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Toward a Clearer Definition of the *Magen Avot* Mode*

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Among the scholarly studies in the field of Jewish music, the theoretical basis for understanding the liturgical music of the Ashkenazic synagogue still remains unclear.¹ A primary issue discussed in this literature has been traditionally referred to as the "prayer modes," a topic that reveals a multi-layered set of inter-related issues. In explaining the notion of prayer modes, one must first clarify the relevance and specific meaning of the term "mode,"² and then distinguish the various modes and how to define and identify them. Among the many tasks to be undertaken is the extrapolation of musical elements in a given mode, systematically isolating their function, establishing their hierarchy within a larger framework, and examining their relationship to the Jewish musical repertoire.

In general, the studies undertaken prior to the work of Abraham Zvi Idelsohn (primarily those of A. Friedmann, A. Kaiser and W. Sparger, I. Lachmann, S. Naumbourg, and H. and S. Weintraub) viewed the Jewish prayer modes only in terms of their scales.³ Yet, their determination as to which scales the Jewish prayer modes comprised varied considerably. Among the scales suggested were those emanating from the Greek and Church modal

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¹ Here I use the term Ashkenazic in its most common, all-inclusive meaning, which embraces the traditions of all European origins, with the exception of Italy, Spain, parts of the Balkans, and some traditions and communities that, although located in Europe, follow Sephardic customs.

² For a related discussion of the term and concept in similar contexts, see H. Powers (1998).

³ For a detailed review of these studies, see M. Wohlberg (1954), who also mentioned others.

systems, the Major-Minor tonal system, and certain elements unique to this repertoire.

A critical reading of the Idelsohn and post-Idelsohn discussions of the *Magen Avot* mode revealed a variety of perceptions and definitions.⁴ A generally accepted notion was that, in addition to a scale component, there were also motifs, which varied from example to example. Nonetheless, the end result of these researches posited that the dominant and, at times, the only defining trait of a mode resided primarily in its scale structure.⁵ This notion remained constant from the time of Idelsohn onward.

Here we may observe a discrepancy between the declared motif-oriented perception of *Magen Avot* and the subsequent discussions, which, in my view, can only be interpreted in terms of scale structure. This discrepancy appears to have stemmed from methodological and, at times, ideological perspectives. Probably the most dominant and influential factor can be traced to Idelsohn, who argued that the Jewish prayer modes, as we know them, originated in ancient Israel, and that all Jewish music—regardless of geographical dispersion and distinct subtraditions—exhibits common traits which point to a Near Eastern origin.

In addition, most past discussions of the mode were undertaken in an historical or comparative musicological context, wherein music theory played a subordinate role. The treatment of the *Magen Avot* mode, in combination with Idelsohn's perception, also led the vast majority of researchers to identify it with the Arab *maqamat* (*Bayat*, *Bayat Nawa*, and *Bayat Huseni*). *Magen Avot* was also referred to as the "mode of the Prophets," suggesting that it was derived from the cantillation of the *Haftarah* (Cohon, Idelsohn, and Levine). Others implied connections (by way of the entire system) with the Greek *tonoi* (H. Avenary, Idelsohn, J. Spector, and E. Werner), Byzantine *echoi* (Idelsohn and Werner) or with Gregorian chant (Idelsohn, J. Levine, and Werner). Idelsohn, in his posthumous 1939 article, "The *Mogen Ovos* Mode," offered an array of musical examples that could be identified as portraying this mode. In addition to his examples of Ashkenazic, Sephardic, and Italian liturgical settings, he also included a Yiddish folksong,

⁴ See especially S. Adler (1972), B. Cohon (1950); I. Freed (1958), L. Glantz (1952), H. Harris (1950), A.Z. Idelsohn (1929, 1932, 1933 and 1939), J. Levine (1989), M. Nulman (1985), J. Spector (1955 and 1981-82), E. Werner (1957, 1959a, 1959b, 1968, and 1976), and J. Yasser (1956).

⁵ See my initial observations concerning this matter in Tarsi (2000).

a Hassidic tune, an Episcopalian hymn set to the text of "Yigdal" (translated into English)—a Hebrew version of which can be found in A. Baer's anthology—and Arab, Syrian-Maronite, French, German, and Spanish songs, as well as medieval melodies from France, Spain, and Central Europe.

Even when an inventory of motivic content is suggested, its details do not necessarily define the mode. Some studies referred to motifs, gestures, motif-like elements or certain characteristics within a scale that go beyond the sequential order of its tones.⁶ But when such features are discussed, and even when musical examples are provided, there is no explanation as to what these motifs or gestures are, nor is there a rationale for deciding that they are indeed the mode's defining constituent elements. In addition, these discussions do not indicate where such elements can be found, nor how and from which sources they were extracted.⁷ Most importantly, with the exception of a few, coincidental motifs, I have found a great discrepancy between the motifs exhibited in these discussions and my own conclusions regarding motivic structure.

A case in point may be observed in the series of seven notated motifs from Idelsohn (1933:xxiii). This early instance of the use of a specific notation for motif-like gestures and phrase segments is, in fact, closer to the model I have derived than those reflected in the rest of Idelsohn's works, and in all of the post-Idelsohn studies that I have examined to date.⁸ It seems that the purpose of these notated motifs was to illustrate various links to and interrelationships with Church music, Jewish music of Sephardic origin, and non-Jewish music such as a Babylonian song, a Christian hymn, pilgrim songs, as well as an old French song, *maqam Bayat*,

⁶ See for example, Werner (1957:20, 1959a:323, and 1976:49).

