



ברכות

Berakhot

A Midrash Cantata

by
Bruce Chalmer

Program Notes and Commentary

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This work is dedicated to my parents, Bertram (ברוך בן זלמן ושיינע) and Clara (קיילע בת יעקב וחנה) Chalmer, who have been blessing and crown to their children.

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Introduction

This work began with some vocal music I wrote for a synagogue choir. As I was beginning a setting of *Ahavat Olam*, the blessing from the evening service about God's love for Israel, I noticed that the prayer could be read as a torch song, recounting how our lover (God) has treated us and pleading that he not take his love away. The text was transformed for me. Suddenly the internal rhymes and rhythms in the Hebrew seemed to have been intended all along to be sung as a blues ballad. I was delighted with the discovery, and followed it up by setting *Mi Khamokha* with an uptempo walking blues bassline and Psalm 150 as a barbershop quartet. These were whimsical strolls, meanderings along ancient, well-worn liturgical pathways to see the spring blossoms.

But I soon realized that this associative awareness, this juxtaposition of traditional text and modern practice, is more than whimsy—it is central to who I am as a Jew, as a musician, in my work, in my life. I realized that *מדרש* *midrash* (from a root meaning "to seek"), the process of going beyond the given text and its traditional interpretations to search out meaning, is not simply embellishment, but is vital, a matter of our very existence: that tradition without imaginative interpretation is deadly, and imagination without a sense of tradition is vapid. My musical meandering turned into an urgent exploration of the territories between the domains of history and mythology, reverence and play, survival and experience.

I began to conceive of a larger work, a cantata that expresses this exploration through midrash, structured around texts and musical ideas that, as a whole, embody Jewish life on many levels simultaneously. The choice of *ברכות* *berakhot* ("blessings" or "praises") as a basis for this structure flowed from the role of the *berakha* as a shaper of traditional awareness: if something happens, the tradition prescribes a *berakha* for it, and this renders daily experience a continual series of opportunities to engage in midrash. In choosing particular *berakhot* and other texts from which to create midrash, my approach was that of a travel writer rather than a mapmaker, in that I was guided by what caught my attention rather than some attempt to be comprehensive.

The 26 pieces of the cantata are ordered (loosely) from morning to evening liturgically, and from youth to old age thematically. The musical styles hint also at a historical progression, with pieces near the beginning of the work set in earlier styles such as modal monophony, pieces in the middle using renaissance- and baroque-like polyphony, and pieces nearer the end using later styles such as blues, swing, doo-wop, and atonality.

None of these progressions is strictly consistent, however. Rather, the pieces flow from one to another as topics in the Talmud flow from one to another. Often the next piece connects to the previous based on an overall thematic or liturgical structure; for example, the various settings from the morning and evening services occur generally in the order they occur in the liturgy, and the settings of the seven blessings (*שבע ברכות* *sheva berakhot*) from the wedding ceremony occur between references to courtship/sexuality and parenting. Some pieces serve

as comments on the work as a whole (especially *Berakhot*, *Lekh Lekha* and *Lechayim/Shalom*). Sometimes the various themes and structures can be seen as interconnecting through chains of association, as if in an ongoing conversation. This volume of commentary, in text and visual art, is another part of that conversation.

The forms of the midrashic interpretations include poetry set to music, musical settings of liturgical texts themselves in the original Hebrew or interpretive English translation, and musical compositions without words. The diversity of musical styles and midrashic forms is itself a comment on the range and adaptability of Jewish experience.

Bruce Chalmer
Iyyar 5762 / May 2002

About the Art

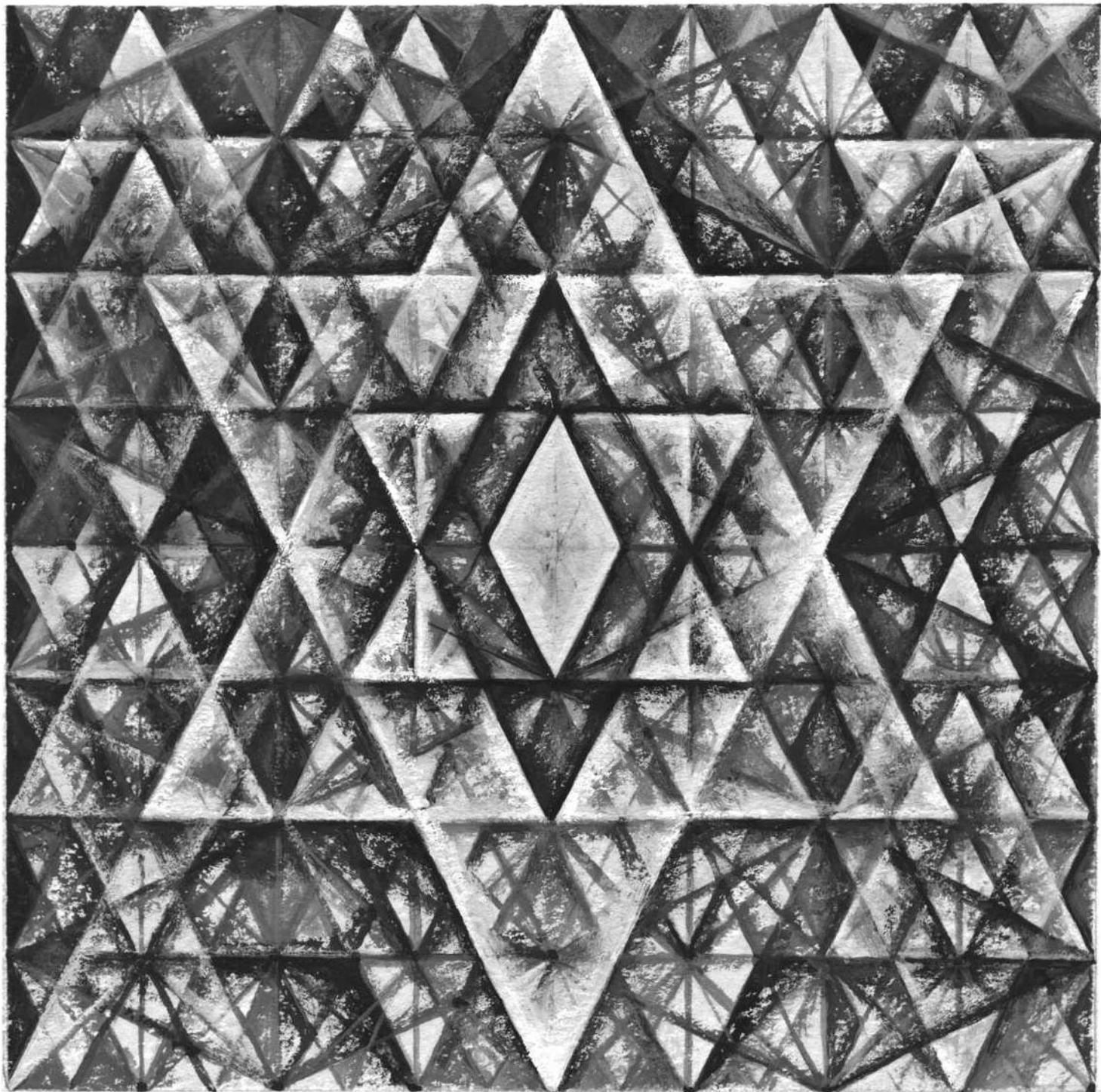
by Diane Sophrin

The act of making art is always, at its height, midrash. Before I even knew the word, midrash had been at the root of my creative efforts. It has defined my work, and my identity. It has given purpose and meaning to my very existence. It has been my "muse."

