

“The Secret of Many Voices”: Blended Prayers in Israel from a Historic Perspective

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In June 2020 a lively debate played out in the pages of the “Shabbat” culture section of the Israeli newspaper *Makor Rishon*. The discussion was sparked by an article asking why Ashkenazi and Sephardi houses of prayer fail to incorporate elements of both traditions, whereas many “mixed” marriages, such as that of the article’s author and his wife, show that it is possible to merge both traditions successfully.¹ The journalist went on to write an elaborate proposal for an Ashkenazi and Sephardi prayer service suggesting that the community would face each other according to the Sephardi seating style while the prayers themselves would be a tapestry of Ashkenazi and Sephardi prayers

* I would like to thank Dr Abigail Wood and two anonymous readers for their insightful and helpful comments and my husband Emanuel Cohn for his perceptive advice. Any errors are, of course, my own. This article is dedicated with love to my dear mother Dinah Zentner (née Nathan) who often reminded us of her Spanish and Portuguese descent and in a way sparked my interest in this topic. This article was first presented at the January 2020 conference on Contemporary Prayer in Israel which took place at the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. I thank Shimon Fogel and Reuven Gafni for organizing the conference and facilitating the publication of some of its papers in this volume.

1 The term *Sepharad*, taken from *Ovadiyah*, verse 20, was adopted in the Middle Ages to mean Spain. Descendants of the Jewish communities who originated from Spain were known as Sephardim. Today Sephardi is applied loosely to Jews of Mediterranean Spanish origin. Medieval Jews associated the term *Ashkenaz*, originating from Genesis 10: 3, with the geographic area of the Rhineland, therefore Jews originating from Germany were termed Ashkenazim. Today Ashkenazic refers to Jews of Franco-Polish-German origin.

and liturgical behavior.² This op-ed was immediately followed by a furious response from an Ashkenazi writer of German descent, upset both by the descriptions of Ashkenazi prayers and conduct as “cold, practical and simple”, and dismayed at the notion of giving up one’s home tradition in favor of a new blended one.

Since 2015, new communities have emerged in Israel, mainly in Jerusalem, combining Ashkenazi and Sephardi texts and musical traditions in an attempt to create a prayer service closer to Israel’s current social and religious character, and the phenomenon appears to be growing. The creation of blended prayers within these communities is often part of a broader effort to develop more meaningful forms of worship. This process is frequently accompanied by a shift toward gender equality in prayer leadership and the incorporation of alternative practices, such as meditation and mindfulness. While promoted as a post-modern (perhaps even post-Zionist) practice, the incorporation of Sephardi melodies into Ashkenazi ritual as a way to rejuvenate worship is far from new and was prevalent in central European synagogues from the nineteenth century.

In this article, I will examine contemporary blended prayer communities both diachronically, as the latest in a long line of attempts to create such prayers throughout modern Jewish history, and synchronically, as one of many manifestations of Jewish renewal in Israeli culture. In doing this, I hope to explore the social, aesthetic and religious developments which have led Sephardi sonorities, whether imagined or real, to serve as a source of inspiration for the remodeling of Ashkenazi synagogue service. I also ask whether the musical ingredients and their mixing grounds can ever be neutral or whether there is always a social backdrop in which power relations come into play. In other words, do blended communities mostly provide just a sprinkling of Sephardi flavor added to a mainly Ashkenazi prayer service?

2 Dvir Dimri, “Tfila Mekomit” [Local Prayer], *Makor Rishon*, 16 June 2020, Shabbat supplement.

As a musicologist, I am interested in the role of music and the process of curation in these blended prayer communities, where aesthetic, ideological and practical considerations determine which melodies will be selected, which ethnic communities will be represented, and consequently, which will not.³ I will also problematize the different approaches and strategies applied to the task of blending. For example, do the components retain their original recognizable properties or do they develop into new hybrid material? Moreover, how do these communities introduce new musical material and make melodies and texts which are unfamiliar to most congregants, feel integral to the services?

The term *nussach* (short for “Nussach hatfila”, literally type of prayer) was first used to denote the textual formulas of prayer used by a particular community (as in *siddur b’nussach benei Roma* – prayer book according to the Roman tradition). But *nussach* can also be used as a musical term, either to describe the musical custom or practice in which prayers are performed, or to indicate the specific musical formulas of the liturgy of Ashkenazi Jews. *Nussach* in this sense refers to the unmetred free-flowing musical recitation style which is used in Ashkenazi prayers, characterizing specific prayers on certain liturgical occasions. For example, by referring to “the *nussach* for Maariv on Rosh Hashanah” one is denoting the particular musical mode, typical phrasing and motivic behavior characterizing that liturgical time in Ashkenazi prayer services. Judit Frigyesi aptly described *nussach* as meaning something like “the traditional way (of singing) according to the given liturgical function and local custom”.⁴

3 I use the term “ethnic group” or “ethnic community” in lieu of the Hebrew *eda*, a term used in Israel to denote Jewish social groups originating from a certain geographic location and tradition.

4 Judit Frigyesi, “Preliminary Thoughts Toward the Study of Music without Clear Beat: The Example of ‘Flowing Rhythm’ in Jewish Nusah”, *Asian Music* 24(2) (1993), p. 69. On the evolution of the term *nussach* from its original textual meaning to a term denoting music, see: Jonathan L. Friedmann, “From Text to Melody: The Evolution of the Term *Nusach Ha-tefillah*”, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 20(3) (2020), pp. 339-360. DOI: 10.1080/14725886.2020.1805905

In this paper I will be using both definitions of *nussach* and trust that it will be clear from the context which is meant in each case.

One of the questions I ask in this article, to which I will return at the end, is whether we are in fact witnessing the birth of a new blended *nussach*, incorporating the musical elements of Ashkenazi and Sephardi traditions in a manner that is seen by blended synagogue members as the creation of an “Israeli” *nussach*.

While this is not a historical paper chronicling the development of blended synagogue services, my argument is organized chronologically, with three sections each focusing on a different era. I will begin by presenting a brief overview of the – mainly unsuccessful – attempts to incorporate Sephardi sonorities into Ashkenazi prayers in European synagogues from 1810 onwards, focusing on England as a case study. Then I will discuss religious Zionist ideologies of the 1950s, which saw the synagogue as an instrument for blending all Jewish liturgies into one, juxtaposed with testimonies of makeshift synagogues in transit camps (*ma'abarot*) during the early years of statehood. Next, I will discuss the de facto Sephardi/Ashkenazi synagogue in small neighborhoods and new settlements. I will conclude by considering several current day synagogues in Jerusalem which have made a point of incorporating traditional soundscapes from a variety of sources into their prayers with the purpose of creating a new and relevant *nussach*.

To investigate the personal and social significance ascribed to blended prayers, I conducted in-depth interviews with several congregants and prayer leaders, some of whose perspectives are directly cited in this article. Furthermore, I undertook ethnographic fieldwork by attending blended prayer services, allowing me to observe firsthand the structure, musical dynamics, and social makeup in these kinds of services.

Sephardi Melodies in Nineteenth Century Ashkenazi Synagogues

From the early nineteenth century, Spanish and Portuguese melodies were incorporated into the liturgies of several Ashkenazi communities in England, Germany, and France, particularly those located near Spanish and Portuguese Jewish communities. This integration was part of broader efforts to reform prayer practices, establish a "national" style of worship, or, in some instances, serve as a mere curiosity. Sephardi pronunciation, liturgical texts, and music represented an authoritative and appropriate alternative to Ashkenazi traditions and were deemed useful by the Ashkenazi religious leadership in their attempts to revitalize their prayer services.

This was based on a longstanding assumption prevalent in the Haskalah and later popular in Zionist circles, that the Sephardi way of Jewish life was in certain ways superior to Ashkenazic Judaism. In *German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic*, John Efron states that the Haskalah's disappointment with traditional Ashkenazi behavior brought to life a theory that the pathway for leading Judaism to modernity lay in a "refashioning of the Ashkenazic Jews by having them emulate Sephardic manners".⁵ According to this theory, replacing the way Ashkenazi Jews sounded – be it their accents, language or music – with the Sephardic pronunciation or adoption of Sephardic melodies would also lead to a cognitive and moral improvement.⁶ As a result, in the late nineteenth century, Sephardic traditions together with Protestant choral works were the two new sources of influence in Central European Ashkenazi synagogue music.⁷

It is important to note that the primary Sephardic influence on Ashkenazi liturgy in Europe came from the Spanish and Portuguese communities. Their melodies and musical traditions, though unfamiliar

5 John Efron, *German Jewry and the Allure of the Sephardic*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

6 Efron, p. 21.

7 Efron, p. 47.

to Ashkenazi Jews, were relatively tonal and their synagogues even adopted European harmony when choirs were incorporated into Sephardi synagogue services. This Sephardic musical style differed significantly from the musical traditions of Middle Eastern Jews, which Ashkenazi Jews encountered in Israel in the twentieth century.

Returning to nineteenth century Europe, the communal singing of the Spanish and Portuguese services and the decorum which came to characterize their dignified houses of prayer appealed to members of the choral synagogues of the late nineteenth century where communal participation in worship was virtually inaudible. Some Sephardi melodies were mistakenly attributed to the medieval “Golden Age” of Sephardic Jewry in the Iberian Peninsula, and thus had the connotation of a time and place where Jews were highly esteemed. The conception of an era when Jews could hold the highest cultural, financial and political positions in the country as equals without loss of Jewish identity was helpful as an imagined model of assimilation in a non-Jewish society, and very much appealed to these later European Jews who had only recently been granted equal rights. However, other factors, such as Sephardi choirs’ performance practice, had an impact as well.