⁷ Two exceptions are J. Levine (1989:91) and a few examples in Idelsohn's *Thesaurus (passim)*. Nonetheless, in both cases, their choices of musical sources are extremely limited. For example, Levine, in his discussion, relies on one paragraph (and as such, an atypical one) from Baer's setting of the "Magen Avot" paragraph to decide what these motifs are. Moreover, when Idelsohn provided a few examples to demonstrate his description of the mode (1929:86), he did not cite their sources, including Lewandowski's setting, which he presented merely as "Ashkenazic."

⁸ However, the larger portion of Idelsohn's motifs includes traits that are in fact atypical of the mode: a pausal tone on the 4th degree at the end of the third phrase; while the first through fourth phrases do include some characteristic traits of the mode, the entire fifth through seventh phrases, as well as a recitation tone on the 3rd degree contradict my analysis (see Ex. 2).

and Gregorian chant.⁹ However, there is no further discussion of these melodic segments to help us define *Magen Avot*.

Despite its formal presentation in the introduction, Idelsohn's motivic interpretation is not supported by the music that follows.¹⁰ On the other hand, it clearly demonstrates the connection to his examples of the old French song, the Christian hymn, and a Jacobean song from the pilgrimage to St. James in Compostella. Thus, Idelsohn's idea (*i.e.*, the notated motifs), which might have contributed to a working definition of the mode, promoted instead his comparative and historical objective, without, however, clarifying the theoretical basis of the *Magen Avot* mode.

Moreover, the examples that Idelsohn and others considered as characterizing the mode comprised so many diverse musical elements that their only common dominator was the Minor scale.¹¹ Furthermore, until now, authors assigned specific motifs to define the *Magen Avot* mode, it being understood that variants could be drawn from them without additional clarification. I therefore propose a definition of the mode, not by its variety of motifs and motivic variants, but by the musical characteristics from which these motifs are constructed.

I believe that the key to a clearer perception of *Magen Avot* lies

⁹ Idelsohn (1929:485 and Table XXXV, nos. 2 through 4 resp.) also attributed the mode to synagogue compositions by D. Nowakowsky (1914:15ff.), H. Weintraub (1901:no. 220), and E. Gerowitsch (*sic!* Gerovitsch, 1897:no. 36). There he also mentioned P. Minkowsky, and A. M. Rabinowitz, as well as Israel Meyer Japhet (whom he mentioned earlier on p. 285), without citing specific examples from their works.

¹⁰ Of the large body of repertoire presented in this volume, only a negligible amount might be identified as derived from his motifs. But even these connections are questionable, because they are based on fragments of Idelsohn's motivic units and are merely simple universal gestures. These include an ascending 5th, a three-step ascent to the fifth degree, and a three-step descent to the tonic. Thus, even these characteristics do not support Idelsohn's methodology as reflected in his motivic descriptions.

¹¹ A comment made in a private communication by Eliyahu Schleifer of Hebrew Union College (Jerusalem) appears relevant. He hypothesized about a striving for balance and symmetry in the traditional perception of the prayer modes. Viewing *Ahavah Rabah* as the "Jewish Phrygian" ("Fregish") and *Adonai Malach* as the "Jewish Major mode," there was a need to identify an equivalent version of a "Jewish Minor mode." I would add that the distinctiveness of *Adonai Malach* and *Ahavah Rabah* is generally accepted, owing to their unique scales and their appearance throughout the liturgy. The need for balance required not only ascertaining the existence of a *Magen Avot* mode, but also ascribing to it the same status and qualities as the other two. Unlike them, however, *Magen Avot* is "a mode of limited application" (cf. footnote 15).

in viewing it as a component of a larger structure. This entails an elaboration and further development of what Dalia Cohen (1971 and 1986:passim) has called a "modal framework." (A thorough exploration of Ashkenazic prayer music as a "modal framework" is an endeavor yet to be pursued.) Relevant here is Cohen's observation that what all modal frameworks share in common is a configuration of an aggregate of notes that is expressed as a scale. Regarding scale structure, *Magen Avot* is different from the other two modes (*Ahavah Rabah* and *Adonai Malach*), because it is identical to either the natural Minor or Aeolian.¹² This trait has led to some confusion in defining the *Magen Avot* mode, and in specifying its core, obligatory characteristics.

As indicated earlier, all pre- and post-Idelsohn sources incorporate a large, random, and varied selection of prayers, texts, and liturgical occasions under the rubric *Magen Avot*. While the choices vary from study to study, they all suggest that the liturgical function of the mode includes the Friday evening service. I therefore propose that the quest for a clearer, systematic definition of the mode begins with a detailed examination of the liturgical section sung on Friday evening after the silent devotion (the *Amidah*).¹³ This notion is based on the premise that the scale is indeed Minor,

¹² The distinction between natural Minor and Aeolian notwithstanding, the scale structure of both is identical. The point at issue here is scale-versus-mode or even more fundamentally, a tonal-versus-modal overview. A modal approach is supported by the following traits: the clear lack of a leading tone, the difference between the role of the first and eighth degrees, the lack of periodic repetition of the octave (which partly stems from the ambitus), the question of an ambitus as a factor, the connection between ambitus and motivic patterns, the presence of a *tonus finalis* that is not the tonic, and the connection between musical characteristics and textual considerations. On the other hand, the musical material clearly bears a tonal "feeling," as it gravitates strongly toward a tonal center. This "gravity" is clearly tonal in nature rather than modal, especially because it is not directed toward the *tonus finalis*, but rather toward the tonic. This strong and dominating sense of tonic, despite a *finalis* on the fifth scale degree, the tendency to form areas in the relative Major, and the presence of freer, more elaborate sections, which at times feature a larger ambitus and include tonal associations, as well as chromatic alterations, all point to tonal characteristics. As in almost all examples of Ashkenazic prayer music, what we have in *Magen Avot* is, in fact, a specific blend of modality and tonality, which is characteristic of much of this repertoire.