The artist's most meaningful work is defined through the sublime act of searching. Without midrash, the creative act reverts to mere production. The best artworks are non-verbal texts of the artist's midrash, recording in a visual alphabet the artist's quest for deepest comprehension of the unarticulated, the unknown...of life.

A piece of art can also, of course, be something slightly different: a presentation, *fait accompli*, of truths already explored and understood by the artist, ideas already more or less realized; with the real work being finished before the piece is even begun. Making such works can solidify and expand an already understood truth—guiding the artist to someplace new—or they can repeat that truth until it fades into a pale parody of its original brilliance. It is up to the artist to always keep in sight the midrash of the work...which can take days, months, years...or a lifetime.

When Bruce Chalmer approached me about creating a visual component to his "Midrash Cantata" project, I was about to depart for a residency at the Hortobagyi Artists' Colony in Hungary. During our initial discussions, I sketched out the basic structure of an idea which had immediately begun to form in my mind: a geometrically-based "visual commentary", which would surround the English and Hebrew texts and commentaries. But this



About the Art, by Diane Sophrin (continued)

would be achieved by creating an abstract image filling the whole page. By placing the smaller areas of English and Hebrew written texts on top of the larger abstraction, "excerpts" of the "visual text" would be seen and "read". Different placements would result in varying visible "excerpts." The abstract image could also be appreciated in its entirety. Tones, textures, and forms began to appear in my mind's eye. I let them rest there for the time being.

We both sensed that my abstract works pointed in directions parallel to Bruce's musical work, and that a harmonious collaboration could evolve. Excited by the possibilities, I left for Hungary. I would let the piece gestate while I worked at Hortobagy. I knew that the paintings and prints created there would lead me to my "Midrash" piece.

And it did. Excited by some new turns my painting had taken while in Hungary, I decided to paint the "Midrash" piece in color, even though Bruce and I had been originally speaking of a drawing. Early on, without my even realizing it, my mental imaginings had quickly turned to color. Now I wanted to pursue the line of thought I'd been working on while at the art colony. I was thinking in paint—I would make a "Midrash" painting, which could then be reproduced both in black and white and color!

For some time my abstract geometrical works had been moving in metaphysical and spiritual directions. While certainly speaking of light, and fragmentation, what they are about, visually speaking, is structure and movement; or to put it more metaphysically, they are about order and chaos; finally, in spiritual terms, they are about simultaneity. Although many viewers tend view paintings as they might read a novel, seeking through association, forms and shapes which they can somehow identify literally, this "Midrash" piece is meant to be experienced in order to be understood. Like music... like prayer... like life.

Basic geometrical elements form and reform themselves again and again... into Stars of David, which appear and disappear, to be supplanted by triangles, diamonds, squares, rectangles, trapezoidal forms, and a myriad of angles and edges, all of which aim to bring the viewer, through the eye, to a sensation, a place of simultaneity. This simultaneity has been a compelling, driving force behind much of my abstract work for the past several years.

In this piece the geometry is the scaffolding upon which to build sensation and thus create experience. The colors heighten sensations of movement, of changing depths, of simultaneous readings. The flickering lights and shadows offer sensations of radiance, of darkness. The piece speaks, in the language of vision, of harmony and conflict, joy and sorrow... it hopes to convey what I sense of the infinite contradictions and simultaneities of life. It is my midrash.

1. *Berakhot* ברכות Praises

A midrash on the work as a whole, this piece embodies four repetitions of the word ברוך *barukh* (most often translated blessed or praised), the opening word of a traditional ברכה *berakha* (blessing or praise), plural ברכות *berakhot*. Thus,

the piece itself can be considered an example of *berakhot*, in the literal sense of a plural *barukh*.

ברוך

Barukh

Praised

The musical setting can also be read as a midrash on the work as a whole. It begins with a statement of a theme by the bassoon that will subsequently appear in the second (*Lekh Lekha*) and last (*Lechayim/Shalom*) pieces of the cantata. The tenor's first two renderings of the word *barukh* are set in cantorial modes, while the third and fourth switch to modes that might suggest settings outside the synagogue. And the instrumentation and style of arrangement are intended to convey a message of multiple possibilities and entryways into the work.

Tenor, Clarinet, Recorders, Bassoon

2. *Lekh Lekha*

לך לך

Go Forth

A midrash based on the beginning of Abram's journey recounted in Genesis 12:

לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל ארץ אשר אראך. ואעשך לגוי גדול ואברכך ואגדלה שמך והיה ברכה. ואברכה מברכך ומקללך אאר ונברכו בך כל משפחת האדמה.

Lekh lekha me-artzekha umi-molad'tekha umibeit avikha el ha-aretz asher ar-eka. Vesekha legoi gadol va-avarekhekha va-agadela she-mekha veheyi berakha. Va-avarekha mevarakhekha umekalelekha a-or veniv-rekhu vekha kol mishpekhoh ha-adama.

"Go forth from your land, and from your birthplace, and from the house of your father, to the land that I will show you. And I will make you as a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, and you will become a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and who curses you I will curse. And in you will be blessed all the families of the earth."

How was Abram shown the place? What was he shown? How was he himself to become a blessing, and how were all the families of the earth to be blessed in him?

What must he see, and learn, and know, of now and generations in the future? What must he insist upon, fall back from, accept without doubt and protest without fear? Why Abram, and so, why we who have this tradition through him? What does it mean to bless? Why ברכות *berakhot*, blessings?

Tenor, Harp, Viol, Vielle

Midrash on Genesis 12

I left my father's lamplight, crossed the moon-splashed river,
followed fireflies and dawn-lit eagle's wing,
sought signs in trackless dust and blazing sky,
until at last I fell upon this mountain's foot,
and in its crown of sinking sun was struck with sight.

Torch fires and hearth fires, curling smoke and braided loaves, tambourine
and ankle-bells
Flowing fringes, living waters slipping, candles whispering to covered eyes
Laughing birth, glinting knife, ram's blood given, youth's blood taken
Burnt offerings

Brick fires and whipped fires, daughters tricked and sons drowned, iron
prybar, chiseled stone
Chafing ropes and stagnant waters rusting, flames marching under empty
eyes
Groaning push, glowing bush, lamb's blood given, youth's blood taken
Burnt offerings

And the flashing shadow of the mountain

Bonfires and siege fires, blossomed plum and heaps of ash, tambourine and
death knell
Silken shawls and flood waters rushing, crystal firmaments of shattered
glass
Aching breath, blinding sword, heart's blood given, youth's blood taken
Burnt offerings

And I must praise the knife and reason with the flood, tell the glory of the
flame and appeal to the lightning.
I must sing of the One who chose me for this.
I must learn to bless.

3. *Birkot Hashachar* ברכות השחר Morning Blessings

This Talmudic excerpt (somewhat adapted in this version) is the basis for the blessings that appear near the beginning of the morning service. The musical setting suggests the sound of a study house,

Adapted from Talmud Berakhot 60b

When you hear the rooster crowing you say, *barukh* who has given the rooster understanding to distinguish between day and night.
 When you open your eyes you say, *barukh* who opens the eyes of the blind.
 When you stretch and sit up you say, *barukh* who loosens the bound.
 When you dress you say, *barukh* who clothes the naked.
 When you draw yourself up you say, *barukh* who raises the bowed.
 When you step on the ground you say, *barukh* who spread the earth on the waters.
 When you start walking you say, *barukh* who makes firm our steps.
 When you tie your shoes you say, *barukh* who has supplied all my needs.
 When you fasten your belt you say, *barukh* who has girded us with strength.
 When you cover your head you say, *barukh* who crowns us with glory.
 . . .
 On entering the house of the throne [that throne we all sit on by ourselves, mostly] you say, Honored and holy ones, wait until I do my needs and return to you.
 And on leaving you say, *barukh* who has formed us in wisdom and created within us openings and cavities. Well I know before the throne of your glory that if but one of them were ruptured or but one of them were blocked we could not endure and stand before you. *Barukh* who heals all flesh to do wonders.

with each voice entering on a traditional Talmudic chant (familiar as a melody for the Four Questions at a Passover seder), but in mutually dissonant keys, finally coming together to discuss what one says on entering the **בית הכסא** *beit hakisei*—literally, house of the throne, a euphemism for a privy. The two lower voices enter this discussion in parallel fifths, a perfect interval, reflecting the Jewish conception of the body as perfect and worthy of celebration, letting us live and stand before the "throne of [God's] glory" as long as all the openings and closings are working properly.