In England, for example, as in other European traditions, choirs were introduced into synagogue services in an attempt to bring decorum, respectability, harmony and order into the synagogue service. This was part of an effort to tame and regulate traditional Ashkenazi worship which was seen as Jewish “noise”, as described in Ruth HaCohen's *Music Libel against the Jews*, and create an alternative civilized service to reflect how Jews wanted to be seen (and heard).⁸ But this new situation led to increasing passivity since it relegated the majority of congregants to spectators who sat and listened while the highly formal service was performed by the cantor and choir. Criticism of the English congregations’ impassiveness led to the establishment

8 Ruth HaCohen, *The Music Libel Against the Jews*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011.

of a choir committee by Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler, which decided in 1887 to commission a collection of harmonized liturgical melodies. This was to be the choral hymnal for the United Synagogue association of Orthodox communities of England, intended as an aide for congregational singing akin to the Anglican hymn books of the time. As part of the quest to create a simplified liturgical handbook to serve as a kind of Jewish hymnal for every member of the synagogue, complex harmonies were simplified, a school system of notation was used, and fifteen Sephardi melodies were incorporated into this new *Handbook of Synagogue Music*.⁹ Nearly all of these melodies were taken from the *Ancient Melodies of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews*, edited by Amsterdam-born cantor David Aharon de Sola and arranged by Emanuel Aguilar in 1857.¹⁰

Yet why did the editors of the *Handbook*, compiled for Ashkenazi congregations, decide to include melodies that had never been part of the traditional Ashkenazi repertoire?

First, the adoption of Sephardi melodies in Ashkenazi synagogue music compilations was not unheard of and occurred in other central European synagogues. Viennese cantor Solomon Sulzer published two Sephardi melodies in his publication *Schir Zion* (Vienna, ca. 1840), which he might have heard in Vienna's Sephardi congregation.¹¹ Louis Lewandowski, composer and musical director of Berlin's Neue

9 Francis L. Cohen and David M. Davis (eds.), *The Voice of Prayer and Praise: A Handbook of Synagogue Music for Congregational Singing*, London: Greenberg, 1899.

10 David Aharon de Sola and Emanuel Abraham Aguilar, *The Ancient Melodies of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews*, London: Wessel and Co., 1857. *The Ancient Melodies* is an important source of Sephardi melodies since it was the first volume to include the main body of Spanish and Portuguese melodies. It includes 71 melodies and an extensive introduction. It was compiled in 1857 by David de Sola, the cantor of the Spanish and Portuguese London synagogue, who was originally from Amsterdam, and harmonized by composer Emanuel Aguilar. For more on this volume and its significance, see Edwin Seroussi, "The Ancient Melodies: On the Antiquity of Music in the Sephardic Liturgy", *Pe'amim* 50 (1992), pp. 99-131.

11 Edwin Seroussi, *Spanish Portuguese Synagogue Music in Nineteenth-Century*

Synagogue, included a Portuguese melody in his *Kol Rinnah U'tefillah* (1882). Parisian cantor Samuel Naumbourg documented some songs from the local Portuguese community in his collection *Agudath Shirim*, possibly for general interest as well as to add variety. Research shows that the Ashkenazi synagogue in Paris was using some Sephardi melodies up to the end of the nineteenth century.¹² According to Seroussi, printed musical collections published in France and Great Britain were formed “with the aim of creating a national *nussach* (here, in the sense of corpus) that would represent the liturgical soundscape of heterogeneous constituencies within the modern nation-states”.¹³ In France, this was particularly obvious when composer Samuel David edited the *Musique religieuse ancienne et moderne en usage dans les Temples Consistoriaux Israélites de Paris* in 1895 as a standardized liturgy intended for both the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities of Paris affiliated with the Central Consistoire.¹⁴ Whether the English *Handbook* had similar national *nussach* aspirations is less clear.

The German Reform of the 1810s promoted the Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew as well as Sephardic melodies as more articulate and aesthetically pleasing and more authentic and appropriate than their Ashkenazi counterparts. David Meldola (1780-1861), a Portuguese cantor originally from Amsterdam employed as the cantor of Hamburg’s Reform temple, was asked by the trustees of the temple to introduce Portuguese melodies to the service. Later, a similar congregation in London which included Ashkenazi and Sephardi members also chose to adopt Sephardi pronunciation and

Reform Sources from Hamburg: Ancient Tradition in the Dawn of Modernity, Yuval Monograph Series XI, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996.

12 Ibid., p. 44.

13 Edwin Seroussi, “The Jewish Liturgical Music Printing Revolution: A Preliminary Assessment”, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 30 (2020), p. 117.

14 Samuel David (ed.) *Po'al hayey adam: musique religieuse ancienne et moderne en usage dans les Temples Consistoriaux Israélites de Paris*, Paris: Librairie Durlacher, 1895.

melodies in an attempt to break away from the standard traditional Ashkenazi customs and create a new liturgical strain.¹⁵ Increased contact between upper class assimilated Ashkenazim and Sephardim in this congregation may have contributed to the removal of what they perceived to be unnecessarily divisive customs, among the other radical changes made to the synagogue service.

Sephardi melodies had many inherent qualities that made them ripe for inclusion in the Ashkenazi *Handbook*: they sounded different but enjoyed unquestioned status as they were already in use by the Spanish and Portuguese communities. Moreover, choirs in the Spanish and Portuguese synagogues served a different purpose to that of their Ashkenazi counterparts, for while Ashkenazi choirs were meant to replace the congregational response, the congregation in the Spanish and Portuguese community in London tended to join in with the choir, and the musical arrangements of the Sephardi tradition facilitated lay people's participation. Sephardi melodies were simple and repetitive with small melodic ranges and few modulations, making it easier for congregants to sing along with than the elaborate choral compositions by composers like Louis Lewandowski and Solomon Sulzer in the Ashkenazi services.¹⁶ Nevertheless, English Rabbinic leadership's

15 The efforts to modernize the service of the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue Bevis Marks led to a dispute among its members which resulted in 1840 in the founding of a breakaway synagogue, the liberal West London Synagogue of British Jews, where prayer services incorporated Ashkenazi and Sephardi liturgical elements, including music. See, Rachel Adelstein, "Singing between the Lines: Modernity and Women's Voices in British Synagogues." *Jewish Historical Studies* 50 (2018) pp. 104-108.

16 Cohen apparently had special interest in Sephardic melodies, which he originally heard in the Spanish and Portuguese synagogues in London. In addition, he took every opportunity to include Sephardic melodies in his activities as a musicologist and expert on Jewish music. He introduced them to the general Jewish public as well as to musicians and musicologists. Examples abound in his prose publications and the melodies he included in his entries in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* eds. Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901-1905).

Some of the Sephardi melodies adopted in the English United Synagogue

addition of Sephardi material into the Ashkenazi service, which was part of an attempt to rehabilitate communal participation, was far from an endeavor to merge both traditions.

In order to fully understand why nineteenth-century editors included these Sephardi melodies, we need to also consider the underlying ideological frameworks which informed their editorial work. Considering the scholarly output of Reverend and musicologist Francis Lyon Cohen, the musical editor of the *Handbook*, one notes that he regarded Sephardi melodies as significant historical milestones in the development of Synagogue music.¹⁷ While historical significance is generally not a crucial factor in accepting a melody into this type of volume, it appears that Cohen's musicological outlook at least partially determined the incorporation of the Sephardi melodies into the *Handbook*.¹⁸ The fact that Cohen based his choices on historical considerations while disregarding other more practical ones may have contributed to the failure of his attempts to have a real impact on Ashkenazi services in England and raises the issue of individual agency in the constitution of new blended liturgical styles.

communities were essentially harmonized psalmody, with a repetitive melodic formula dividing each verse into two parts and characteristic motifs for the middle and ending of each textual phrase. This was deemed to fail since both the Sephardi sonority and its modes of Psalms singing were foreign sounding to Ashkenazi ears. New pieces composed for the Sephardi community in the nineteenth century, such as “Adon Olam” by Sephardi cantor Aharon David de Sola were more likely to gain success in the ears of the Ashkenazi congregants.

17 In most cases it was agreed that these melodies did not actually originate from Spain. For example, “Lech Leshalom Geshem”, which appeared in De Sola's *Ancient Melodies* and was adopted into the *Handbook* as a melody for the Hallel service, was in fact a famous song, known as “La Mantovana” used by Italian composers throughout the seventeenth century for various instrumental forms. Seroussi suggests that “Immigrant cantors trained in Italy brought this melody to the Sephardi enclaves in Western Europe”. Edwin Seroussi, “Ghetto Soundscapes: Venice and Beyond”, in Haviva Ishay (ed.), *Shirat Dvora: Essays in Honor of Professor Dvora Bregman*, Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2019, pp. 157-171.

18 Naomi Cohn Zentner, “Sephardi influences in the Liturgy of the Ashkenazi Orthodox Jews in England”, *Journal of Synagogue Music* 32 (2007), pp. 177-187.

Thus, in the nineteenth-century context we see how European attempts to incorporate Sephardi melodies were largely dictated by those in leadership positions who produced printed volumes aimed at generating a change to the sonority of the prayers. While some Sephardic melodies continued to be sung in Reform communities in Germany until World War I, in most cases these endeavors did not bear fruit and Sephardi influences were not widely adopted, remaining in the printed hymnals as historic evidence of an early and unsuccessful attempt to introduce Sephardi melodies into Ashkenazi services.¹⁹

Synagogues in Israel from the 1950s

Almost half a century after these European attempts to merge traditions in contrasting circumstances and with different ideological motivations, Rabbis and religious Zionist leaders in the early years of the State of Israel expressed the need for a single “unified” liturgical service, appropriate for what they believed to be “the era of redemption and the ingathering of the exiles”.²⁰ The development of this integrated liturgy was related to the melting pot policy popular at the time which intended to assimilate the new immigrants with the dominant Ashkenazi secular society that held power in the Yishuv period and the early years of the State. However, such policies were only partially applied to the Religious Zionist ideology which also

19 Two exceptional cases in which Sephardi melodies did become part and parcel of Ashkenazi services in England (in United Synagogue congregations) include the Sephardi melodic for *Shirat hayam* (Song of the Sea), as sung during the Torah portion reading on *Shabbat Beshalach* for those verses which include God’s name, and De Sola’s composition for “Adon Olam” which has become one of Anglo-Jewry’s much loved melodies for concluding prayers on Sabbath day.