¹³ This includes the four paragraphs that begin with "vay'chulu" and end with "mekadesh hashabat" ("who hallows the Sabbath"). They serve as an abbreviation of the cantor's repetition of the *Amidah*. The third paragraph ("Magen avot") includes references to the seven blessings in the preceding *Amidah*. The Hebrew term for this is *me'eyn sheva*. For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon from a liturgical viewpoint, see J. Heinemann (1983).

but that the definition of *Magen Avot* cannot be determined by its scale-structure alone and must rely on other components. These various musical components define the mode within a clear textual circumstance. The texts of the four paragraphs following the silent devotion are taken from Harlow's translation (1985:315):

1st paragraph: "Vay'chulu...": The heavens and the earth, and all they contained, were completed. On the seventh day God finished the work which He had been doing; He ceased on the seventh day from all the work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and called it holy, because on it He ceased from all His work of creation.

2nd paragraph: "Baruch...": Praised are You, Lord our God and God of our ancestors, God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, great, mighty, awesome, exalted God, Creator of the heavens and the earth.

3rd paragraph: "Magen Avot...": His word was a shield to our ancestors, His decree gives life to the dead. Holy God, beyond compare, desired to favor His people with rest and gave them His holy Shabbat. Him shall we worship with reverence and awe, proclaiming Him God day after day with appropriate blessings. He is the Source of blessings, God deserving gratitude, the Master of peace who hallows Shabbat, in holiness granting His gift of Shabbat to the people thus filled with delight, recalling the act of Creation.

4th paragraph: "Retseh...": Our God and God of our ancestors, accept our Shabbat offering of rest, add holiness to our lives with Your *mitzvot* and let Your Torah be our portion. Fill our lives with goodness, and gladden us with Your triumph. Cleanse our hearts and we shall serve You faithfully. Lovingly and willingly, Lord our God, grant that we inherit Your holy gift of Shabbat forever, so that Your people Israel who hallow Your name will always find rest on this day. Praised are You, Lord who hallows Shabbat.

If the musical building blocks of these four paragraphs are abstracted into motivic patterns and other musical characteristics, the structures they form and their textual connections can establish a model for the mode. This model in turn will serve as the mode's only defining criteria. By relying only on specific musical characteristics to define the mode (as opposed to the scale, which cannot provide defining factors), we eliminate all other liturgical functions that might be associated with this mode, because none

of them features the same musical characteristics.¹⁴

Magen Avot may thus be called "a mode of limited application."¹⁵ The only liturgical setting that features the mode's entire complex of specific musical characteristics and their combinations is the "Me'eyn sheva" section of the *Amidah*. The liturgical unit of these four paragraphs is relatively short, comprising a limited section with clearly defined boundaries. The *Magen Avot* mode is found only within this section, in contrast to the *Ahavah Rabah* and *Adonai Malach* modes, which are found in a broad cross-section of the liturgical repertoire.¹⁶

After exploring a large sampling of Ashkenazic prayer music,¹⁷ I have concluded that the best example of a *Magen Avot* prototype would be the setting of the *Vay'chulu* as it appears in Ephros (1953:166). Ephros entitled this piece "traditional," indicating that it was not his own composition, but presumably what he considered to be the traditional version. My selection of

¹⁴ Occasionally, a motif or a gesture similar to musical characteristics of *Magen Avot* can be found in the repertoire. However, these occurrences by themselves are insufficient to define the mode. For example, see the comments on the *Yishtabach* mode, and the High Holiday *Amidah* mode below.

¹⁵ This term refers to sets of different musical patterns not within a unique scale structure, each associated with a liturgical section that is limited to a smaller division of text and contained within one closed section with clearly defined textual boundaries. Other examples include the section beginning with "Ata echad" ('You are One') in the Sabbath afternoon service, the section between "Bar'chu" ('Let us bless') and "Ga'al yisrael" ('Redeemer of Israel') in the Friday evening service, that between "Uv'chen" ('And Thus') and "Retseh" ('Accept') in the High Holiday services, parts of the Three Festivals morning repetition of the *Amidah*, and sections from the weekday prayers, to name a few. Many of these "modes of limited application" are in the Minor, and some are considered to be *Magen Avot* by one source or another. Although they all belong to the same modal category (modes of limited application with no unique scale structure), it should be stressed that each one comprises a separate, distinct pattern.

¹⁶ This is another fundamental difference between *Magen Avot*, on the one hand, and *Ahavah Rabah* and *Adonai Malach*, on the other, thus negating the traditional status of *Magen Avot* as one of the "three main Jewish modes."