The last phrase in the blessing, **רופא כל בשר ומפליא לעשות** *rofei kol basar umaflia la-asot* is more often translated "who

heals all flesh and does wondrously." Translating the phrase "who heals all flesh to do wonders" provides a subtle shift of emphasis, a reminder of our own responsibility in the partnership of creation: It is indeed wondrous that we are healed, but we are healed to do wonders.

Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

4. *Elohai Neshama* אלהי נשמה My God, the Soul

This prayer is also prescribed in Talmud Berakhot, and refers implicitly to both the daily restoring of soul in the act of awakening, and the restoration of life to the dead in the time to come. The word נשמה *neshama*, soul, can also be translated as breath, and the word itself breathes without consonantal stops. In referring to the soul placed in us as תהורה *tehora*, pure, the rabbis argue across history against the later non-Jewish concept of original sin.

The musical setting is mostly in Mixolydian mode, a mode that Aristotle (in the Politics) said "made men sad and grave"—which might account for its association with modern blues—but might also be heard as suggesting purity and calm. Though close to a modern major scale, Mixolydian has a whole step between the seventh and the octave that seems soothing compared to the commercial insistence of the major scale. Try humming a major scale with a flatted seventh—do you find you can breathe more easily in that mode?

The translation of the text is close to the original, with liberties taken mostly to facilitate matching some of the internal rhymes and rhythms between the English and Hebrew texts.

Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Recorders

Morning service

אלהי נשמה שנחת בי תהורה היא

Elohai neshama shenatata bi tehora hi

אתה בראתה אתה יצרתה אתה נפתחה בי

Ata verata, ata yetzarta, ata nefachta bi

ואתה עתיד לעלה ממני ולהחזירה בי לעתיד לבא

Ve-ata atid litta mimeni ulehachazira bi le-atid lavo

My God, the soul you placed within me, pure is she.

You were her maker, you were her shaper, you breathed her in me.

Though I know you'll take her you'll restore her to me in the time to come.

כל זמן שהנשמה בקרבי מודה אני לפניך

Kol zeman shehaneshama vekirbi moda(e) ani lefanecha

י אלהי ואלהי אבותי רבון כל המעשים ארון כל הנשמות

Adonai elohai velohei avotai, ribon kol hama-asim, adon kol haneshamot

As long as the soul breathes in me, I will acknowledge you,

Adonai my God, master of all works, lord of all souls.

ברוך אתה יי המחזיר נפשות לפגרים מתים.

Barukh ata Adonai, hamachazir neshamot lifgarim metim.

[Praised are you, Adonai our God, who restores souls to dead bodies.]

5. *Barukh She-amar* ברוך שאמר Blessed Who Spoke

This blessing, more recent than the Talmud but included in the morning liturgy for at least a thousand years, serves as the introduction to the section of the service called פסוקי דזמרה *pesukei dezimra*,

verses of song. This rendition is a midrash on the first line of the blessing. The logic—admittedly rather twisted—rests on an interpretation of the first line of the Torah, which points out (prior to God's first words bringing light into existence) that "the earth was formless and void." Applying the traditional exegetical device of stopping the sentence at a point more advantageous for the sake of the desired conclusion, we can read the sentence as simply indicating that prior to God's speaking light into existence, "the earth was." In other words, the world existed before God spoke. The apparent contradiction with the text of the blessing is resolved by dividing the first two words God spoke, concluding that the world came into existence on the first word, *yehi*, "let there be."

Why wrestle the two texts to this conclusion? Because to speak the word *yehi* is simply to laugh—*yehi, yehi*—which implies, according to this midrash, that the world comes to be in the act of God's laughter.

The musical setting starts with a statement of the text in harmonies somewhat reminiscent of the 14th century French composer Guillaume de Machaut, through a recitative exposition of

Morning service

ברוך שאמר והיה העולם

Barukh she-amar ve-haya ha-olam.

[Blessed who spoke and there was the world.]

Midrash:

We are taught: ברוך שאמר *Barukh she-amar*, Blessed who spoke, והיה *ve-haya*, and there was העולם *ha-olam*, the world. This refers to the words *yehi*, let there be אור *or*, light. But is it not also written: בראשית ברא *bereishit bara elohim*, "In the beginning God created את השמים ואת הארץ *et hashamayim ve-et ha-aretz*, the heavens and the earth והארץ *veha-aretz*, and the earth הייתה *hayta*, was תהו ובהו *tohu vavohu*, formless and void." Therefore we conclude that the world existed before God created אור *or*, light.

But we are taught: ברוך שאמר *Barukh she-amar*, Blessed who spoke, והיה *ve-haya*, and there was העולם *ha-olam*, the world. Does this not contradict our proof that the world existed before God spoke?

There is no contradiction. The world existed, not before God said *yehi or*, let there be light, but rather before God said *or*, light. So we conclude that the world came to be when God said *yehi*.

Yehi, yehi, yehi, yehi...

ברוך הוא

Barukh hu. [Blessed is he.]

the midrash, leading to a reggae-like rendition in three parts of God's laughter (*yehi, yehi...*) in 7/4 time—resting, in commemoration of creation, on the seventh beat—while the baritone plays word games with English verbs of speaking and creating, and the soprano revisits the text. The music concludes with a restatement of the original text, adding the second line of the liturgical prayer, ברוך הוא *Barukh hu*, blessed is he [God].

Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Tenor, Baritone, Bass

6. *Pesukei Dezimra* פסוקי הזמרה Verses of Song

The section of the morning service called *פסוקי הזמרה pesukei dezimra*, verses of song, consists of a set of scriptural passages generally on themes of praise of God. The content of *pesukei dezimra* differs between weekday and Sabbath or holiday services, with additional passages added for Sabbath and holidays reflecting the availability of more time.

Midrash on morning service

(Instrumental)

As many commentators have pointed out, the word *זמרה zimra*, shares the same root as the word *הזמר tizmor*, prune, as in pruning a vineyard [A.S., p.58; cf. Lev. 25:4]. So the chants in this section of the service can be experienced not only as imitations of the *זמיר zamir*, nightingale, but also as a kind of mantra that prunes the consciousness in preparation for the intense focus needed for the prayers to follow.

In the spirit of pruning, this musical setting eliminates text entirely.

Recorder, Lute, Harp, Finger cymbals

7. *Kol Haneshama*

כל הנשמה

Every Soul

The core of the דומרה פסוקי *pesukei dezimra* section of the service is the last six chapters of the Book of Psalms, numbers 145 through 150. The last of those, Psalm 150, has attracted many musical settings—not surprising, given its explicit

references to musical instruments and dance.

Psalm 150

הללויה הללו אל בקרשו הללוהו ברקיע עזו
Haleluya. Halelu el bekodsho, haleluhu birkiya uzo.
Praise God! Praise God in his holiness, praise him
in the firmament of his strength.

הללוהו בנבורתיו הללוהו כרב גדלו
Haleluhu bigvurotav, haleluhu kerov gudlo.

Praise him in his power, praise him in the greatness
of his good.