20 In many ways this was a continuation of the national alignment of Zionist synagogues during the time of the British Mandate. Reuven Gafni, *Synagogues and Jewish Nationalism in the Yishuv during the British Mandate*, Sde Boker: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2017.

promoted the continuity of religious traditions and lifestyles. This led to a certain duality with regard to the extent to which diasporic sounds should make way for more relevant “Israeli” ones within the liturgical sphere. The synagogue service in Zionist synagogues and communities thus served as a space for mediation where complex processes of traditional continuity versus innovative nationalism were negotiated.²¹

In 1955 a publication called *The Synagogue: Articles and Essays* was published by the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs regarding the role of the synagogue in the newly founded State of Israel. One of the articles in this publication advocated the use of the synagogue as “a vehicle for blending the ethnic communities”, stating:

A serious problem was presented to leaders of the nation, to unify (*lemazeg*, lit. to blend) the different ethnic communities and to ameliorate their spiritual integration. The synagogue can contribute greatly to solving this problem... Prayer is not constrained by diasporic chains, it pours from the depths of the heart and creates a common understanding of the different communities and ethnic backgrounds. There is no greater spiritual unifier for those belonging to different communities

21 A number of studies of Ashkenazi synagogue music in Israel touch upon such questions of ethnic belonging versus nationalistic renewal. See: Amalia Kedem, “Forging Israeli Ashkenazi Identity through Synagogue Music: Ohel Nehama in Jerusalem as a Case-Study”, Doctoral Thesis, Hebrew University, 2011. Also: Eliyahu Schleifer, “Current Trends of Liturgical Music in the Ashkenazi Synagogue”, *The World of Music* 37 (1) (1995), pp. 59-72. For more on the tension amongst religious Zionists between the desire to develop a new “young” Zionist identity versus supporting the continuity of religious traditions and religious law see: Nissim Leon, “From Bnei Akiva to the Minyan Tze’irim: The Nationalization of the Ashkenazi Tradition among Religious-Zionist Congregations”, *Iyunim Bitkumat Yisrael* [Studies in Israeli and Modern Jewish Society] 10 (2015) pp. 153-176. See especially pages 157-158. With regard to this dilemma within the domestic sphere see: Naomi Cohn Zentner, “Ancient Melodies for a New Society: Zemiroth Shabbat among Bnei Akiva and Religious Zionist Youth”, *Iyunim Bitkumat Yisrael* [Studies in Israeli and Modern Jewish Society] 6 (2014) pp. 713-740.

than a common prayer... A unified prayer, a unified nussach, a common religious culture... all these have the potential to blend the various communities together in the most practical way.²²

The article was written by Rabbi Avraham Orenstein, who was the official responsible for religious affairs in immigrant transit camps. Orenstein's idealized vision of a "unified prayer" assumed that members of the Ashkenazi, Sephardi or Yemenite synagogues would effortlessly leave their own congregations – divided by ethnic *nussach* – to join a common unified one; however, he clearly underestimated the importance that specific liturgical traditions had for new immigrants in the 1950s. For religious Jews who had immigrated to the newly formed state it was simply unacceptable to abandon the liturgical customs, texts and the characteristic soundscape of their traditional prayers for national and patriotic reasons. The musical, communal and liturgical practices of the ethnic synagogue were a familiar and welcoming oasis for immigrants in the foreign and often harsh new reality of the state of Israel.²³ For new immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s, the choice to worship according to the tradition of their forefathers was an integral part of their cultural identity, since the synagogue was often the one place in their new and foreign "homeland" in which they had a semblance of continuity and could

- 22 Rabbi A. Orenstein, "A Vehicle for Blending the Ethnic Communities," *The Synagogue: Articles and Essays*, Tel Aviv: Government Publications, 1955, p. 82. This and subsequent translations are mine.
- 23 Anthropologist Shlomo Deshen, who coined the term "ethnic synagogue" (Beit haknesset ha'adati) in 1969 chose to emphasize the musical aspect of the ethnic synagogue as definitive to its character, "In Israel... the immigrants who adhere to religious practices... congregate mainly in ethnic synagogues... The ethnic synagogue is differentiated by its particular melodies, customs, languages or dialect and sentiments of the common origin of its members." "Ethnicity and Citizenship in the Ritual of an Israeli Synagogue," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 4 no. 4 (1969), p. 172. See also: Shlomo Deshen, "The Ethnic Synagogue: A Pattern of Religious Change in Israel," S. N. Eisenstadt and A. Zloozower, (eds.) *The Integration of Immigrants from Different Countries of Origin in Israel*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1969, pp. 66-73[Hebrew].

feel "at home". The synagogue was a place deeply connected to the "old country," in which they could maintain their ties to their family, community and geographical background. In view of the immense difficulties and hardships of their new life in Israel, new immigrants at this time, viewed the synagogue as the one familiar place where they didn't need to reacclimatize and adjust.

Not all the articles in the 1955 volume sided with Orenstein's radical view. In the introduction, Dr Zerach Warhaftig, deputy Minister of Religious Affairs at the time, argued that blending the liturgy of the different ethnic communities into a uniform nussach was a gradual process which would come naturally and needn't be hurried. He believed that it was justified for each of the ethnic communities to demand their own place of prayer, although he did suggest that all could be housed under one roof.²⁴

The utopian ideal of an intentionally blended prayer which Orenstein envisioned never came to fruition during his time, for the reasons stated above. What did often occur, however, was that in many cases a single synagogue had to be used by a few different ethnic communities which necessitated a continuous compromise of all those involved and inevitably led to a de facto blended prayer. This often occurred in transit camps, new settlements and new neighborhoods, especially in the early years of the state when the lack of infrastructure did not allow each ethnic group to have its own synagogue. Since Orenstein himself was in charge of religious services in the transit camps, he was able to bring first-hand testimonies of how these services operated in practice. In his article he tells the following story:

In one of the transit camps a building was built to serve as a synagogue for both of the ethnic communities, the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi (Iraqi). Since there were not enough members of each community to make their own minyan and the leaders of

24 Zerach Warhaftig, "Introduction," *The Synagogue: Articles and Essays*, Tel Aviv: Government Publications, 1955.

the communities were afraid people would get used to praying alone, they encouraged them to create one minyan for everyone to pray together. It was decided that the Ashkenazim would lead the prayers while the Sephardim would read from the Torah and perform the *misheberach* blessings. At first the Iraqis found it difficult to follow the Ashkenazi prayers and similarly, the Ashkenazim found it difficult to follow the Iraqi Torah reading, but eventually after a few months each community got used to the other and out of a mutual understanding of this blending process a new nussach was created which was shared by both.²⁵

Orenstein's optimistic conclusion here is quite surprising. Did the division of the service prayer into two separately designated segments really serve as the *mizug*, the blend which he advocated? The means by which the prayer was divided can teach us more about the strategies and perhaps even power relations in this case. It is easier to listen to an unfamiliar ethnic tradition which doesn't demand a communal response. Therefore, once Ashkenazim could follow the text being read with an unfamiliar cantillation and accent, it would have been easier to listen to an Iraqi Torah reading as passive listeners, rather than to participate in a Shacharit or Mussaf prayer service proper according to the Iraqi custom. Perhaps this is why in many cases, including the one mentioned above, it was the Torah reading which was given to the Sephardi communities, while the prayers themselves, such as *Chazarat hashatz* (repetition of the prayer leader) were led by an Ashkenazi Cantor according to Ashkenazi *nussach*, which couldn't have been easy for the Sephardim to follow or to participate in. This also may have been part of a certain unintentional hierarchy whereby Ashkenazim were able to listen passively to the Torah reading as they would have with an Ashkenazi reader, but they could join in and respond actively to the rest of the prayers according to their own *nussach*. In contrast, the Sephardim would have to follow the

25 Orenstein, "A Vehicle", p. 83.

unfamiliar Ashkenazi prayer without knowing how to participate in the congregational responses.

This and other cases seem to indicate that these prayers were not played out on equal grounds, and that Ashkenazi *nussach* was given a certain preference. Orenstein hints at further asymmetry when he says “one moshav consisted of Ashkenazi new immigrants from Romania and older immigrants from Yemen. At first, they had a difficult time communicating but eventually they all started to speak Hebrew and understanding each other... They prayed together in the synagogue, and sometimes members of the Yemenite communities would lead the service according to their own nussach...” It appears from this description that it was on rare occasions that Yemenite sonority was sounded in this blended moshav synagogue. These testimonies exemplify the liturgical process occurring all over Israel in new settlements and neighborhoods in which praying was a continuous state of compromise and negotiation.²⁶

Another musical initiative to incorporate the musical traditions of the different Jewish communities was *Machon Shirat Yisrael* (The Song of Israel Institute), established by cantor, teacher and composer Shlomo

26 This continuous state of compromise was true even within Ashkenazi or Sephardi synagogues which themselves were far from homogeneous. Within united Sephardi synagogues there was even more discord since there was less common ground between the musical and liturgical traditions of the North African Jews and those of Iraqi and Syrian Jews than amongst the German, Hungarian and Polish, Hassidic and Litvak customs found in the Ashkenazi synagogue. For a case study of the various musical sources comprised in the Sabbath morning prayers of a single Sephardi synagogue in Israel, see: Essica Marks, “The Collection of melodies in “Aboav” Synagogue in Zefat – historical, musical and social aspects,” *Peamim* 104 (2005), pp.79-96. [Hebrew].