¹⁷ Alter (1968), Baer (1901/1877), Ephros (1953), Friedmann (1901), Gerovitsch (1897, 1954/1904), Glantz (1965), Max Grauman (in Ephros 1953:164-166), Greenberg (1978), Heller (1905), Kaiser and Sparger (1893), Katchko (1952), Kavetzky (1966), Maier Kohn (in Idelsohn 1933:11-12), Kornitzer (1928), Kwartin (n.d.), Lachmann (1899), Levi (ca. 1845), Lewandowski (1921/1871), Naumbourg (1954/1847), Ne'eman (1968/69), Nowakowsky (1954/1900), Ogutsch (1930), David Rubin (in Kornitzer 1933:11), Löwe Sänger (in Idelsohn 1933:123-124), Scheuermann (1912/1903), Semiatin (1950), Shnipelisky (1924), Sulzer (1905/1838), Weintraub (1901/1859), Weisser (1943), Wodak (1898), Zemachson (1924, 1960), and audio sources at the National Sound Archive in Jerusalem (Shlomo Elzas, The Hague; Benjamin Klein, Strasbourg; and Leo Levi, Prague).

this setting as the prototype by no means implies that it is necessarily more authentic than others. It is probably not older than some other renditions, nor is it more "correct." My choice merely suggests that it is the best representation of a setting in which many characteristics of *Magen Avot* appear in their purest and most concentrated form. This version is probably Ephros's own synthesis of the variants and sources that he may have encountered in his traditional upbringing.¹⁸

Example 1a: Ephros's version of *Vay'chulu* (1953:166)

The musical characteristics extracted from the previous example (1a) are the following:

¹⁸ Whether indicated or not, it is probable that many cantorial sources constitute such an amalgam. However, this is the very nature of cantorial practice. Thus, the issue of primary versus secondary sources is insignificant, and we should value all cantorial sources.

Example 2: Musical characteristics of the *Magen Avot* mode:

A = An ascending 5th from 1 to 5 (d-a, in Ex. 2), with or without passing through 3 (f), melodically outlining an ascending triad. This musical characteristic functions as an opening motif. Not every opening phrase includes it, but when it appears it is most likely to be at the beginning of a phrase. With few exceptions, this motif appears on the word *vay'-chulu*.

B = A recitation tone on 5 (a). In most cases the recitation tone is clearly identified, but at times there is only a suggestion of it. In such cases, and only when a recitation tone would be expected, I identify it as such if it includes at least one word, plus a syllable from the previous or the following word, or syllables from two adjacent words.

C = A pausal tone on 5. The pausal tone is primarily a function of the text, most often appearing with a comma or a textual period. Most of the time this function coincides with a musical pause or semicadence, but in the few cases where it does not, the determining factor would most likely be the text.¹⁹ In addition, although often expressed as a longer note value, the pausal tone does not primarily depend on its duration (as notated in the manuscript where it is shown as an approximation of the rhythmic value of its performance). The same applies to *fermatas*. At times

¹⁹ My initial exploration suggests a correlation between pausal tones and the cantillation markings of *etnachta* (semi-cadence) and *sof pasuk* (end of the sentence). This connection calls for further exploration, especially beyond its appearance in the *Vay'chulu* paragraph. Naturally, it may turn out to be valid only in cases where the liturgical text is a Biblical quotation.

the pausal tone may coincide with them, but the literature includes many cases where *fermatas* have no particular connection with the text, nor do they function as a pausal tone.

D = In Example 2, characteristic D¹ represents a particular configuration of this pattern that is occasionally found (in the Baer and Sulzer manuscripts, in the Grauman setting and, with altered pitch class [d-d'-g-a] in Kaiser and Sparreger).²⁰ The usual approach to the pausal tone is by ascending stepwise motion. This may appear as a one-step motion from 4, two steps from 3 through 4 to 5, etc., as indicated in Example 2. What precedes this stepwise motion is not controlled by the mode. The specific motif it creates is identical to a cadence in *Ahavah Rabah*. This motif is sometimes found as an approach to the *finalis* at the end of a paragraph, either in its original form, or in various inversions or other configurations (cf. Ex. 2, characteristic J). Exploring the significance or the evolution of this identity with *Ahavah Rabah* would be speculative. Nevertheless, this identity merits notice.²¹ Its appearance in Germanic sources may correspond with what Max Wohlberg (personal communication) perceived as a tendency in the Western European tradition to use this particular cadence in *Ahavah Rabah* as a way to de-emphasize the scale's augmented 2nd and its characteristic sound.

E = Here, an ascending 5th or the melodic triad (1-3-5) in musical characteristic A is transposed to the relative Major (f-a-c'). This almost always begins a phrase, usually a continuing phrase, typically the second, but it can be found anywhere in the middle of a paragraph. It is unlikely to appear in the last phrase of a paragraph and is never an opening phrase.

F = A recitation tone on the 5th degree of the relative Major. This usually follows musical characteristic E. Although characteristics E and F shift A and B to the relative Major,

²⁰ Transposed up one step for purposes of comparison with Example 2, characteristic D¹.

²¹ The location of this variant on the fifth degree of the scale corresponds with its use as the tonic in *Ahavah Rabah*, particularly when the function of its tonic is the fifth degree of its "equivalent Minor." For an initial discussion of "equivalent Minor," see Tarsi (1991:6-9).

the pausal tone (Ex. 2, characteristic C) does not appear on the 5th of the relative Major, but is found only on the 5th of the original Minor key.