הללוהו בתקע שופר הללוהו בנבל וכנור
Haleluhu beteka shofar, haleluhu benevel vekhinor.
Praise him in the blast of the shofar, praise him in
the lyre and harp.

הללוהו בתוף ומחל הללוהו במנים ועגב
Haleluhu betof umachol, haleluhu beminim ve-
ugav.

Praise him in drum and dance, praise him in strings
and flute.

הללוהו בצלצלי שמע הללוהו בצלצלי תרועה
Haleluhu betziltzelei shama, haleluhu betziltzelei
terua.

Praise him in clattering cymbals, praise him in blar-
ing trumpets.

כל הנשמה תהלל יה הללויה
Kol haneshama tehalal ya. Haleluya.
Every soul will praise God. Praise God!

This *a cappella* musical setting features a variety of barbershop quartet techniques, including block chord homophony (melody and harmonies generally together in rhythm), liberal doses of seventh chords, setting of the primary melody in the second tenor (lead voice, and a tag with a tenor "hanger." In between the barbershop elements, listen for imitations or intimations of the shofar, harp and lyre, drum and dance, flute, trumpets, and cymbals.

The barbershop style is also characterized by a "lock and ring" style of singing, in which the singers strive to blend their voices to lock into just intonation. Just intonation is a form of tuning in which the intervals sound harmonically pure, without beats, resulting in a ringing sonority much greater than the sum of its parts.

In the last line of the psalm, כל הנשמה *kol haneshama* can be translated not only as

"every soul," but also as "all breath." And isn't the name of God used in the psalm, יה *ya*, just a breath? When barbershop-style singers succeed in blending their breath to lock and ring, they become "every," and "all," and yet more—they become הללויה *haleluya*.

Tenor, Lead, Baritone, Bass

8. Shirat Hayam שירת הים Song of the Sea

The Song of the Sea (Ex. 15:1-18) is traditionally recited near the end of the פסוקי דזמרה *pesukei dezimra* section of the service. The text celebrates the deliverance of the children of Israel at the Sea of Reeds. It is written in the Torah in a distinctive layout of three interlocking columns, suggesting (according to various commentators) waves, or bricks, or two walls of water with people between. (See picture at right.)

This musical midrash picks up the three-column motif in its 9/8 (or occasionally 6/8) time signature, which groups into threes, similar to an Irish slip jig. The tune, tempo and instrumentation are intended to suggest a nautical setting.

Curiously, the text begins אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל, "Then will sing Moses and the children of Israel..."—not שר *shar* "sang," but ישיר *yashir* "will sing." Though this can be explained grammatically as a sort of imperfect form, implying "they would (habitually) sing," or as an indication that they chose to sing [A.S., p.79], we are still left with the implication that this is not a report of a one-time historical event. What will happen will happen. Then, we will sing.

Pennywhistle, Flute, Harp, Contrabass, Percussion

Midrash on Exodus 15:1-18 (Instrumental)

אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל את השירה הזאת ביהודים יאמרו	אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל את השירה הזאת ביהודים יאמרו	אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל את השירה הזאת ביהודים יאמרו
כאמר	אשר ירה ליהוה בים סוף	אשר ירה ליהוה בים סוף
ויבנו	על יד ימית זה וזהו כיו	על יד ימית זה וזהו כיו
לשירנה	זה אמר ואנוהו	זה אמר ואנוהו
אשר	יהוה יאמר משה ויהוה	יהוה יאמר משה ויהוה
עמו	מלכות פאעה וזונו יתנו	מלכות פאעה וזונו יתנו
עלתי	טעמי טעמי סוף	התנת פסוקו ידיו במוטות כחו
אבך	ימינה יתנו וארזי פכל	ימינה יתנו וארזי פכל
יהוה ידועה	איש	ובשרו וזאת הדרס
קמך	השכלת חרני האנסטיק	יברחיה
אשר	ענינו בו	ונטנו סוף צד
מלכ	הפא יהדות כסב יש	אמר
איש ארדוק	אשה	אחנה יתכל המלאכו
קמך	איה חרני אויעלוי	עלתי
ברוך	ספוקו	כסבו בעקרת ספוקו
אדוק	מי נפסקת האבם יהוה	מי
מכוח	אדוק בקדש	גורל התכלת עשירה
פלא	גורל יפוך המלכות או	גורל
בחסדך	עמי נאכרה	השכלת ענינו את גורל
קדש	טעמי עכסו ירונו	היב
איה יעמי	פסוקו	אז נבחרו אבוקו
אדוק	איה חרני אויעלוי	נמני
כסו ישיר	פסוקו	הפסקתיהם אבוקו
על	קדש ורשני יהוה פאבן	על
יעמי	עמר יהוה	על יעמי עמי זו
קנה	הפאבו והענינו סוף	מכך
מלכות	פסוקו יהוה	מלכות אדוקי ספוקו
ידך	יהוה ימלה בעשב ועד	בי
בא סוף	פסוקו ופסוקו יתנו	ועמי יהוה עלתם אתם
איה	ובני ישראל חסבו מיערה סוף	איה

9. *Nishmat*

נשמת

Breath

As noted earlier, the word נשמה *neshama* means both "breath" and "soul," and the phrase כל חי *kol chai* can be seen as either singular ("every living being") or plural ("all life"). Thus, the first line of this liturgical poem, a paraphrase of the last line of

From Shabbat and festival morning service (excerpted)

נשמת כל חי חברך את שמך יי אלהינו...

Nishmat kol chai tevarakh et shimkha Adonai eloheinu...

The breath of all life will praise your name, Adonai our God...

אלו פנו מלא שירה כים ולשגנו רנה כהמון גליו

Ilu finu male shira kayam, ulshonenu rina kahamon galav,

If our mouths were filled with song as the sea, our tongues with exultation as the masses of its waves,

ושפתותינו שבה כמרחבי רקיע ועינינו מאירות כשמש וכירח
vesiftoteinu shevach kemerchavei rakiya, ve-eineinu me-ivot kashemesh vekhayareach,

our lips with praise as the expanse of the firmament, our eyes shining as the sun and moon,

ידינו פרושות כנשרי שמים ורגלינו קלות כאילוח
veyadeinu ferusot kenishrei shamayim, veragleinu kalot kayalot,

our hands spread like eagles of the sky, our feet swift as deer,
[continued]

Psalm 150, suggests a joining of our individual breath with the universal breath of all life. In a word: music.

נשמת *Nishmat* is thought to be a compilation of three separately composed parts of pre-Talmudic origin [Milgram, p. 168]. The first section is represented in this excerpted musical setting by the first

line. The second section, beginning "If our mouths were filled with song as the sea," and included in this setting in full, is identified in T.B. 59b as part of a prayer for rain, a usage which suggests an image of the "thousand thousand thousands and myriad myriads of kindnesses" as raindrops. The musical setting of this section includes tone paintings intended to suggest waves, stars (via staccato, hiccup-like dabs of

9. *Nishmat* [continued]

sound on the word רַקִּיעַ *rakiya*, “firmament”), a soaring eagle, running deer, and raindrops.

The third section, excerpted here beginning “We will praise you,” recapitulates the theme of praise, invoking the first line of Psalm 103, “Bless Adonai, my soul, and all my inner parts, his holy name.”

Here the name for soul is נֶפֶשׁ *nefesh*, which is distinguished from נִשְׁמָה *neshama* in kabalistic literature as an earlier or more inward stage of the soul’s development [A.T., p. 1238]. Note the movement of the alto and tenor—the inner parts—on the word קִרְבֵי *keravai*, “inner parts.” The universal soul/breath invoked at the beginning of the prayer here comes back to the individual—we each become the universe.