Within the Sephardi Israeli synagogues a certain textual uniformity was created with the influence of Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef and the promotion of his siddurim such as “Hazon Ovadia”. For more, see Nissim Leon, “The Posek (Religious Arbiter) as Lobbyist: Halacha and Populism in Contemporary Sephardic Jewry,” *Iyunim Bitkumat Israel* 20 (2010), pp. 337-359. For more on the musical compromises taking place in Ashkenazi synagogues see Kedem, *Forging Israeli Ashkenazi*, pp. 209-219.

Zalman Rivlin (1884-1962), including a children's choir and *chazzanut* training program.²⁷ Rivlin's endeavors included training the children as future Ashkenazi prayer leaders and preparing liturgical pieces for performance. The soloist sections of the prayer taught in his children's choir were according to the traditional Ashkenazi *nussach*, however his compositions for choir or for congregational singing were composed in a style he hoped would be palatable to both Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities. Accordingly, Rivlin called his 1933 publication of these compositions: *The Songs of Solomon: From United Singing to Communal Singing: An Eastern-Western Assembly for all the Jews of the East and the West* [Shirei Shlomo: mishira me'uchedet leshirat kahal: harkava mizrachit- maaravit lechol yehudey hamizrach vehamaarav].²⁸

He was not singular in his aspirations at this time. By the 1950s and 1960s, the call for unified or at least blended liturgical music was increasingly popular. This ideology resulted in scores of both Ashkenazi and Sephardic traditional music published by the *Kibbutz hadati* (Religious Kibbutz) movement on the one hand, and on the other, in new compositions by Yehoshua Leib Ne'eman, Yoseph

27 *Machon Shirat Yisrael* began as a collaboration with Abraham Z. Idelsohn as a larger vision for the future of the Israeli nation. This vision is apparent in a joint article published in 1910 in Eliezer Ben Yehuda's newspaper "Hashkafa" in which they appeal to "peel away the evil spirit of the galut, cleanse your spirit and prepare yourselves for the song of Israel...For in the future, the children of Israel shall have a common song, a new-ancient song. And people will no longer say: Ashkenazi song, Yemenite song, Sephardi song, Aleppocan song and so forth, but rather Israel's song coming from Jerusalem." According to Rivlin and Idelsohn, this objective was to be realized through various means: by collecting music and poetry, training cantors in various musical traditions, and founding children's choirs in multiple traditions. However, with Idelsohn's emigration from Israel the fulfillment of this larger ideology was stunted and the most successful of all these endeavors was the founding of a longstanding children's choir which was active for over half a century.

28 Shlomo Zalman Rivlin, *Shirat Shlomo* (Jerusalem: Shirat Yisrael Institute, 1931). Rivlin described the musical ingredients of his compositions and the way they would be arranged: "Jewish Ashkenazi European song: Lithuanian, Wohlin, and Hassidic with Mizrachi accentuation; Jewish Sephardi song: Syrian, Yemenite, Babylonian, Persian in European meter and character."

Rambam, Avigdor Herzog and others which either tried to sound both Ashkenazi and Sephardi at the same time, or traditional in sonority without belonging to a specific tradition.²⁹ In line with this reasoning, prayers at the Zionist *Bilu* school and synagogue, founded by Haim Mishori in Tel Aviv in 1932, included new liturgical melodies composed by cantor Shlomo Ravitz which were to serve as an “*eretz yisraeli nussach*” suited for both Ashkenazi and Sephardi pupils, an endeavor which had very little impact outside the student body and congregation.³⁰ These efforts were part of the national ideology within the religious milieu, not dissimilar to the efforts of Hebrew folksong composers at that time to create a new Israeli musical language by combining elements of Ashkenazi, Sephardic and Arabic music with modal elements, bridging in this way between the Jewish past and the Hebrew present.³¹

In a comparable textual enterprise, Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren initiated the creation of a “Unified prayer book” in the 1960s, which, despite what the title suggests, was not a tapestry of the different ethnic communities’ liturgical traditions, but actually a reprint of the *nussach Sfard* (Polish-Hassidic) siddur with the addition of the prayer for the state of Israel.³² This prayer book was meant to replace the

29 For example, the *Zimrat* sheet music series, published by the *Machon le'musika datit* of the *Kibbutz hadati* movement between 1952 and 1958. Ne'eman's archive at the NLI holds a manuscript draft of his unpublished book *Tslilei Tefillah* from 1957 intended for congregational singing of youth. One of his declared aims was to create choral music that would include “musical elements of *nussach hatefila*, biblical cantillation and a Mizrachi-Israeli blended tone (*meziga shel hanima hamizrachit- yisraelit*).” Ne'eman, Yehoshua Leib, “*Zliley tfila*”, MUS 0262, unpublished music manuscripts, National Library of Israel, p. 1.

30 Gafni, *Synagogues and Jewish Nationalism*, pp. 225-228.

31 Rivlin and Idelsohn's 1910 declaration was regarded as a call to action for the creation of a body of secular Hebrew songs as well, which would be both ancient and new, Eastern and Western. See: Shai Burstyn, “*Shira atika chadasha: moreshet Avraham Zvi Idelsohn*” [‘An ancient- new song' the heritage of Avraham Zvi Idelsohn] *Katedra* 128 (2008), pp. 113-144.

32 *Nussach Sfard*, also known as *nussach HaARI* since it is attributed to Rabbi

variety of prayer books in use according to different *nussachim* and serve as the one common prayer book. Although it was sometimes used by the IDF soldiers for whom it was first published, the unified *siddur* never gained popularity within the communal synagogues or within the education system. Ultimately, all these attempts to use the synagogue as an “instrument for blending communities” and the music of the prayers as an “Eastern- Western assemblage” were considered artificial and were largely unsuccessful.

Within the education system and in synagogues within army bases a clear bias towards the Ashkenazi liturgy and *nussach* was apparent. *Nussach* Sfarad, was sometimes perceived as being Zionist, or at least Israeli, due to its use in religious Zionist schools and youth movements and in official ceremonies such as the memorial service for fallen soldiers, leaving Sephardi students and soldiers feeling like outsiders since there was no place for their liturgical traditions.³³

Itzhak Luria Ashkenazi (1534-1572), later became the foremost *nussach* in Israel, used in state schools. It is also referred to as the “Polish” *nussach*. For more on the evolution and creation of this liturgical tradition, see Daniel Goldschmidt, *Mekhkerei tfila ufiyut*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1980, pp. 315-321.

- 33 Leon, “From Bnei Akiva”: pp. 154-156. Similar process occurred within the world of Zionist Yeshivot (religious schools). From the mid-1980s, the High Holiday prayers at the hesder “Birkat Moshe” yeshiva in Maale Adumim incorporated both Ashkenazi and Sephardi *piyyutim*, a situation which was unprecedented at that time, possibly since the head of the yeshiva Rabbi Haim Sabato, was born in Egypt to a Sephardi family. The blended *nussach* in which Mussaf and Arvit are prayed in Ashkenazi *nussach*, and Shacharit and Mincha are prayed in Sephardi *nussach*, is still in use today. The two days of Rosh Hashannah are neatly divided so that the first day Shacharit is Ashkenazi and Musaf is Sephardi and vice versa on the second day. In this case too, a special booklet was printed with the extra prayers. This effort was one of the first of its kind among Zionist Yeshivas, which later included blended *slichot* services too. Yeshivat Maale Gilboa claims to have been the first to initiate the “combined” Ashkenazi and Sephardi *slichot* service, starting from the founding of the yeshiva in 1993. While at first the service was prepared by the students who cut and photocopied several pages, by 2001 a printed volume, edited by the Head Rabbis of the yeshiva, was published. This version of the combined *selichot*

There are multiple factors which determine the degree and style of blending Ashkenazi and Sephardi liturgies within a certain community. Blending can be the result of a purposeful a priori decision motivated by ideologies such as those discussed until now, or it can be the result of population distribution patterns (depending mostly on social class) in which synagogues are attended by default as a pragmatic choice.³⁴ From the 1960s onward, multi-ethnic synagogues became increasingly prevalent in Israel, particularly in new neighborhoods and settlements, due to practical considerations. These synagogues were seen as providing a *modus vivendi* for diverse ethnic communities, enabling them to pray together in relative harmony.³⁵ In some cases, what began as a compromise due to circumstances came to be regarded over time as a desirable situation, reflecting a shift in public opinion regarding the value of cultural currency—particularly the recognition and acceptance of diverse ethnic traditions—in Israeli society. The variety of traditions, musical customs and voices came to be regarded positively, as opposed to the default Ashkenazic liturgical model, in what can be related to the rising popularity of cultural pluralism at the turn of the twentieth century in Israel.

was adopted by other Yeshivot belonging to the religious kibbutz movement and beyond it. The process is described in detail on the yeshiva website, with a certain pride at being the pioneers of what later became a popular and widespread practice among religious Zionist yeshivot and women's Midrashot. See, <https://www.maalegilboa.org/article/-%D7%A0%D7%95%D7%A1%D7%97-%D7%A1%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%97%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%94> accessed 26/7/20. Sephardi Slichot went on to later be considered Israeli popular culture by all factions of Israeli society. For more see, Abigail Wood and Naomi Cohn Zentner (2024) 'Resonating repentance: selichot and the performance of Mizrahi identity in the Israeli public sphere', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 23(3–4), pp. 739–761.

34 The demographic makeup of urban settings in Israel is varied with larger cities tending to have more multiethnic population while development towns and smaller settlements tending to be more ethnically uniform.