G = A skip from 5 to 8 where 5 is typically a short upbeat or an unaccented part of the measure,²² and 8 is on a down-beat or is accented by other rhythmical, metrical, or textual means. This usually begins a concluding phrase, especially in the first paragraph, but it can be found in other phrases as well, and not only at the beginning. There appears to be a text-motif connection with the words "vayishbot" and "ki vo shavat" (both referring to Sabbath rest).

H = This characteristic is the basis for many variants, whose common denominator is a descending zigzagging motion (see Ex. 6).

I = An approach to the tonic by descending stepwise motion. This is a defining characteristic only when the tonic denotes a cadence.

J = The *finalis* and its approach. *Magen Avot*, like most components of the Ashkenazic modal framework, consists of both tonal and modal elements. Here this is reflected in the presence of both a tonic, with its gravitational pull, and a *finalis* on 5. With the exception of the first, all the paragraphs of this section feature a *finalis* on 5. A possible reason for this would be that these paragraphs are sung as one continuous unit; therefore the ending of one would lead naturally to the next. Playing on the tonal-modal duality in this section, the tension between a *finalis* on 5 and the inherent gravitational pull toward the tonic creates the perception of a suspended ending of the paragraph, which supports this sense of continuity. This applies to the final paragraph as well, because the chant does not conclude there, but continues directly into the *Kaddish* that follows it. The first paragraph is as likely to end on the tonic as on 5. A possible explanation for this may be that it is distinct

²² The word "measure" is used here only as a mechanical unit of reference. In most cases the music has no clear beat, which eliminates the possibility of meter as perceived in Western music. Nevertheless, there is clearly evidence of rhythmical organization insofar as notes are assigned different time values. A metrical component is also present as some notes are stressed while others are not (beyond the obvious connection to accents provided by the text). For a discussion of this phenomenon, which the author calls "flowing rhythm," see Frigyesi (1993).

from the other paragraphs, because, unlike them, it is a quotation from the Torah (Genesis 2:1-3). The approach to the *finalis* is either by ascending stepwise motion, as it would be when it serves as a pausal tone, or a leap down from 8, at times combining both in an 8-4-5 cadence.

Thus, if we extracted the musical characteristics of *Magen Avot* from Ephros's setting in Example 1a, the result would be the following:

Example 1b: Musical characteristics of *Magen Avot* as expressed in Ephros's *Vay'chulu*:



Beyond their textual connections, these characteristics, discussed under Example 2, may appear in any given combination and order, with or without free musical material inserted between them. Nevertheless, they often form specific combinations, which create the following characteristic phrase types:

Phrase Type I begins with an ascending 5th or triad, followed by a recitation on 5 and continues with an ascending stepwise progression to a pausal tone on 5 (cf. Ex. 2, characteristics A-B-D and C.)

Example 3: Phrase Type I

Lewandowski

Phrase Type II consists of an initial and recitation tone as in type I—but shifts to the relative Major—and a pausal tone on 5 of the original Minor, with its ascending stepwise motion (cf. Ex. 2, characteristics E-F-D and C.)

Example 4: Phrase Type II

Sulzer

Phrase Type II also appears in several altered forms. These alterations may include the following: 1) the omission of the opening 5th or triad; 2) the use of characteristic A as the opening instead of E; 3) a recitation tone on the 5th of the original Minor; 4) the omission of characteristic E and a recitation on 5 in Minor, but within the relative Major (structurally outlining the Major triad; and 5) any other mixture of traits from Phrase Types I and II within the relative Major.

Example 5: Altered Phrase Type II

Baer

Note that although both Type II and its alterations create areas of the relative Major, what defines them is not the tonal change, but their specific musical characteristics. A shift to the relative Major (a prevalent procedure in the Ashkenazic repertoire, as it is in the tonal music of the Western tradition) without these motivic patterns does not establish a *Magen Avot* trait.

Phrase Type III begins with a skip from 5 to 8, followed by a zigzag descent and a stepwise descent to the tonic (cf. Ex. 2, characteristics G-H and I.)

Example 6: Phrase Type III

An examination of the Ashkenazic sources (listed in footnote 17) reveals a degree of resemblance among them unparalleled in any other section of the liturgy.²³ It is this similarity which enables us to identify such a large number of specific musical characteristics (compared to other modes and patterns) and their high level of specificity, all of which create a mode that is stricter and more structured than any other in the modal framework of the Ashkenazic liturgy. The reasons for this similarity, including its historical evolution, remain unclear and are not within the scope of the present discussion.²⁴ It is clear, however, that the result is

²³ An exception would be those fixed melodies that occasionally appear in the Ashkenazic liturgy, such as certain settings of the "Kaddish" and "Avot" sections of the Yom Kippur Ne'ilah service, seasonal melodies, and the so-called "Missinai Tunes."

²⁴ Some cantors/composers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century were, at times, influenced by each other's work. Few of the Germanic sources were completely free from some influence of Solomon Sulzer. But these manuscripts generally do not present such striking similarities in other liturgical contexts. With regard to Sulzer's influence, although his rendition is well within our defined parameters, it is clearly not at the center of our model's core, and the same can be observed in his setting for the first part of the Friday evening service (from the beginning until the *Amidah*). If one were to choose Sulzer's setting as a prototype, such a choice would overlook some of the significant characteristics of the mode.

a much larger presence of specific characteristics than in other modes, and that a larger portion of the music is comprised of them rather than unstructured, freely composed or improvised music. It would seem that in the case of *Magen Avot*, the need for such structure is greater because the mode is defined only by these characteristics, and cannot rely on a unique scale structure for its definition or even for its characteristic sound. It is precisely this trait which enables us to define the mode so clearly.