[continued]

אֵין אַנְחֵנוּ מַסְפִּיקִים לְהוֹדוֹת לְךָ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וּלְבָרַךְ אֶת שְׁמֶךָ
ein anachnu maspikim lehodot lekha Adonai eloheinu velohei avoteinu ulevarekh et shemekha

we would still be inadequate to thank you, Adonai our God, or to praise your name
עַל אַחַת מֵאַלְפֵי אֲלֵפֵי אֲלֵפֵי אֲלֵפֵי וְרַבֵּי רַבּוֹת פְּעָמִים הַטּוֹבוֹת שְׁעָשִׂיתָ עִם־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
וְעִמָּנוּ...
al achat me-alef elef alefei alafim veribei revavot pe-amim hatovot she-asita im avoteinu ve-imanu...

al achat me-alef elef alefei alafim veribei revavot pe-amim hatovot she-asita im avoteinu ve-imanu...

for even one of the thousand thousand thousands and myriad myriads of kindnesses
you have done for our ancestors and for us...

נְהַלְלֶךָ וְנִשְׁבַּחֶךָ וְנִפְאָרְךָ וְנִבְרַךְ אֶת שֵׁם קִדְשְׁךָ כְּאִמּוֹר לְדָוִד
Nehalelekha uneshabekha unefaerekha unevarekh et shem kodshekha ka-amur ledavid:

We will praise you, and laud you, and glorify you, and bless your holy name, as was
said by David:

בְּרַכִּי נַפְשִׁי אֶת־יְיָ וְכָל־קִרְבֵי אֶת־שֵׁם קִדְשׁוֹ.
Barchi nafshi et Adonai vekhol keravai et shem kodsho.

Bless Adonai, my soul, and all my inner parts, his holy name.

Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

10. *Besamim* בשמים Spices

The blessing over spices, *borei minei vesamim* (בשמים בורא מיני בשמים) ("creator of various spices"), or *besamim* for short, is one of the *birkot hanehenin* (ברכות הנהנין), blessings of enjoyment, along with blessings of eating and drinking. This blessing is most associated with the ceremony of *havdala* (הברלה), separation, that marks the end of the Sabbath on Saturday night. In the context of *havdala*, the *besamim* blessing is seen as offering consolation, in the form of sweet fragrance, for the loss of the extra soul that we acquire with the coming of the Sabbath.

Midrash on blessing

(Instrumental)

But the *besamim* blessing is not just for *havdala*—it is traditionally appropriate any time one experiences a pleasant smell with a bit of mystery involved (mystery, in that fragrances involving particular, known plants or fruits are assigned their own, more specific, blessings).

In the context of this cantata, the setting of *Nishmat* (the previous piece) completed the liturgical references to morning. The liturgical references to evening are much later in the work (beginning with *Maariv Aravim*). So the placement of *besamim* here is not intended to suggest its association with *havdala*, an evening prayer.

Rather, this setting of *besamim* introduces the section of the cantata that includes mikveh and marriage—themes associated with sensual awakening and sexual and spiritual union. This midrashic spice is a waltz.

Clarinet, Guitar, Contrabass, Finger cymbals

11. *Mikveh*

מקוה

Living Waters

A מקוה *mikveh* is a gathering of water used for ritual immersion. Immersion in a mikveh is part of the ritual of conversion to Judaism, and is also used for spiritual purification in preparation for the Sabbath and holy days.

But the most common use of a mikveh is as part of the observance of *טהרה משפחה mishpacha* (literally, "family purity"), the laws and customs related to sexuality. Traditionally, a woman immerses in the mikveh seven days after the end of her menstrual period, after which sexual relations are permitted. This practice effectively means that, during the woman's years of menstruation, married couples refrain from sexual relations for about half of each monthly cycle, rejoining on mikveh night. The effects of this on the couple are best understood by trying it.

The defining feature of a mikveh is that it must be a gathering of מים חיים *mayim chayim*, living waters—that is, a collection of water that comes to the pool through its own natural flow, as opposed to being artificially piped in from somewhere else. This means that lakes, ponds, streams, and even cisterns of rainwater can be used. However, given the need for year-round, all-weather availability, and the requirements of modesty (since immersion in a mikveh must be performed without anything between the person and the water), the rabbis developed rules that allow small quantities of living waters to be combined (the term used is "kissed") with tap water, which can be collected in an indoor, heated structure.

The ocean is also—perhaps quintessentially—a kosher mikveh. This musical setting, in free phrases, is intended to suggest the rhythms and pulses of ocean surf. Another common use of the mikveh accounts for the setting of this piece in the context of this cantata: the mikveh is used by a bride (and sometimes groom) just prior to the wedding.

Baritone, Harp, Viol, Metallophone, Finger cymbals, Rainstick

Midrash on blessing

מים חיים

Mayim chayim

Living waters

12. *Borei Peri Hagafen* בורא פרי הגפן Wine

This blessing is used any time wine is part of a Jewish ritual, which is nearly always if the ritual is joyous. Traditionally, wine used in Jewish ritual is sweet, for the sweetness of the occasion.

Blessing and midrash

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן.
Barukh ata Adonai eloheinu melekh haolam borei peri hagafen.

Praised are you, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

This wine, this sweet, red wine—what if the wine goes sour?

In particular, *borei peri hagafen* serves as the first of the ברכות *sheva berakhot*, Seven Blessings, that form the conclusion of the wedding ceremony.

The bride and groom stand beneath a חפה *chupa*, canopy, symbolizing the home they are creating. At the conclusion of the seventh blessing, they will each drink from the cup of wine over which the blessings have been said, to symbolize the sharing of their joy.

How could they not wonder, at least a little, if the wine will remain sweet?

Baritone chant, Soprano, Tenor

13. *Shehakol Bara Likhvodo* ברא להכל כבודו Glory

This blessing is included in the *ברכות שבע sheva berakhot*, Seven Blessings, of the wedding ceremony to honor the guests and witnesses, who are emulating God, the witness to the wedding of Adam and Eve [A.S. p. 206].

In the context of the other blessings of the seven, this blessing presents the widest-angle shot of the scene, which is then narrowed and refocused in subsequent blessings. The open sides of the *הפה chupa*, wedding canopy, serve a similar symbolic purpose, inviting awareness of the interdependence between the couple's newly forming union and the community and world beyond.

The word *כבוד kavod*, glory, is related to *כבד kaved*, which means heavy, grave, important. Applied to the divine, the sense of importance connotes splendor and radiance.

The midrash in this piece, set with a brief, inquisitive instrumental duet followed by four voices *a cappella*, flows from an associative rendition of the language and symbolic function of the blessing: *הכל hakol*—literally, the all (or the every)—*ברא לכבודו bara likhvodo*, created as God's radiance—all are the witnesses.

Baritone chant, Recorder, Harp, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

Blessing and midrash

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם שהכל ברא לכבודו.
*Barukh ata Adonai eloheinu melekh haolam shehakol
bara likhvodo.*

Praised are you, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe,
who created all for his glory.

Not just the sun in their eyes
but the valley-shadowed brook frog
and the fly it snips from the rippled surface
are witnesses.

14. *Yotzer Ha-adam* יוצר האדם Who Forms the Human

Having alluded to the sweetness and sanctity of the occasion (in *Borei Peri Hagafen*), and honored the assembled guests and all of creation (in *Shehakol Bara Likhvodo*) this next of the *שבע ברכות sheva berakhot*, Seven Blessings, now focuses on the human form. As in the creation story in the Torah, this allusion to the formation of *האדם ha-adam*, "the Adam," can be interpreted in the general sense of human beings, or the more specific mythological sense of Adam, a particular male character in the story. (In keeping with the latter approach, Eve shows up in the next blessing.)