35 Musical and liturgical considerations can sometimes have an impact on the choice of where to settle. Some families and ethnic groups choose to dwell in close proximity to specific synagogues in order to have access to a synagogue with their musical and liturgical preference.

One of the earliest examples of an intended blended synagogue is the Reich Synagogue, inaugurated in 1979. While it was the sole synagogue of the new neighborhood of Givat Hamivtar in Jerusalem and was blended for practical reasons as well as ideological ones, its founders expressly decided to include non-Ashkenazi liturgical traditions and its members prided themselves in having a blended *nussach* following the tradition “according to the prayer leader.”³⁶

The diverse ways in which blending occurred also appear to have changed over time. For example, in some communities, initially only the Torah was read by a “non-Ashkenazi” reader and the rest of the prayers were Ashkenazi in style. In others, every prayer leader would conduct services according to their own *nussach*. Prayer leaders were chosen randomly at first, and later by roster to ensure a fair allocation to all ethnic traditions. After a while, especially with permanent prayer leaders and in areas without alternative synagogues, congregations grew accustomed to these prayers and young children were raised on such blended traditions. And finally, in later years certain communities started printing blended prayer books enabling all members to follow the various prayers and organizing meetings dedicated to musical preparation to facilitate the appropriate communal responses to the prayers (usually before the High Holidays).³⁷

36 In a eulogy for Adir Zik, one of Reich Synagogue's most influential figures and prayer leaders, one of the mourners said: “Our synagogue is mixed, it has (elements) of all the ethnic communities. Adir (along) with his friends advocated for creating a common *nussach* which would include the *nussachim* of all the different ethnic communities, all the special tunes. It wasn't easy but the mixed *nussach* that took shape can be an example to all the synagogues in Israel” <https://www.makorrishon.co.il/nrg/online/11/ART/867/083.html> 10/6/10, accessed 8/8/21. Recently, in a dramatic turn of events, one of the main donors to the synagogue initiated a breakaway Sephardi minyan, after a falling out with the congregation. He based the launch of his new minyan on Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's ruling that every ethnic community should pray according to their own tradition.

37 An interesting initiative is the publication of two “Yachad Shivtey Yisrael” prayer books in 2017. One according to *nussach* Sfard to which highlighted Sephardi passages were added; and the other in *nussach Edot hamizrach* to

Blended Synagogues in Jerusalem in the Late 2010s

Although the call for blended Ashkenazi and Sephardi prayers in Israel was not new and had been consistently advocated for over half a century as part of efforts to create a unified “national” liturgy, and while de facto blended synagogues had existed in Israel since the time of transit camps—and likely earlier—it was only in the 2010s that purposefully blended synagogues, which attracted large followings, began to proliferate, particularly in Jerusalem. The blended prayer communities of the twenty-first century were established through the initiative and leadership of charismatic and authoritative individuals, who also served as their liturgical leaders. These communities emerged in response to a growing number of mainly liberal, religious young families and individuals who were drawn to the newly formulated blended prayers. While large-scale research that systematically categorizes the variables and blending styles of all blended synagogues in Israel is needed, this paper presents three of the many contemporary communities in Israel, each addressing the challenge of blending their liturgy in their own distinct way.”

Minyan Klausner

In October 2015, a new prayer community was founded in the South Jerusalem suburb of Arnona named *Minyan Klausner* after the street in which it convened. Minyan Klausner was unusual for a few reasons. It was liberal, egalitarian and child-friendly and it purposefully included Sephardi elements, even though most of its members were Ashkenazim. This ideal of blended prayer was stated in the group's “12 founding stones” as linked to the regathering of exiles to the land of Israel. Rabbi Mishael Zion described the community's mission:

The blessing of the return to Zion is also the challenge of weaving the many traditions which have gathered to the land

which highlighted *nussach* Sfarid sections were added. A similar kind of *Mahzor leyamim noraim* (prayerbook for the high holidays) which was published by the Siyach Yitzchak community will be discussed later.

of Israel and viewing the plethora of differing ways of sacred worship as a blessing. We will aim to reflect the different customs brought by our community members in prayer, custom and study. The voice of God will not come from one voice but ‘from the voices of many waters’.

Minyan Klausner convenes on Sabbaths and festivals for evening and morning services, and every prayer leader leads the prayer according to his or her own tradition while several communal responses (such as “Yimloch Adonai leolam Elohayich zion ledor vador haleluyah” after the Torah reading) are sung by the children according to the Sephardi custom. In addition, the community decided that Shacharit of the Day of Atonement, one of the most important High Holiday services, would be prayed entirely in the Sefarad-Yerushalmi *nussach*. To this end, an internal communal publication was printed with the appropriate liturgical supplements. “The real challenge,” said Rabbi Mishael Zion, founder and leader of the community, “is getting the community to join in and answer in the correct places where the Sephardi practice requires it, so we marked those places in bold in the prayer book we created for the Shacharit service for Yom Kippur.”³⁸

Minyan Korazin and Siyach Yitzchak

Minyan Klausner is not the only such prayer group in Jerusalem, or even the most innovative. One of the first prayer groups to initiate blended prayers was *Minyan Korazin* in the older Jerusalem neighborhood of Nahlaot, followed by *Siyach Yitzchak: Minyan yisraeli*, and then by *Kehilat Zion: An Eretz Yisraeli community*. These are but a few of the growing number of communities which each in their own way blend Ashkenazi and Sephardi musical cultures in their prayer. The move to actively incorporate Ashkenazi and Sephardi sounds in the synagogue even as late as the 2010s is not always an ideological initiative. Sometimes it is also due to the practicalities and demographics of living in Israel. The community of Siyach

38 Mishael Zion, Interview with the author, 10th June 2019.

Yitzchak, an older community near Minyan Klausner with a different demographic makeup, consists of many “mixed” couples consisting of an Ashkenazi partner and a Sephardi partner who still want to pray together in one synagogue without either one having to completely give up their tradition. “In an Ashkenazi prayer I felt *galut* (lit. in exile)” said Nissimmi Naim Naor, a founding member of the Siyach Yitzchak community who is of Moroccan descent, and whose wife is Ashkenazi “and in a Sephardi service my wife feels in exile.”³⁹

In the systematic prayer framework of Siyach Yitzchak, one prayer is sung in Ashkenazi *nussach* and the other in Sephardi *nussach*; every Shabbat, however, certain moments are more intermingled. For instance, the seamless segue from the Moroccan-Jewish communal singing of “Hashkivenu” to the Ashkenazi communal singing of “Veshameru” (composed by Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach) at Siyach Yitzchak's Friday night service retains the same tonal center (around the natural minor scale) as can be heard in Example 1 (which can be heard here).⁴⁰



Example 1

Since there is no particular melody sung in Ashkenazi melodies for “Hashkivenu,” this also resolves the need to find a melody for singing

39 Nissimmi Naim Naor, Interview with the author, 26 July 2020.

40 Both the Moroccan “Hashkivenu” melody and the Ashkenazi “Veshamru” melody use the natural minor scale degrees and end on the “tonic”, however the central notes, emphasis and character are vastly different. This melodic combination is prevalent in other relatively new communities, such as *Beit Prat* and *Kehilat Bereshit* (in Zur Hadassa). While very different in age and demographic makeup, both these communities chose to give women a larger role in the prayer service and include Ashkenazi and Sephardi members, although they are predominantly Ashkenazi.

together in much desired communal participation. This melodic juxtaposition is popularly sung in other blended communities as well.

Siyach Yitzchak began as a prayer group without a permanent home, eventually settling in 2016 in a well-established synagogue whose population was growing older. The group of young families was welcomed by the older community who accepted their blended tradition as the new policy of the synagogue. The desire of community members of “mixed” families to continue to pray according to their tradition but still pray together as a family is especially potent during the High Holidays, in which the typical liturgical textual and musical traditions of the various ethnic communities are more divided and distinct. For many, the sacred atmosphere of the day is generated by the distinctive melodic formulas of the prayers, especially the *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) and their appropriate melodies. Although there are certain differences in the High Holidays’ central prayers between the Ashkenazim and Sephardim, the *piyyutim* are the main site in which traditions are divergent between Yemenite, Ashkenazi, Moroccan or Iraqi liturgical practices. The attempt by Siyach Yitzchak and Minyan Klausner to encompass more than one *nussach* during the High Holidays necessitated the printing of a High Holidays supplement with the particular Ashkenazi or Sephardi *piyyutim* absent from the respective *Mahzorim* (holiday prayer books). In Siyach Yitzchak, the prayers are conducted by an Ashkenazi cantor and a Sephardi *somech* (supporter), who adds in the particular *piyyutim* and their appropriate tunes wherever needed and vice versa.

Siyach Yitzchak and Minyan Klauzner are characteristic of the new blended communities established in the second decade of the 21st century. These communities are often young dynamic places of prayer seeking new, more relevant ways to pray while attempting to remain attuned to underlying social currents and spiritual shifts in contemporary Israel.⁴¹ Other features of these communities include

41 Blended minyanim in Israel can be compared to the independent minyanim in the United States which share the same new spirit and start-up mentality, meeting

their positive attitude towards women's leadership and participation in the service, their casual and less stringent attitude towards religiosity and their meeting mainly on sabbaths and festivals with no weekday prayers.

In addition to these variations on tradition, the community's self-definition as 'mixed' is viewed as a natural development, similar to how many Israeli families perceive themselves as mixed or blended. In these communities, certain Sephardi additions have become staples of blended prayers, such as "Hashkivenu" (Example 1), "Yimloch" sung by children mentioned earlier, and "Mizmor letoda".