The musical characteristic for the blessing that opens the second paragraph consists of structural notes 3-2-1-(3)-5 [a-g-f-(a)-c] of the relative Major, whose area does not extend beyond this designated pattern. It lacks a cadence. After the pausal tone on the 5th of the relative Major, coinciding with last syllable of the word *adonai*, it returns to the original Minor key (see Ex. 7):²⁵

Example 7: Opening of the second paragraph (*Boruch*)

In some sources we find a quasi-sequential pattern on the words *elohey avraham elohey yitschak ve'elohey ya'akov* ('God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob'). This pattern may be a natural reflection of the text, in which the names of the patriarchs, each attached to the words "God of," create a mini-phrase consisting of three parallel units. A number of sources, however, do not feature this sequential treatment.

A similar sequential pattern can be found on the words *ha'el hagadol hagibor ve'hanora el elyon* ('great, mighty, awesome, exalted God'). Here too, the sequential pattern may derive from the text, which embodies four adjectives relating to the Deity. Unlike the previous sequential treatment, however, this one generally as-

²⁵ In Wodak's rendition, this pattern is combined with the opening 1-5 of the Minor (musical characteristic A).

cends.²⁶ Once again, the *finalis* of this paragraph is on the fifth degree.

Example 8: Quasi-sequential patterns

Alter

e - lo - kei av - ro - hom e - lo - kei yits - chok vei - lo -
 kei ya - a - kov ho - keil ha - go - dol ha - gi - bor v' - ha - no - ro keil el - yon

While the first and second paragraphs follow the musical characteristics more strictly, the third and fourth reveal a higher degree of freedom. Although many musical forms follow this pattern (in Western music and in the music of Eastern cultures), the freedom found here in the third and fourth paragraphs is related to matters of practice and genre. A majority of the sources manifest a change in the third paragraph that probably suggests congregational singing, which by its nature involves a more regulated, often metered melody. In some sources this is where the texture changes from a solo line to a four-part choral setting (Heller, Kornitzer, and Sulzer), or from a "flowing rhythm" to a metrical setting (Baer, Friedmann, Heller, Kavetzky, Lewandowski, Semiatin, Scheuermann, Shnipelisky, Sulzer, and Weisser). This may manifest itself by the introduction of a time signature in the third paragraph where none exists in the first two.²⁷ In Kwartin's manuscript this change is accompanied by a tempo indication (*Andante*). Weintraub's setting (1901:26-27) is also illuminating: the entire paragraph is notated as a four-part recitation tone similar to the congregational responses on *baruch hu uvaruch sh'mo* ('blessed be He and blessed be His name') throughout the service, thus

²⁶ One may be tempted to consider the sequential pattern as word painting, because the adjectives reflect an accumulation of intensity, ending with "exalted God." The existence and relevance of word painting in the music of the Ashkenazic liturgy have yet to be demonstrated. In this case, the musical peak is not always on the Hebrew word *elyon*, thus making a weak case for word painting.

²⁷ In some manuscripts we may find time signatures in all the paragraphs. In these sources, however, the time signature in the first two paragraphs appears to be superimposed on "flowing rhythm," whereas in the third, it reflects a genuine metrical character.

rendering it musically equivalent to a congregational response.

Wodak's setting features a recitation tone on 5 for the choir, whereas the other paragraphs are marked "Cantor." Baer explains that the congregation says the *Magen Avot* prayer quietly by itself or with the cantor, and Lewandowski's setting includes the instructions "Chor u[nd] G[emeinde]" (choir and congregation).²⁸ In Semiatin's manuscript the "Vay'chlu" paragraph is marked "recit." and the "Magen Avot" paragraph indicates "congregation." In addition to these verbal instructions, some sources provide music only for the beginning of the paragraph (Semiatin) or the beginning and ending (Wodak), whereas others omit much of the music (Alter, Katchko, and Ogutsch) or omit it all together (Kohn and Naumbourg). These are apparently idiomatic conventions to indicate congregational participation, normally the singing of a familiar melody.

Other illustrations of this phenomenon are found in three manuscripts: Zemachson (1960:108-114), Gerovitsch (1897:141), and Nowakowsky (1954/1900:63-72), all of which contain choral settings exclusively. These manuscripts do not provide music for the Friday evening service, except for the "Magen Avot" paragraph.²⁹

At present, the most popular melody for the "Magen Avot" paragraph (primarily in North America, but in other Ashkenazic communities as well) is by I. Goldfarb (1918:66-69). Another commonly used setting is by Lewandowski (1921:20-21). All such melodies naturally exhibit their own unique musical material, and are therefore freer than the specific musical characteristics found

²⁸ Other sources indicate changes from "Vorbeter" to "Gemeinde," "Chasan" to "Choeur," "Cantor" or "Kantor" to "Chor" or "Coro," "Cantor" to "Cong.," or in Hebrew letters מַנְדָּחָן (Chazan) to קָהָל (Kahal), all of which indicate cantor to choir or to congregation. These verbal indications can also be found in the first paragraph (*Vay'chlu*), where I hypothesize that they reflect an instruction rooted in the code of Jewish law. Ben Arieh (1868:190) presents a statement that asserts that the "Vay'chlu" section should be said out loud by the congregation while standing. The reason provided for standing is that this section bears witness to the fact that God is the creator of heaven and earth. It further argues that this act is equivalent to testifying in court, which must be done while standing, and which requires at least two people. Therefore, the cantor may not sing the *Vay'chlu* alone. This paragraph, however, does not contain musical indications for congregational singing as does the third paragraph, nor does it present metrical rhythm.