Blessing and midrash

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם יוצר האדם.
*Barukh ata Adonai eloheinu melek haolam
yotzer ha-adam.*

Praised are you, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe, who forms the human.

The occipital bone forms the posterior portion of the back of the head.

Major structures include the foramen magnum and the occipital condyles.

Occipital condyles articulate with the first cervical vertebra

And allow you to nod your head yes.

Either way, the word *אדם adam* connotes a much earthier image in Hebrew than does either of the English words "man" or "human." Gen. 2:7 says that the adam was formed of "dust from the *אדמה adama* (earth)," and embedded in the same word are *אדם adom*, red, and *דם dam*, blood. The formation of *adam* is not from ethereal wisps, but red, bloody soil.

The midrashic text for this setting is a piece of found poetry, discovered in nearly identical form in several anatomy texts. Try pronouncing the

line beginning "Occipital condyles articulate..." using staccato articulation, and notice what your tongue and lips are up to as you speak. The intricate oral dance of these words, together with their meaning, together with the baroque-like musical setting, are meant to suggest the infinitesimal complexity of the human form, a complexity that makes possible the simple act, with its special relevance to a wedding ceremony, of nodding "yes."

Baritone chant, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Recorder, Bassoon, Contrabass

15. *Binyan Adei Ad* בנין עדי עד Eternal Structure

A traditional interpretation of this blessing starts from the assumption that the previous blessing was specifically referring to the creation of Adam—not humans in general, but the first human, who, in this interpretation, was male. It then understands the phrase והחקין לו ממנו בנין עדי עד *vehitkin lo mimenu binyan adei ad*—literally, "and fixed for him from himself a structure forever"—as referring to the creation of Eve from Adam's body [A.S. p. 206]. In this highly male-centric interpretation, then, Eve is seen as a building created from and for Adam.

There are other strands of tradition, however. Even patriarchal sources include alternative renderings, in which the first human was both female and male, as implied in Gen. 1:27. More recently, feminist scholars have sought to "render visible the presence, experience, and deeds of women erased in traditional sources" [Plaskow, p.28].

To seek out and give shape and voice to what has been hidden is to perform midrash. My father's words are given in the text, but my mother told me of her dream.

Baritone chant, Alto, Recorder, Viol

Blessing and midrash

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר יצר את האדם בצלמו
בצלם דמות חביתו והחקין לו ממנו בנין עדי עד. ברוך אתה
יי יוצר האדם.

*Barukh ata Adonai eloheinu melekh haolam asher yatzar et ha-
adam betzalmo, betzelem demut tavnito, vehitkin lo mimenu
binyan adei ad. Barukh ata Adonai yotzer ha-adam.*

Praised are you, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe, who formed the human in his image, constructed him in the image of his likeness, and fixed for him from himself a structure forever. Praised are you, Adonai, who forms the human.

My mother told me of her dream.

She rested on a garden bench of carven oak.

Her daughters tended orchards of her planting,
and extended bowered pathways of their own designs,
her sons wove trellis-work for branching vines,
and her children's children of her proverbs spoke.

My mother told me of her dream,
and though her seedlings grew in others' fields,
and though her accent fades and her footpath lies
concealed,
still I know my mother's dream.

16. *Kibutz Baneha* קבוץ בניה Gathering Her Children

This segment of the *ברכה שבע sheva berakhot*, Seven Blessings, of the wedding ceremony emphasizes that this is not just a wedding of two individuals, but a Jewish wedding—a celebration of the Jewish people. The reference to *העקרה ha-akara*, "the barren one," in the blessing is an allusion to Zion (Jerusalem), symbolized as bereft of her children through exile, and rejoicing in their ingathering, like the joy of the bride and groom.

Blessing and midrash

שׁוֹשׁ חֵישׁ וְהַגַּל הָעֵקֶרָה בַּקְבוּץ בְּנֵיהָ לְחֻכָּה בְּשִׂמְחָה. בְּרוּךְ
אַתָּה יי מִשְׂמַח צִיּוֹן בְּבִנְיָהּ.

Sos tasis vetagel ha-akara bekibutz baneha letokha besimcha. Barukh ata Adonai mesameach tzion bevaneha.

Bring great joy and delight to the barren one through the gathering of her children to her in gladness. Praised are you, Adonai, who gladdens Zion through her children.

She's gonna call her children home,
Gonna gather her children home.

This blessing implicitly reminds us that the Jewish people is not a community of belief, or a voluntary society, or even a particularly welcoming group. Rather, Jews are a people—a tribe, a family. One can choose to become a Jew, but the process, by design, is not easy. Nor is it easy to be a Jew, whether one got there by birth

or choice. As a family that has survived despite continual, institutionalized efforts to destroy us, we can be rather touchy about outsiders, even when they seem friendly. In no other context is this touchiness more evident than in our communal angst around courtship and marriage.

All of which might render the choice of gospel as a style for a musical midrash on this blessing somewhat curious. As Jews, can we sometimes risk admitting, hesitantly, depending on who else is around, that our own culture is profoundly affected by, even enriched by, the peoples among whom we live? From that perspective, this setting is an act of appreciation.

Baritone chant, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

17. *Gan Eden*

גן עדן

Garden of Eden

This blessing is the most intimate of the *ברכות שבע sheva berakhot*, Seven Blessings. Its theme is the joy of the couple in their sexual and spiritual union. This blessing refers to *וכלה חתן chatan vekhala*, "groom and bride," in contrast to the following blessing, which refers to *חתן עם הכלה chatan im hakala*, "groom with the bride." The contrast suggests that this blessing is about the gladness of the lovers as individuals, while the following blessing is about the lovers as a couple [A.S., p. 207]. This blessing, then, could be seen as celebrating the lovers' discovery of each other—their coming to "know" each other, in all of the senses of the word.

The midrashic poem, set as a love ballad, is based on both the meaning and the sound of the word "know." It celebrates the "oh" that lovers bring to knowing each other, even knowing that their life as individuals must someday end.

Baritone chant, Tenor, Recorder, Clarinet, Bassoon

Blessing and midrash

שמח תשמח רעים האהובים כשמחך יצירך בנן עדן מקדם.
ברוך אתה יי משמח חתן וכלה.

Sameach tismach reim ha-ahuvim, kesamechakha yetzirekha began eden mikedem. Barukh ata Adonai mesameach chatan vekhala.

Greatly gladden the lovers as you gladdened your creature in the garden of Eden from before. Praised are you, Adonai, who gladdens the groom and bride.

All I ask is to know who you are.

All I can give is to follow as far
as the river flows to the sea.

And though,

like the snow on the rim of the freshening rill,
and the blossoms that blow on the crest of the hill,
what glows must grow dim, what dances must go still.

Even so, I would know you.

18. *Kol Sason Vekol Simcha* קול ששון וקול שמחה Joy and Gladness

This blessing is the dramatic conclusion of the ברכות *sheva berakhot*, Seven Blessings, a litany of reasons to celebrate and prayers for the redemption of the Jewish people in joy. At least two of the words in the blessing, רנה *rina* (here translated “celebration”)

and נגנחם *neginatam* (part of the phrase translated “their songfests”) are specific references to singing and music. And the prayer is that God קול *yeshama*, let be heard, the קול *kol*, voice—the many forms of voice—of our joy. Like the central statement of our relationship as a people with God, the שמוע *shema*, this blessing is about hearing.

Blessing

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר ברא ששון ושמחה חתן וכלה גילה רנה דיצה וחדוה אהבה ואחווה ושלום ורעות. מהרה יי אלהינו ישמע בערי יהודה ובחצות ירשלים קול ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול כלה קול מצהלות חתנים מחפתם ונערים ממשחה נגנחם. ברוך אתה יי משמח חתן עם הכלה.