Blended Liturgical Soundscapes in Kehilat Zion

In the final section of this article, I would like to focus on a unique and perhaps quite radical prayer group which has become extremely popular and has its own style of blending Ashkenazi and Sephardi musical traditions. *Kehilat Zion*, also known as "Zion: Kehila erez yisraelit" [Zion: a community of the land of Israel], a community affiliated with the Masorti movement, was founded by Rabba Tamar Elad Appelbaum in 2013 and is located in South Jerusalem, at first in Baka then moving to the German colony. Kehilat Zion is extraordinary in many ways which warrant further scholarly attention, not least for its incorporation of people who are not Jewish in specialized interreligious prayers, for its social and political activism, and for its alterations to the text of the prayerbook by incorporating ancient prayer variants along with adding Hebrew poetry, Hebrew folk songs and *piyyutim*. The main services in Kehilat Zion are the Friday evening *kabalat shabbat* service (often people do not stay for the subsequent Maariv service), High Holiday and festival prayers with only occasional morning Sabbath services which are generally less

in makeshift spaces, often starting out without an official leadership figure and preferring not to be identified with any specific denomination. For more on independent minyanim in the United States see, Elie Kaunfer, *Empowered Judaism: What Independent Minyanim Can Teach Us about Building Vibrant Jewish Communities*, Nashville: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010.

well attended. The welcoming approach of Kehilat Zion's community members and leadership towards anyone wanting to join the prayers is one of its guiding principles. Thus, for example, its inclusion of Hebrew songs invites the many non-religious congregants to feel at home in the prayer service, a sentiment not often felt by secular participants in synagogue. Kehilat Zion consciously offers a religious experience to those who wouldn't feel comfortable in a more traditional religious environment.

Sephardic melodies, liturgical texts and customs are part of the liturgical makeup of Kehilat Zion's prayer, brought about by the talented musical directors and *Paytanim* (literally singers of *piyyutim* but in practice prayer leaders) and by Sephardi community members who are often called upon to lead the Maariv section of the Friday night prayers.

Rabba Tamar Elad Appelbaum repeatedly emphasizes in her sermons the need to return to the “Israeli” way of prayer in its deepest and earliest sense as an inspiration. She claims that since we are not capable of imagining the sound of a prayer which is neither Ashkenazi nor Sephardi, we have to create different models to help us imagine what it would be like to pray in pre-exile Israel.

The return to Zion is to return to the blessing of Ahava Raba (multitude of Love) and the attempt to gather this multitude of prayers and melodies and from within this to renew the Land of Israel's capability to incorporate creativity and renewal which we lack so much... At Zion we blend four main sources: The Ashkenazi nussach and its nuances, the Eastern nussach and all its nuances, nussach erez yisrael from the texts of the Cairo geniza, and what is being written today.⁴²

Bringing together a diverse assortment of melodies and performance practices from a variety of musical traditions may further an ideological purpose, however it runs the risk of producing a disjointed service lacking cohesiveness. Therefore, the seamless blending of Ashkenazi

42 Rabba Tamar Elad Appelbaum, personal correspondence, 5th August 2021.

and Sephardi melodies and liturgical formulas is crucial to Yair Harel, former musical director and leader of the prayers at Kehilat Zion. The ability to shift from one musical tradition to another, from an Ashkenazi melody to a Sephardi one, sometimes mid-sentence, in a natural sounding way is the focus of his artistic direction. Harel says of this, “I want my prayer to sound to someone from the outside as one. And even to an insider it has to sound elegant.”⁴³

Let us consider two examples of this approach at work, both part of the Friday evening prayers at Kehilat Zion. “Yedid Nefesh,” a *piyyut* written in the sixteenth century by Rabbi Elazar Azikri, is popularly sung in Ashkenazi religious Zionist communities to a particular Hassidic melody as a prelude to the *Kabalat Shabbat* prayer section.⁴⁴ Kehilat Zion's rendition of “*Yedid nefesh*” in Example 2 (which can be heard here) combines a well-known Algerian melody sung by Moroccan Jews, with the Hassidic melody sung in Ashkenazi synagogues.⁴⁵



Example 2

43 Yair Harel, personal correspondence, 16th July 2020.

44 Kehilat Zion, *Penei Shabbat* CD (2016) track 11. This recording was part of an internal communal recording documenting the communal prayer as it sounded in its first years. The tune is sung as a wordless *niggun* or to other texts during *seuda shlishit* (the third sabbath meal) by Karlin Hassidim, Purisov Hassidim and others. In the 1950s, the religious kibbutz movement instigated a custom of beginning Friday night prayers with this text and melody which quickly caught on in Ashkenazi communities in Israel.

45 This melody, usually sung at informal gatherings in the home and at family celebrations, originates from an Algerian song in Arabic called “Ya Ashikin lahabat Jimar.” To this a new Hebrew *piyyut* “yaalat chiski betoch michmar” was written, based on the same vowels as the Arabic song's lyrics. In the past few years, the melody was adopted for “Yedid nefesh” at informal events, but not in the *bakashot*, the traditional setting in which Yedid nefesh and other paraliturgical poems are sung weekly by Moroccan Jews. Recently a different Moroccan melody for “Yedid nefesh” has been introduced in Kehilat Zion and is sung throughout this *piyyut*.

Since both melodies share the lower tetrachord of the minor scale (the Moroccan tune is in *Nuba Ram al maya* similar to the Dorian mode), the same tonal center is retained through the shift from the first two stanzas sung with the Moroccan tune to the last two stanzas sung to the Hassidic one. This creates a seamless segue, albeit with a *ritardando* in tempo and a few moments of quiet between the two sections. This example elucidates how using the same mode in the same key can create a sense of unity and continuity even when using melodies originating from completely different modal systems and modes of operation.

Yair Harel explains how staying in the same mode guided his curation decisions as the founding musical director of Kehilat Zion and how this is part of a broader quest for a prayer which sounds unified and Israeli:

The Israeliness [of Kehilat Zion] is reflected on the one hand by including the diversity of [traditional musical] cultures, but also within this eclecticism, by creating a musical language which organizes these elements in a musical, emotional, spiritual system so that it doesn't feel like a salad, with a bit of this and a bit of that. For me the maqam [meaning the musical mode of any kind, NCZ] is the starting point of this organizing structure... from within one mode you can transition to other melodies, recitatives, *nigguns* in the same way that you build up the development of a maqam.... There won't be one clear *nussach* that *Zion* will contribute like let's say Carlebach, but there will be a language that will be recognized as *Zion's* language. Taking prayer seriously, coming from a traditional world... not saying now I am inventing something completely new, rather to be in humility with regard to the world of prayer.⁴⁶

Harel views the diversity of cultures as an element of Israeliness, as a cultural tapestry whose organizing element is a musical one. "Israeli" in this sense comes to mean rooted, grounded but also new

46 Yair Harel, Interview with the author, 16th May 2018.

and relevant; this duality between tradition and innovation has been at the root of many attempts to musically create and define Israeliness both in art music and in popular music.⁴⁷ Harel's use of Israeliness as a code name for multiculturalism within the synagogue service sounds very much like the ideas of the "blended service" in the national Zionist narrative in the 1950s, although they never came to fruition the way Kehilat Zion's prayers did quite successfully many years later.

The connectivity emphasized in Harel's words shows a commitment to continuing established traditions, exemplified in Example 2, "Yedid Nefesh," which incorporates both of the melodies traditionally used for this text. However, at times the artistic liberty taken by Harel and Kehilat Zion strays further outside traditional lines. In Example 3 (which can be heard here), psalm 97 "Adonai Malach Tagel Haaretz" from *Kabbalat Shabbat* is sung merging two musical sections, only one of which is originally used in a liturgical tradition for this text.



Example 3

The piece begins with a soloist improvisation by the prayer leader with a Moroccan feel in a free-flowing style which is far removed from any Sephardi tradition of *Kabbalat shabbat*. The improvisation in a major sounding mode consists of: an opening formula, a semi cadence, a precadential formula and a cadential ending for each of the verses, typical of a psalmodic formula. This section sounds very

47 For more on the quest for "Israeliness" in Art music see Assaf Shelleg, *Jewish Contiguities and the Soundtrack of Israeli History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. For the search for "Israeliness" in popular music see: Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004.

traditional and liturgical without belonging to a particular tradition. After this psalmodic form of improvisation, the next section of the psalm, beginning with the words “*Ohavey Adonai*,” is sung using the traditional Ashkenazi formula used for Kabbalat Shabbat *nussach*, in the major-sounding Ashkenazi prayer mode of “*Adonai malach*” albeit in the same Sephardi intonation, accent and ornamentation as the earlier section. The instrumental accompaniment in this recording, which is the same one used in the prayer, continues seamlessly throughout the text. The continuity between the psalmodic formula and the uninterrupted free-flowing rhythm of the Ashkenazi *nussach* style – which seems to echo the similar free-flowing Sephardi-Moroccan sonority which precedes it – all contribute to the cohesiveness between the two parts of the psalm. In other words, the unifying factor in this example is not only the same major mode but also the modes of behavior such as intonation, accent and ornamentation, and also the lack of a clear beat which both parts share. Indeed, for those who have no previous recollection of a traditional *nussach*, both parts could sound like one musical piece.

Yahala Lachmish, co-head of prayer leading and musical director at Kehilat Zion, talks about the challenges of creating a unified *nussach* especially during the High Holidays in which everyone's musical appetite needs to be addressed: “‘Aleynu leshabeach’ and [Yair] Rosenblum's 'Unetane Tokef' have to be Ashkenazi. Everyone expects it. And there are certain moments that must be according to the Sephardi tradition such as the *Selichot* melodies and “Adonai melech, Adonai malach”. In between these highlights one has to create transitions which aren't too alarming, that flow well and connect all the dots naturally.”⁴⁸

Kehilat Zion's musical complexity, which attracts members and visitors from all over Jerusalem, is informed by its prayer leaders, all of whom are professional musicians who feel at home with Mizrahi sonorities, specializing in Turkish, Arabic or North African musical

48 Yahala Lachmish, Interview with the author, 28 July 2020.

traditions of Jewish and non-Jewish origins. Yair Harel was born to an Iraqi father and an American (Ashkenazi) mother, but musically he is most attracted to the Moroccan-Jewish tradition, performing with older masters and setting up *The Piyut Ensemble*, a male vocal ensemble drawing inspiration from North African traditions. It is clear that his artistic preferences inform his musical choices for Kehilat Zion's prayers.

