the service and invite the congregants to have a symbolic festive meal with me, over *kiddush* and *challah.* To draw not only the hungry, older people, but also the younger newcomers, I insisted that the *oneg* continues the script of the service. We move to our only usable square space, in the basement.

Virtually everyone comes downstairs and we form a circle. There is always an inner and outer ring, the concentric circles of "movers" and "watchers" in Hoffman's parlance. (*Art,* p. 101) Of course, I can see in this setting who has come. I think the gathered are always a bit surprised to find themselves standing in a fair-sized group--since many of them are shy about their Judaism or in general. In the face to face of the *oneg* I say hello and offer a hand. If they wish, they meet me. I will make introductions among fellow davenners. It is scary to require strangers to form a circle, and still more so to enforce greetings, touching and the like during the course of the service. I might introduce people to one another at the oneg, on the other hand, if I feel that they would be comfortable talking. Often the sole moment of communion with others consists of handing fresh challah to a stranger, face-to-face. Finally, the *oneg* is a teaching moment so I narrate through the simple rituals, like hand-washing and *hamotzi*--again running into that "*hafsakah*" problem unique to the teacher/ritual-doer rabbinic paradox.

For many, being in shul on *Erev Shabbat* is a confrontation with something foreign, or conversely, long lost memories. But I feel that I can create a *kavannah* even walking into our building our into the sanctuary, or into the oneg space. I painted a colorful banner for the otherwise blank facade of our building--"Cool Shul. Warm People. The Actors' Temple." It was certainly not true when I first hung that banner, and then, more recently, I had a professional signmaker do the banner again, and hung it with more confidence. It is a goal to be attempted for, articulated in a simple "vision" soundbite. I have added flickering *Shabbat* candles to the bimah decor (pre-lit of course), flowers, brighter lights in the sanctuary. At first there were complaints about even the suggestion that *Shabbat* candles would be a visual opening of the script. I asked how many on the

Board were able to get home and light candles before shul started. None! Recently I forgot to have the candles lit and there were comments about their absence.

Some visitors sit in the back and observe. Others participate on the first go, smile, espouse true love but never return. Others slowly move forward, volunteer to read a poem or translation--the actors at Actors' are an asset this way. A few of the old timers continue to sit in the back rows and talk throughout the script, and I accept that is their way of opening it.

I am set to continue my task, and I have been hired for next year. But I am not the same person now as six month ago, and hopefully, the opening of the script is a reason why I am excited by the prospect of another 40 or so *Erev Shabbat* services. I was deeply moved and motivated by reading Lawrence Hoffman's charge in *The Art of Prayer*: His words stir the soul: "We need spaces that do not separate laity from clergy; music that collapses social distance; accessible, warm melodies and poetically touching texts;...to extend the liturgical action into the congregation; make regulars aware of the concerns of watchers; and let the people themselves do the praying by singing, reciting, and acting out the script in the sure knowledge that it is theirs, not the guarded turf of professionals who are there to do it for them. We must discover they joy of knowing how it feels to be part of a closely knit fabric of people in touch with one another in an environment of absolute care and compassion., This is what we called a community...it is there that we find God." (*Art*, p. 244) As has been shown in this paper, I am bound through my understanding of the rabbi-congregation relationship, to add one item to Rabbi Hoffman's list. We must be sensitive to halacha, which is a way of saying that it connects to the great conversation about the parameters of correct Jewish behavior that is so central to our long history.

I visited my family and Maryland and my mother read the first draft of this thesis. As I set off for the return trip to New York, she handed me a slim volume as a gift. It was a work written by the Jewish composer Israel Goldfarb, my great grandfather. In 1953, nearing the end of a long career he

had published a hardcover compilation of favorite congregational songs to enliven *Erev Shabbat.* The perfection of the book itself, the fonts and paper, the musical notation, and stilted, patriarchal English, delight the eye and further inspire me. In every generation, we take up the honor and challenge of renewing our script.

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