²⁹ Gerovitsch, however, does provide music for the "Vay'chlu" paragraph, in all likelihood a reflection of the halachic (legal) implications discussed above (cf. preceding footnote).

in the first and second paragraphs.

While more freedom in the third paragraph results from congregational singing and metrical melodies, that found in the fourth paragraph "Retseh," reflects its style as a cantorial *fantasia*.³⁰ This involves further musical elaboration, a more ornamental texture, an expanded vocal range, increased chromaticism (primarily chromatic passing tones), occasional use of the leading tone (only in the upper octave leading to 8, not to 1), and rare tonicizations. All of these render this section closer to the harmonic or melodic Minor. Examples of this genre are found in the manuscripts of Alter, Glantz, Gerovitsch (1954/1904:22), Greenberg, Katchko, Kavetzky, Kwartin, Semiatin, Shnipelisky, and Weisser.

Even in less elaborate versions, or in ones where it is unclear whether the section constitutes a fully developed cantorial *fantasia* (for example, Baer, Friedmann, Kohn, Lewandowski, and Ne'eman), the settings are clearly more elaborate with regard to ornamentation, chromaticism, and vocal range. Despite the freedom found in the cantorial *fantasia*, the overall structure as well as the tonal center remain intact. Specific musical characteristics are also present, though fewer in number, interspersed with free music. In addition, the more structured formation of Phrase Types I, II, and III are less likely to appear. Sulzer's rendition, which may be considered a simple, less elaborate cantorial *fantasia*, demonstrates how the original musical characteristics, by way of elaboration, increased range, ornamentation, and chromaticism, are transformed into a cantorial *fantasia*.

Example 9: Musical characteristics in Sulzer's setting of "Retseh"

Music score for Example 9, Sulzer's setting of "Retseh". The score consists of two staves. The top staff has measures labeled A, B, D, and C. The lyrics for these measures are: e - lo - he - nu we - e - lo - be a - vo - se - nu re - zeh - wim' - . The bottom staff has measures labeled I, E, and a section labeled "choir". The lyrics for these measures are: nu - cho - se - nu ka - d' - sche - nu b' - miz - wo - se - cho.

³⁰ The cantorial fantasia is discussed in Avenary (1968). Although rarely found, Avenary's term is more appropriate than the commonly used term "recitative," because the nature and characteristics of this genre have little in common with the recitative found in Western music. See also Wohlberg (1982, 1987-88) and Ephros (1976).

Music score for the "Magen Avot" mode. The score consists of multiple staves of music. Various labels are placed above the staves, including I, E, F, G, D, C, B, F, D, C, I, D, C, J, and choir. The lyrics for the music include: w'sen chel - ke - nu b' - so - ro - se - cho, sa - b' - e - nu mi - tu - we - cho w'sa - m' - che, nu bi - schu - o - se - cho w'ta - her li - be - nu l'ow - de - cho be - e - mes w'han - chi - le - nu a - do - noj e - lo - he - nu be - a - ha - woh uw - ro - zon schab - bas, ko - d' - sche - cho w' - jo - nu - chu woh jis - ro - el - m' - ka - d' - sche schi - me - cho bu - ruch at - toh a - do - noj, choir cantor choir, bo - ruch hu u - vo - ruch sch' - mo m'kad - desch ha - schab - bos a - men.

Being a "mode of limited application," *Magen Avot* as defined here is used only in the Friday evening "Me'yn Sheva" paragraphs. Two other liturgical sections in the repertoire are generally considered to be in the mode as well; in addition to the Minor key, they each exhibit one *Magen Avot* characteristic. The first concerns the music for the section between "Uv'chen" and "Retseh" in the morning services of the High Holidays (commonly called the *Amidah* mode in professional and educational circles). There are occasional short, temporary shifts to the relative Major. Although an aspect of *Magen Avot*, this shift is too common to suggest the mode. Furthermore, in *Magen Avot* this shift is connected to specific patterns (musical characteristics E and F), and most importantly, it is the only trait this pattern shares with *Magen Avot*. I have discovered something close to this pattern in the handouts that

Cantor Max Wohlberg distributed in his classes at the Jewish Theological Seminary.³¹

Example 10: "Uv'chen" for the High Holidays



The second liturgical section begins on the Sabbath morning with *Nishmat kol chai* ('The soul of every living thing') and ends approximately with the *piyyut* ('liturgical poem'), *El Adon* ('God, the Lord'). Cohen identifies it as the *Yishtabach Steiger* (from the prayer *Yishtabach shimcha la'ad malkenu* ['Praised be Your name forever, our King']) as one part of his *Magen Avot Bor'chu* mode (Cohen 1950:28). Glantz uses the same term in his description of *Magen Avot* (Glantz 1952:39). Nevertheless, the only musical characteristic that this section shares with *Magen Avot* is an opening ascending skip from 1 to 5. The *Amidah* and *Yishtabach* modes need to be more thoroughly researched and defined.³² Nevertheless, it is clear that sharing one motif out of a complex structure of multilayered musical characteristics is insufficient to establish a connection with *Magen Avot*. Moreover, in both cases the motifs shared with *Magen Avot* feature universal musical gestures, prevalent throughout the standard Jewish and Western repertoire.