In addition to his work at Kehilat Zion, Yair Harel serves as the head editor of the website *The Piyut and Tefilla website*, which is hosted by the Israeli National Library and plays an important role in making the library's recorded music collections accessible to the general public.⁴⁹ This elaborate webpage presents every *piyyut* or prayer with its text, a literary commentary, and recordings of a variety of melodies from different traditions. Besides presenting the *piyyut* with recordings and sometimes even their notation, Harel has chosen to add to each melody its musical mode, usually the Arabic maqam or Moroccan Nuba. In so doing, Harel is admittedly trying to create a simple system to enable the various modes of different musical traditions to correspond (for example, the Ashkenazi Steiger *Ahava raba*, Arabic maqam Hijaz and the Moroccan nuba Hijaz al Kabir, which share the same melodic degrees). This is intended to facilitate a smooth transition from one musical tradition to another for anyone who would like to juxtapose songs from different musical traditions.

This may sound like a tool which would only interest a few people, but lately Yair Harel has been involved in another novel enterprise in which he and a team of teachers train prayer leaders to create and lead contemporary prayers which are blended, with Hebrew folk songs, Ashkenazi, Moroccan and other musical elements.⁵⁰ For the

49 <https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/he/song/pages/default.aspx>

50 The "Ashira Tehilot" program established in the Schechter Rabbinic seminary in Jerusalem in 2018, trains prayer leaders in three separate tracks: Ashkenazi, Sephardi (divided into Moroccan and Sephard/Yerushalmi) and contemporary. The contemporary track, initiated and led by Yair Harel and Rani Jaeger, trained men and women to lead blended prayer services as well as to create and curate

next generation of blended prayer leaders, this tool can be extremely useful when the unifying agent is the maqam or mode. Harel believes that the uniting agent of the prayers at Kehilat Zion, which makes it all feel unified is the maqam. In all three of his roles; as prayer leader and musical director of an influential community, as editor in chief of the most influential Jewish music website in Israel, and also as a mentor and teacher of the next generation of prayer leaders, Harel serves as an influential musical curator and has an undeniable authority as to which music will be made accessible to the Israeli public as traditional or to the prayer-going public as rejuvenating and Eretz Israeli, in a multicultural sense.

Multi ethnicity within one synagogue appears to be gaining popularity in Israel beyond the religious Zionist and liberal realms. In his research on Ultra-Orthodox minyanim in Israel, sociologist Nissim Leon claims that we are in the age of the multi-ethnic synagogue which may be more ethnically heterogeneous but is more homogeneous religiously. According to his study, many minyanim in Ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods, particularly Mizrahi ones, no longer reflect a single ethnic group, but are instead differentiated according to the religious typology of the members, be they: *baaley tshuva* [Newly religious], *bnei yeshivot* [Yeshiva scholars], etc. He believes that nowadays the *nussach* of the prayers in these communities' synagogues and their ethnic makeup are less important than the degree of religiosity of their congregants which are a far more defining characteristic of the synagogue.⁵¹ According to Leon, the ethnic synagogue is perceived by many Ultra-Orthodox as a relic

their own contemporary prayer services. There are 35 graduates of the program, many of whom have gone on to lead prayers in new communities interested in these kinds of combinations. The author was co-leader of the Ashkenazi track of this program.

51 Nissim Leon, "Ethnic Synagogues of Mizrahi Jews in Israel: Ethnicity, Orthodoxy, and Nationalism" in *Between Tradition and Modernity: The Plurality of Jewish Customs and Rituals* (2018) 13, pp. 6-21.

Nissim Leon, unpublished paper, Prayer in Contemporary Israel Conference, 14-15 January 2020, Schechter Institute and Rabbinic seminary, Jerusalem.

of the past and the newer communities of multi-ethnic synagogues appreciate innovative cantors who incorporate new music from the surrounding religious world – especially those who enhance audience participation – regardless of the ethnic origin of the music or the cantor. This is an unexpected and interesting observation since the Ultra-Orthodox world is much more ethnically divided with fewer mixed Ashkenazi and Sephardi marriages and schools.

While I believe that it is probably premature to dismiss the ethnic synagogue altogether, Leon's view regarding the Ultra-Orthodox community has echoes in an interview I carried out with a secular young man who prays in Kehilat Zion: "For me a prayer which is only Sephardi or Ashkenazi is bland and boring. It is diasporic in a bad sense. The generation before us would not have been able to do this kind of blending of *nussach*, they were *Dor hamidbar* [the biblical generation of exodus who wandered the Sinai desert] but we (the young generation) are already able to move forward." The ethnic synagogue is viewed in both of these cases negatively as something from the past to be replaced with a new and exciting value (be it religious typology, or Israeliness) by a progressive younger generation.

A series of social and cultural changes brought about the positive reception of blended prayer in new Israeli communities of the 2020s. In the past thirty years there has been a shift toward ethnic-religious plurality in the Israeli public in general, and within the young generation of the religious Zionist community in particular. Nissimi Naim Naor explains:

Thirty years ago, if there was a mixed Sephardi-Ashkenazi couple, the wife was expected to give up her own *nussach* in favor of her husband's which would then become the family *nussach*. Today that is not the case. My children hear me saying *Havdalah* in the Moroccan way and my wife say *Havdalah* in the Ashkenazi way and they feel comfortable with both.⁵²

52 This plurality is happening specifically in the ritual life of young couples in the religious Zionist circles and not in Ultra-Orthodox mixed families where

Blended prayers are also attractive due to a shift in Israeli society's regard for pre-Zionist customs and languages over the past 15 years - especially non-Ashkenazi ones - which has promoted an openness to Jewish ritual of different kinds and led the Israeli government to endorse the celebration of ethnic holidays such as the Ethiopian *Sigd*, the Kurdish *Saharna*, etc. Ethnic traditions and languages of the diaspora which in the 1950s were perceived to as a threat to Israel's cultural character began to be welcomed as an enriching heritage to the Israeli state's Jewishness and uniqueness.⁵³

In the past decades the ability to enjoy and consume music of different styles and a variety of traditions, is looked upon favorably.⁵⁴ This outlook has been introduced into the liturgical sphere as well, especially by young people. According to this ideology, if one believes that synagogues should reflect the individual's social and cultural life, then the blended Israeli synagogue better mirrors not only the living fabric of current Israeli society, but also its ideals.

The fact that blended prayer services are more palatable in the 2020s than they were fifty years ago is also due to deep cultural shifts in mainstream Israeli music and in Israeli society. The emergence of *Mizrachi* music (Mediterranean pop) and its adoption into the mainstream of Israeli popular music made the Mizrachi sound (and with it Yemenite, Moroccan and Arabic musics) more familiar to non-Mizrachi Israelis growing up in the 1980s and 1990s than it had been to previous generations, and it gradually came to be accepted first as *an* Israeli sound and later as *the* Israeli sound.⁵⁵ *Piyyut* texts and

“blended” Ashkenazi and Sephardi couples are less common and if they do marry, it is expected that the wife will adopt her husband's *nussach*.

- 53 With regard to new attitudes to the Arabic language in popular Israeli music, see: Oded Erez and Nadeem Karkabi, “Sounding Arabic: Postvernacular Modes of Performing the Arabic Language in Popular Music by Israeli Jews”, *Popular Music* 38, 2 (2019), pp. 298-316.
- 54 Dana Kaplan and Rachel Werczberger, “Cosmopolitan Spirituality and Jewish Authenticity: Spiritual Renewal and the Middle Class in Israel”, *Megamot: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1 (2020), online journal.
- 55 Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music*, pp. 213-248. While the formation process

melodies which were sung by Mizrahi Jews as an integral part of celebrating Sabbaths, festivals and life cycle events were introduced via Mizrahi pop renditions to non-Mizrahi Israelis who began using them as sacred songs for religious and family occasions. Therefore, when Mizrahi *piyyutim* songs were introduced into blended prayer services, some were already familiar to many of the congregants.⁵⁶

In addition, a movement for Jewish renewal took hold from the early 2000s among secular Israelis. Secular places of Jewish learning were established (such as the Midrasha in Oranim, Elul, Bina and others) and with them initiatives geared at exploring and experiencing the *piyyut* repertoire were founded, such as *Yedidi hashachachta* (at Hebrew University's Beit Hillel) and *Kehilot sharot*, which had branches all over the country.⁵⁷ The paraliturgical *piyyut* repertoire was a “softer” and more welcoming framework than the synagogue rite which follows a rigid and formal ritual. Sung in the home and in informal gatherings and rituals outside of the prayers proper, the *piyyut* was a cultural site where sacred and secular, Jewish and non-Jewish musics came together.⁵⁸

of Mizrahi music has been widely researched, less has been written about the gradual acceptance of *piyyutim* popularized through Mizrahi pop as religious music by traditional, religious and even secular Israeli Jews. Wood and Cohn Zentner, “Resonating repentance”.