Barukh ata Adonai eloheinu melek haolam, asher bara sason vesimcha, chatan vekala, gila rina, ditza vechedva, ahava veachava, veshalom vereiut.

Meheira Adonai eloheinu, yeshama bearei yehuda uvechutot yerushalayim kol sason vekol simcha, kol chatan ve kol kala, kol mitzhalot chatanim mechupatam, unearim mimishte neginatam. Barukh ata Adonai mesameach chatan im hakala.

Praised are you, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe, who created joy and gladness, groom and bride, delight and celebration, mirth and gaiety, love and kinship, peace and companionship. Speedily, Adonai our God, let be heard in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride, the shouts of grooms from their canopies and youths from their songfests. Praised are you, Adonai, who gladdens the groom with the bride.

The musical setting (scored with the performance notation, “With enough schmaltz for a wedding feast”) is in klezmer style. Listen for the “*mazel tov*” chord, which represents the moment in the ceremony, immediate-

ly following this blessing, after the bride and groom drink from the wine, when the groom smashes a glass with his foot. מוזל טוב *Mazel tov!*

Baritone, Recorder, Clarinet, Trumpet, Trombone, Contrabass

19. *Barukh Sheptarani/Shehecheyanu* שפטרני/שהחינו ברוך Setting Free

When a Jewish child is considered responsible for his or her own performance of the מצוה *mitzvot* (commandments), the child is referred to as a מצוה בר/בת *bar/bat mitzva*, literally "son/daughter of a commandment." The blessing שפטרני מענשו שלזה ברוך *barukh sheptarani meansho shelaze*—"Praised is the one who freed me from the punishment of this one"—is prescribed in traditional prayer-books to be said by the father of a *bar mitzva* when the boy is called to the Torah for the first time. (This blessing has generally not been adopted in egalitarian communities, and so is rarely said by mothers, or about girls.)

Aside from its rather sour tone—in fact, the expression ברוך שפטרני *barukh sheptarani* is a Hebrew idiom for "Good riddance!"—the blessing is also problematic in its ambiguity. Does it mean that the father is glad that he will no longer be subject to punishment for his son's bad behavior? Or that he no longer has to punish his son? Or that he is freed from the punishment of having to raise his son? The sentiment seems less than tender, which might account for the disuse of the blessing in non-orthodox communities. Still, the idea of setting free remains active as a theme of this rite of passage.

This midrash starts from the idea of becoming a *bar* or *bat mitzva* as a kind of setting free, but expresses it in the voice of the child. In doing so, it picks up the theme of another blessing traditionally recited at joyous occasions, which thanks God להזמין והגיענו לזמן הזה *shehecheyanu vekiyemanu vehigiyanu lazman haze*, "who has kept us in life, and sustained us, and brought us to this time." Blurring the distinction between thanking God and thanking parents, as in this midrash, is in the line of psychological and scriptural understanding that, for example, placed the commandment to honor parents on the first tablet of the Ten, which deals with people's relationships with the divine, rather than the second tablet, which deals with people's relationships with each other.

Midrash on blessings

When I was small, and my feet lost the way,
and I cried in the darkness, you led me back to the day.
So I want to thank you, you who carried me here,
and set me free.

And when I get angry, and push you away,
and I can't find the answers, well you know just what to
say.
So I want to thank you, you who dragged me here,
and set me free.

Now there may be times when I run down that road,
and you can't see the end, and it feels like your heart's
come untied,
but I want you to know, no matter how far I go,
you can't shake me loose, there's a part of me stays by
your side.

Now if I am stronger, it's 'cause you taught me to try,
and if I can see farther, it's 'cause you taught my heart
to fly.

So I want to thank you—
you who gave me life, and pulled me through,
and brought me here,
And set me free.

Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

20. *Dayan Ha-emet* דין האמת The True Judge

These are the words, according to Jewish tradition, to say upon hearing of the death of a loved one, or other horrible news. These are awful words.

The musical midrash begins with a short theme posited by the clarinet, which is then embellished and tossed around playfully among the clarinet, recorder and bassoon, each contributing its own style and bouncing its ideas off the others. Meanwhile, the trumpets insinuate themselves into the mix, with their own more regimented thoughts. As the other instruments unsuspectingly carry on their conversations and explorations, the trumpets wait, and then suddenly strike violently. As the smoke clears, the trumpets depart insistently, gracelessly.

Blessing

ברוך דין האמת.
Barukh dayan ha-emet.

Praised is the true judge.

The bassoon, now joined by voices, must find a way to carry on.

Recorder, Clarinet, Trumpets, Bassoon, Alto, Tenor, Bass

21. *Meshane Habriyot* משנה הבריות Diverse Creatures

Jewish tradition teaches—more, begins from the axiom—that God does not make mistakes. This idea does not stop us from arguing with God and each other about what God has apparently done and whether we might have done it differently. Nor does the tradition claim for Jews any special knowledge of just why some of what happens is not evidence of divine blundering. But the tradition does call on us to respond to our own lack of understanding by affirming that, even if we are mystified, God is not.

The blessing *Dayan Ha-emet* (The True Judge), discussed earlier, is one example of this attitude. The process of midrash itself is another example, especially as applied to anomalous spellings or grammatical constructions in sacred text: since God could not have made mistakes, there must be meaning in the apparent anomaly—and, in the act of searching, meaning emerges.

This blessing, *ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם משנה הבריות*, *Barukh ata Adonai eloheinu melekh haolam meshane habriyot* (Praised are you, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe, who diversifies the creatures) is what the tradition assigns us to say when we encounter a living being who appears exceptionally strange to us. As a people who are, ourselves, called upon to appear strange in the world as a way of bearing witness (consider, for example, the commandment to wear *ציצית* *tzitzit*, ritual fringes, on the corners of our garments), we are called upon to view our own perception of strangeness as witness to God's creation. Much as the daily reflection on our experience as slaves in Egypt has sensitized Jews to injustice, the recognition that we are a peculiar group has sensitized Jews to the oppressive effects of conformity on others.

Midrash on blessing

(Instrumental)

The musical midrash derives its association with this blessing by being something of an odd duck of a melody and accompaniment, played by the alto recorder and guitar. It starts in one key, takes a chromatic turn, and reaches an apparent end in a key a major second above the original tonic. Realizing it can't end there, it goes back to the beginning, but then the only plausible place to stop is on a chord a fifth above the original tonic, which leaves the whole thing sounding like a question. A midrash on Jewish experience of the strange.

Recorders, Guitar, Contrabass

22. *Maariv Aravim* מעריב ערבים Evening Twilight

This is the first blessing in the evening service. Both of the words in the phrase מעריב ערבים *maariv aravim* are from the same root, ערב, meaning (in this context) to grow dark or be obscured.

Evening service (interpretive translation)

Praised are you, Adonai our God, ruler of all time and space, whose word brings on the evening, stars, planets, sun and moon in their courses, moving through the sky in orderly splendor, creating day and night, rolling light from darkness and darkness from light, passing day, bringing night, and separating day from night. Adonai of hosts is your name. Living God to infinity, sustaining God, may you rule over us eternally. Praised are you, Adonai (praise God and praise God's name), who brings evening twilight (Amen).

This blessing responds to the coming of darkness, with its attendant fear, by invoking the orderly celestial motions as evidence of a universe by design, brought on by God's word. God is referred to as יי צבאות *Adonai tzevaot*, God of hosts, to emphasize the uncountable forces involved in the physical universe [A.S., p. 258], forces that would be terrifying to us

were we not able to conceive of God as ruler over them and over us.

In asking that God rule over us forever, we are implicitly asking that we live forever as well, even as each of us must know the rolling of light from darkness and darkness from light.

Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

23. *Ahavat Olam*

אהבת עולם

Eternal Love

This blessing, the second of the blessings in the evening service, serves as the immediate introduction to the *שמע shema*, the central affirmation of Judaism. In preparation for our declaration of God as ours, and of our love for God with all our heart, soul and strength—a symbolic marriage between God and Israel expressed in the *shema*—in this blessing we reassure ourselves of God's love for us, and plead that God's love not be taken away.

That reassurance is necessary is a commentary on Jewish history. If we are sure God's love is **אהבת עולם** *ahavat olam*, eternal love, why do we then plead, "Don't take your love away **לעלמים** *le-olamim*, to eternity?" Even as we claim our certainty we reveal our fear. It is a fear born of experience, not, perhaps, of our loss of God's love (see the commentary on the blessing *Meshane Habriyot*), but of our painful mystification at what kind of love would allow us to be treated so badly so many times. Though he slay us, yet we trust him, though we keep our own ways before him (cf. Job 13:15).

In other words, this blessing provides a lyric in the blues tradition of "don't do me wrong" torch songs. The musical setting emphasizes the rhyme and meter of the Hebrew text, which was clearly meant to be recited, or sung, as verse rather than prose.

Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, Contrabass

Evening service

אהבת עולם בית ישראל עמך אהבת תורה ומצוות חקים ומשפטים
אוהבו למדת. על כן יי אלהינו בשכבנו ובקומנו נשיח בחקך
ונשמח בדברי תורתך ובמצותיך לעולם ועד. כי הם חיינו וארך
ימינו ובהם נהנה יומם ולילה. ואהבתך אל תסיר ממנו לעלמים.

*Ahavat olam bet yisrael amkha ahavta, tora umitzvot, chukim
umishpatim, otanu limadta. Al ken Adonai eloheinu,
beshakhbeinu uvekumeinu, nasiach bechukekha venismach bedi-
vrei toratekha uvemitzvotekha leolam vaed. Ki hem chayeinu
veorekh yameinu uvahem nege yomam valaila. Veahavatkha al
tasir mimenu leolamim.*

With eternal love you have loved your people, the house of Israel.
Torah and commandments, laws and judgments you have taught
us. So, Adonai our God, when we lie down and when we rise up,
we will talk of your laws and rejoice in the words of your Torah
and your commandments, forever. For they are our life and the
length of our days, and on them we will meditate day and night.
And your love, don't remove from us ever!

24. *Mi Khamokha* מי כמכה Who Is Like You?

This verse comes from the Torah (Ex. 15:11), as part of the Song of the Sea sung by Moses and the children of Israel to celebrate their escape from the pursuing Egyptian army at the Sea of Reeds (see commentary to *Shirat Hayam*). Its inclusion here derives from its citation in the blessing that follows the שמע *shema* in the evening service.

The Mishna [M.B. 1:5], in a section also used in the Passover seder, raises the question of why the departure from Egypt must be commemorated at night, an obligation fulfilled by the blessing

Evening service

מי כמכה באלים יי מי כמכה נאדר בקדש
נורא תהלה עשה פלא.

*Mi khamokha baelim Adonai, mi kamokha
nedar bakodesh, nora tehilot, ose fele.*

Who is like you among the gods, Adonai?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome beyond praises, doing wonders?

from which *mi khamokha* is taken. In the present context, just as in the sages' answer in the Mishna, we can draw an inference from the inclusion of the word כל *kol*, "all," in the verse (Deut. 16:3), "[this is] so that you will remember the departure from Egypt ימי חיך כל *kol yemei chayekha*, all the days of your life." If the point of telling of liberation were to remember it for "the days of your life," we might only need to tell of it when we are young—in the day—and ready to create a revolution from which we can personally benefit. But to tell of

liberation "all the days of your life" means to tell of it in old age as well, to keep the message alive and pass it on even through generations of struggle.

The musical setting is based on a traditional theme, sung first by the tenor.

Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

25. *Hashkivenu*

השכיבנו

Lay Us Down

This prayer is mentioned in the Talmud [T.B. 4b], and serves as the conclusion of the section of the evening service that embraces the *shema*. Subsequently, the same prayer was incorporated into the קריאת שמע על המטה *keriyat shema al hamita*, literally "the recitation of the shema on the bed," a set of prayers recited prior to retiring for the night.

The musical setting of this prayer is a tribute to Salamone Rossi (c. 1570—c. 1630), the first composer to "compose, perform and publish polyphonic settings of the synagogue liturgy for mixed choir" [Jacobson, p. 11]. At the time, the use of modern European-style harmonies for Jewish liturgical texts caused considerable controversy among Rossi's fellow congregants in Mantua and other Italian Jewish communities. But Rossi had realized that Jewish practice could expand to accommodate new forms of beauty, and still remain Jewish. His work was lost for two centuries, before being rediscovered during the nineteenth century.

Evening service

השכיבנו יי אלהינו לשלום

Hashkivenu Adonai eloheinu leshalom

Lay us down [Adonai our God] in *shalom* [peace]

והעמידנו מלכנו לחיים.

veha-amidenu malkenu lechayim.

and raise us up [our ruler] *lechayim* [to life].

This setting, though not directly taken from Rossi's work, includes part of a phrase and some chord progressions from Rossi's *Keter*, from his collection *Hashirim Asher LiShlomo* (The Songs of Solomon), first published in 1622. The lyrics are excerpted from the full *Hashkivenu* prayer, and leave the words *shalom* (peace) and *lechayim* (to life) in the Hebrew.

Tenor chant, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

26. *Lechayim/Shalom* לחיים/שלום To Life/Shalom

The first line of the *Hashkivenu* prayer asks God to lay us down in שלום *shalom* (peace), and raise us up לחיים *lechayim* (to life). Those two words, *shalom* and *lechayim*, are the epitome of Jewish good wishes, serving as greeting and toast, prayer and benediction.

Shalom comes from the root שלם, meaning completion and wholeness. As kabalistic commentators have pointed out, the word begins with ש, *shin*, with its multidirectional top and its chaotic "white noise" *sh* sound, and concludes with ם, *mem*, with its whole, closed form and pure, ordered *m* sound. *Shalom* connotes return to wholeness, a recognition that beginnings and endings are merely signposts within eternal cycles.

שלום	לחיים
<i>Shalom</i>	<i>Lechayim</i>
[Peace]	[To life]

Like the celebration of חורחה שמחת *Simchat Torah*, Rejoicing of the Torah, at which the annual Torah-reading cycle is completed and immediately begun anew, this musical conclusion incorporates the theme of the introduction to the work.

Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Recorders, Bassoon

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Pronunciation Guide

Vowels:

<i>a</i>	As in far
<i>ai, ay</i>	Like i in lie
<i>e</i>	As in bed; also used for the voiced schwa, like a in about
<i>ei, ey</i>	Like ay in lay
<i>i</i>	Like the ee in street, but shorter
<i>o</i>	Between low and law
<i>u</i>	Like oo in too

Consonants as in English, with the following notes:

<i>g</i>	Always hard as in get
<i>h</i>	As in here
<i>kh, ch</i>	Like German Bach (kh is used for כּ, ch for ח)
<i>s</i>	Unvoiced as in sing
<i>sh</i>	As in she
<i>tz</i>	Like ts in hats
<i>z</i>	Voiced as in zoo

The Fyre and Lightning Consort

Founded in 1974, the **Fyre and Lightning Consort** is a group of central Vermont musicians dedicated to the study and performance of Medieval, Renaissance and traditional music from Europe, as well as the traditional music of the Sephardic Jews. More recently, the consort has performed and recorded new compositions and arrangements by its members. Recent recordings available on CD include:

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Dennis Murphy (bassoon, contrabass, viol, recorder, percussion and vocals)

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