Sections outside of the "Me'eyn sheva" paragraphs in which we may find occasional *Magen Avot* motifs also include the prayer *Hashkivenu* ('Cause us to lie down') and the following paragraph *Vesham'ru* ('They shall observe') on Friday evening. But in those sections they appear only sporadically, and only a few of these characteristics—the more universal ones (primarily characteristics A, C, and D)—are found. Although not within the mode, the pres-

³¹ Although these handouts do not constitute a primary source, they played a significant role in the practicum, because of their use in cantorial schools and programs, and not only at the Jewish Theological Seminary. It is not clear from which sources Cantor Wohlberg derived these motivic patterns for this liturgical section. Nevertheless, despite the scarcity of documentary evidence for this music, it has become so prevalent in North America that it is now the established norm. Indeed, Spiro (1999:120-21 and 126), whose collection reflects the core of current American practice, has traces of this in his music.

³² This is especially true in the case of the *Yishtabach* mode. My own initial survey revealed that the music for the "Yishtabach" section varies widely among the cantorial sources.

ence of these motifs is significant as they constitute what may be interpreted as a musical foreshadowing of the "Me'eyn sheva" paragraph which follow them.³³ We thus observe a "retroprojection" of *Magen Avot* material to some of the preceding prayers. Furthermore, one may speculate that the *Magen Avot* motifs in these sections (and the *Kaddish* that follows them) establish the appropriate musical environment before the congregation's silent *Amidah*. This "retroprojection" may be at the root of what is identified as the Volhynian tradition,³⁴ which appears to resemble the mode from the very beginning of the Friday evening *Ma'ariv* up to *Amidah*. This is featured in Ne'eman (1968/69:33) and Glantz (1965:39).

As demonstrated at the beginning of our discussion, drawing parallels between the Ashkenazic liturgical tradition and music outside of the Jewish repertoire might be hazardous. Nevertheless, as a result of our redefining the mode, a striking similarity is found in Gregorian chant: the opening motif, recitation tone, and the pausal tone in our model of *Magen Avot* is identical to that of the Fifth Psalm Tone on F³⁵ (used among other texts in the *Magnificat*, *Benedictus Dominus*, and *Gloria patri*).³⁶

Example 11: Psalm Tone 5

Intonation		Mediation			
Ma - gni - fi -	cat *				
Et exsul -	távit spiri -				
Be - ne - dí -	ctus Dóminus		tus	me - us *	
Sa - lú - tem	ex inimi -		De - us	Is - ra - el:	
Gló - ri - a	Patri,		cis	no - stris:	
			et	Fi - li - o,	

This similarity extends significantly when we consider the Lutheran chorale *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* ('Awake, the Voice

³³ Schleifer (1986) discussed, as a related phenomenon, the anticipation of musical material of a given liturgical section which features the last few lines of text that precede it.

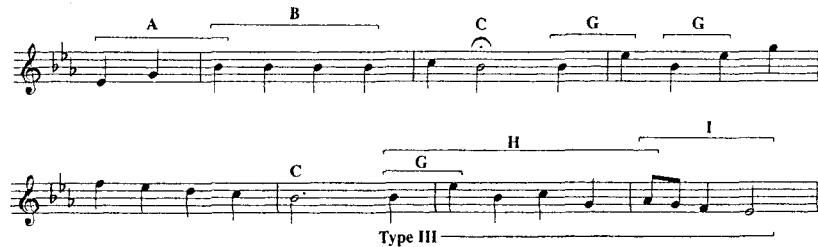
³⁴ Volhynia, a region in the Northeastern Ukraine, was a center of Jewish life from about the twelfth century until the Holocaust.

³⁵ There is an obvious difficulty in comparing the tonal/modal nature of *Magen Avot* with Gregorian chant, all the more so in comparing *Magen Avot* phrases in Minor with a Psalm Tone (belonging to a different modal system) that outlines a Major triad.

³⁶ Johner (1925:89).

Calls to Us'). Its melody, written by the German Lutheran theologian, poet, and composer, Philipp Nicolai (1556-1608),³⁷ served as the basis of Bach's cantata, no. 140. The structure of the chorale in Major is almost identical to its Minor version in *Magen Avot*:³⁸ its first phrase includes musical characteristics A, B, and C (from Ex. 2); its second phrase begins with musical characteristic G and ends with C. The third phrase of the chorale consists entirely of motifs that can be found in the *Magen Avot* model (G, H, and I) and constitutes a Major-key version of the mode's Phrase Type III.

Example 12: Musical characteristics of *Magen Avot* in *Wachet auf*



Striking as it appears, this correspondence may be considered coincidental. Nonetheless, their remarkable similarity is a phenomenon of particular interest and calls for further inquiry. The clear definition of a mode is an end in itself. As befitting our initial objective, discussions such as this, suggesting possible Christian relationships with *Magen Avot* in conjunction with our proposed model point to fresh directions, and provide a more secure basis for further analysis.

³⁷ This is confirmed in Walter Blankenburg's entry on Nicolai in *The Revised New Grove Dictionary of Music* (London: Macmillan, 2000), vol. 13, p. 214). See also Gerhard Herz's study, *Johann Sebastian Bach. Cantata No. 140 : Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972).

³⁸ There is an argument whether there is in fact a connection between the Fifth Psalm Tone and *Wachet auf*, which I am not currently addressing.

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