- 56 Mizrahi *piyyutim* were also disseminated orally, when sung on shabbat events in schools and Zionist Yeshivas as well as in informal educational frameworks such as youth movements, etc. Usually the Mizrahi songs used in these frameworks were known via recordings of Mizrahi pop bands such as “Tsliley haUd”, “Tsliley hakerem” and singers such as Daklon and were not part of a particular Sephardi paraliturgical tradition known to the students from home.
- 57 Essica Marks, “New Contexts and New Audiences of Old Jewish Religious Hymns” in *Musica Judaica – Journal of the American Society for Jewish Music* 21 (2015-2016), pp. 113-132; Galeet Dardashti, “The Piyyut Craze: Popularization of Mizrahi Religious Songs in the Israeli Public Sphere”, *Journal of Synagogue Music* 32, (2007) pp. 142- 163; Odeya Barkan, “My Beloved, Have You Forgotten”? The Repertoire of Kehillot Sharot (2002–2023): Musical and Sociological Perspectives” MA thesis, Bar Ilan University, 2024.
- 58 Haviva Pedaya, *The Piyyut as a Cultural Prism*, Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute Press, 2013.

Musicologist Carmel Raz views the *piyyut* as a site of social discourse deconstructing binaries of secular versus religious, Ashkenazi versus Sephardi. She sees the actions of “singing, hearing and supporting *Piyyut* [as facilitating] the expression of a more heterogenous mode of being Israeli.”⁵⁹ She continues, “Thus the contemporary *piyyut* revival may be seen as paving the era toward a new era of Pan-Jewish culture, one in which different ethnic traditions coexist and cross fertilize each other.” Raz's views on the cultural significance of the *piyyut* revival in mainstream popular music resonate with the narratives around the creation of blended prayers as well, pointing to a similar belief system at the foundation of both.

The adjectives “Israeli” or “Erez Yisraeli” appear as a subtitle in the names of many blended communities. “Erez Yisraeli” is sometimes used in contrast and opposition to the term “Zionist,” and can be viewed as part of the ideological choice of these communities to promote a multicultural view of Israel, which in this case refers to a certain effort to return to diasporic pre-Zionist sounds. While the ethnic diversity of prayers and music in these communities is defined as Israeliness, it is also a code word for being relevant and up to date. Israeliness is used as a term for a pan-Jewish culture, on the one hand imagining the sound of biblical-era Israel in which ethnicity did not yet divide the Jews, and on the other hand as the sound of the future, of a new song which is neither Ashkenazi nor Sephardi, as Raz and Harel have suggested. In Kehilat Zion's “Adonai malach” we saw a reflection of Harel's attempts to create such a paradigm in the liturgical sphere.

Although we have focused on communities with purposefully or pragmatically blended services, inter-ethnic musical adoptions occur even within the most homogenous Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities. Moroccan synagogues in Israel, which tend to be

59 Carmel Raz “Tafilalt's ‘Soulmate’ and the Israeli *piyyut* revival” in *Musical Exodus: Al-Andalus and Its Jewish Diasporas*, Ruth F. Davis(ed.) London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015, pp. 165-180.

relatively open to the surrounding culture, have integrated not only Mizrahi pop songs but also Ashkenazi melodies into the prayers, such as a Hassidic “Lecha dodi” sung in their Friday night service.⁶⁰ On the other hand, mainstream Ashkenazi synagogues regularly sing the Moroccan melody for “Yigdal” at the conclusion of the Friday night services. Similarly, within the “Ashira Tehilot” prayer leading course, alongside the blended prayer track, even those studying to be Ashkenazi prayer leaders learn a number of Sephardi melodies, based on the assumption that knowing and incorporating these melodies will make the Ashkenazi prayers richer, and should be part of the essential training of any prayer leader in Israel.⁶¹

Additionally, lockdowns and restriction of movement due to the Covid 19 crisis, brought about changes to synagogue goers’ patterns of attendance, with proximity and safety measures taking precedence over other considerations. This may have weakened the tendency to pray in intentionally blended synagogues which demanded a special effort since congregants had to walk further to get to them. On the other hand, pragmatic praying together regardless of ethnic traditions also increased congregants’ exposure to alternate liturgies and melodies.⁶² The full extent of the effect of Covid 19 in the realm of prayers in Israel in general and on blended prayer communities in particular need further perspective to be properly contextualized and

60 Marks, “The Collection of Melodies”, p. 86. In the Sephardi Aboav synagogue in Safed “El Adon” is sung according to the Modzitz Hassidic tune, attributed to Rabbi Saul Yediyah Taub.

61 Interestingly, the heads of the Sephardi track view it as unnecessary to teach Ashkenazi *nussach* or melodies to their students, based on their well-founded assumption that all the Sephardi students are already familiar with Ashkenazi prayer formulas which are staples of the prayer services in religious state schools.

62 One enlightening example of this was a lively Facebook debate relating to the origin and questionable status of the Ashkenazi custom to bow down to the ground during the High Holidays prayers, which was sparked by a comment of an Israeli born Yemenite Jew who was first exposed to this custom when the Covid measures of 2020 led him to pray in an Ashkenazi High Holiday service for the first time.

examined but its ramifications on the blended synagogue are sure to be felt.

Conclusion

While I have presented several occurrences of blending Ashkenazi and Sephardi sounds chronologically in a seemingly historical unfolding of events, I find it important to clarify that these are not subsequent chapters in one continuous project to create blended prayers. On the contrary, drastically differing historical circumstances and social movements make it complicated to compare or to learn from one instance to the other.

It should also be reiterated that the top-down efforts to create national liturgies, be they British or French or unified national Israeli, received very little if any widespread support. These ideologies and their musical manifestations were not taken up by the congregations and individuals they were hoping to recruit.

What occurred naturally in the late 2010s was far removed from the prescriptive nineteenth century attempts to proactively introduce Sephardi melodies to Ashkenazi congregants. It is equally far removed from the strategic attempts to use blended synagogues as a means for unifying the nation in light of the massive immigration from a vast array of ethnic communities, as expressed in official Israeli government publications in the 1950s.

Instead, blended communities in the late 2010s to a certain extent fulfil Zerach Warhaftig's prediction that prayer blending would happen naturally over time. Indeed, when I asked leaders of blended prayer groups what they thought prayer in Israel would sound like in twenty years' time, they predicted that more synagogues would be blended. "This is the future of prayer in Israel", says Nissimi Naim Naor.

We have seen three musical strategies of blending which each can be seen as a paradigm. The first, prevalent in multi ethnic synagogues in Israel, is a de facto pragmatic policy allowing (and encouraging) every prayer leader and cantillation reader to lead according to his

own *nussach*. The second, which was popular in European attempts of the nineteenth century, was the incorporation of Sephardi melodies into a largely Ashkenazi synagogue service, mainly prevalent in printed volumes and not in practice. And the third, prevalent in the blended communities of the late 2010s and more specifically in Kehilat Zion, was creating a tapestry of a finer resolution, not only alternating melodies of different origins or prayer leaders of different musical traditions but constructing a new model of prayer from a range of previous cultural products.

In her seminal article on contemporary changes to Jewish liturgy, Ruth Illman uses the term “bricolage” to describe changes to contemporary liturgy which are at once both “firmly rooted and embedded in tradition, historically relevant, and theologically substantial, yet open and flexible so that new influences are allowed to inspire and inform the practice, making the ancient rituals inclusive, egalitarian, and relevant in the twenty-first century”.⁶³ While Illman's research, focusing on progressive synagogues in England, deals with incorporation of Sufi chants and contemporary folk and popular music, Kehilat Zion's attempts are very much rooted within Jewish traditional practices, albeit from a variety of ethnic sources. However, the notion of mixing, blending and creating a new hybrid tradition which is contextualized and attuned to contemporary personal and communal identities in an ongoing process of bricolage is one which can be seen as common to both cases. Indeed, the construction of relevant Jewish liturgical practice in the twenties of the twenty-first century is embodied by a constant mixing and mashing with Jewish others.

A good way to understand this notion at work is by looking at the way Yair Harel deals with the issues of the *nussach* of Kehilat Zion and its Israeliness:

63 Ruth Illman, “‘Retaining the Tradition but with an Open Mind’ - Change and Choice in Jewish Musical Practices”, *Temenos – Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 53, no. 2 (2017), p. 198.

I ask myself how to make an instrument to create things that feel traditional, but you can't tell whether they're Ashkenazi or Sephardi, rather you'd say they're Israeli, local. Ehud Banai and Shai Zabari are successful examples of this in the world of pop and we must see how it can correspond with the prayer tradition. How to create a language like this. And maybe in the end, I mean, the Ashkenazi tradition was born at some point too, right? And maybe, here, in the future, there will be a local tradition like this one...⁶⁴

Yair Harel makes a compelling argument by imagining the starting point of what we call *nussach* as a historic moment when what was a varied collection of agreed-upon modes, melodic formulas and songs begins to be recognized as a singular *nussach*, a term encompassing the textual and musical formulation of a tradition of prayers. Indeed, with a new generation of prayer leaders trained to lead and create their own blended prayers, and with the growing number of young communities choosing to pray in this manner, it begs the question: Could we be in the midst of an adaptation process in which a new way of praying is taking shape? Will there one day be a singular *nussach* which is recognized by Jews all over the world as the “way” in which Israelis pray?

The traditional names we give to our transnational *nussach* connect them to a primordial land: *Nussach Ashkenaz*, *Nussach Sepharad*. They refer to places remaining in our collective memory and imagination, places which our own daily and weekly prayers are supposedly reenacting and representing musically. Could we now be in the midst of a process of solidification of an Israeli *nussach*, much in the same way that an eclectic assemblage of musical pieces collected for centuries in Spain and later in the Sephardi diaspora came to be called *the Spanish and Portuguese tradition*; and in the same manner that the agglomeration of Franco-German and Polish prayer modes came to be called *Nussach Ashkenaz* and *Nussach Sfard*? This Israeli *nussach*,

64 Yair Harel, interview with the author. 16 May 2018.

if one does come to exist, would consist of an assortment of carefully curated Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Yemenite and Hassidic melodies and modes of performance, defined, in this case too, as a re-enactment of an ancestral homeland: Zion.