Spirituality and Synagogue Music: Case Study of Two Synagogue Music Ensembles

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Abstract

Participation in community music ensembles is an important and popular form of education—with members of ensembles that perform within religious services, opportunity of experiencing a possible extra dimension of a spiritual experience. The intent of this study was to survey adult choir and band members at Temple E Teaneck, New Jersey, USA in terms of connections between music performance, educational experiences and spirituality. Thoughts and reflections of the participants as those of the clergy and choir director were gained through qualitative, open-ended interviews. Overall, it was found that participating in a synagogue musical ensemble in addition to music education, lent itself to spiritual connection as well as providing congregation with enhancement and education of the worship service. The results of this study were presented at the Spirituality and Music Education Conference in Bio England in June 2010.

Introduction

In 2009 – 2010, I conducted a study of the adult choir (Kol Emet) and band (Emeth Band) at Temple Emeth, a Reform synagogue in Teaneck, New Jersey, effort to begin to understand what may be the spiritual connections and musical educational experiences of those that participate in synagogue musical ensemble, an area that has not been researched in the music education field and very limited research on ensemble participation in synagogues. One obvious reason is the absence of such ensembles, especially instrumental, at Orthodox and most Conservative synagogues. But, they are increasingly prevalent in the Reform movement and involvement on the part of congregants bears attention.

An aspect of community music, participation in a synagogue choir or band provides music education opportunities as do their counterparts in the secular world. Synagogue, or temple, is a community, bound by common religious and cultural traditions. Choirs, especially, maintain the community’s music as well as providing outlet for musical expression and learning for its members. In addition, participating in a synagogue musical ensemble can offer the added layer of a spiritual connection through music making. Further, performing synagogue music affords th
the opportunity to learn more about the liturgy and the service. This study is an example of music/religious education and spirituality at a specific house of worship, the results of which suggest important implications for research in religious school and other educational experiences they were having. While the interviews were open-ended int

Background

In the Reform movement, the cantor’s role encompasses both prayer and song; the congregation is generally encouraged to sing along during the service. It is common for congregations to maintain a choir of volunteers that participate in some services. In experience from almost professional to very amateur. The use of musical instruments was banned from use in the synagogue after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. in part because they suggest celebration. Shiloah tells us that must forever mourn the destruction of the 2nd temple...” and “instrumental music identified with pleasure and the secular world [the use of instruments] may convey melodies and actions of non-Jews” (Shiloah, 1992, p. 86).

While the Orthodox and most Conservative denominations maintain this ban, the Reform movement has embraced the use of instruments, particularly the organ. In an effort to be more like Christian worship that the organ was introduced to worship practice. While organs appeared early in the development of the Reform movement, the guitar as a product of the folk song movement of the 1960s, the regular use of other instruments have appeared more recently. Since 1985, there has been a re-appearance of musical instruments in synagogue services, accelerated by the “Friday Night Live” service, composed in 1998 by Craig Taubman as a way to draw young adults (ages 25 – 40) in an effort to draw them back to temple life (http://www.judaism.com/gif-bk/99011b.gif).

The Reform movement prides itself on adaptation, modernization and balance on The Union for Reform Judaism website, ”The great contribution of Reform is that it has enabled the Jewish people to introduce innovation while preserving tradition” (http://www.urj.org). The re-appearance of instruments as part of worship service is an important example of that.

The changes in the nature of how the music of the prayers is delivered in the service also created a new role for music as a device to foster a sense of spirituality. Serving as a means to chant required text, many congregants see the act of listening to singing to be an integral part of their spiritual experience. In discussion of interest in singing as part of Reform worship services, composer and performer Debbie Friedman said that congregants are “‘hungry for it, really hungry’ for a spiritual connectedness” (Cohen, 1996, p. 50).

The Study

The intent of this study was to discover aspects of spirituality experienced by the two aforementioned synagogue music ensembles through open-ended interviews. Pan at the end, I asked what their perceived connections were while performing, what they understood their role to be during worship services and what intended or unintended educational experiences they were having. While the interviews were open-ended...
set of questions to serve as a basis for the discussions. Those interviewed were encouraged to elaborate or go “off-topic,” which often led to interesting revelations only to me, but to the interview subject as well.

The study focused on those members of Kol Emet that participate year-round and those that join the choir to participate only in the High Holiday (Rosh and Yom Kippur) services. One participant in the Temple Emeth Band is the pianist, and as a paid, non-Jewish member of the temple staff, he was not included in inquiries made as to the participants’ perceptions of the musical quality of the ensemble and there was no skills assessment attempt made on my part. The pianist was not solicited for their perceptions, so the reporting of spirituality and the responses in this project suggest such a study w

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To ensure privacy and recognizing the highly personal nature of the responses, quotes of ensemble members are given as anonymous.

I am a flutist and a member of the Temple Emeth Band; on occasion I play with the ensemble. Thus, I acknowledge my role as a participant-observer in this research project. The emic (account stemming from an observer within the culture) and etic (account stemming from an outside perspective) issues present during the interview process were addressed. In addition, I have previously served on the Board of Trustees of the temple and am an officer on the Executive Committee, therefore I am privy to some amount of knowledge regarding governance of the temple.

**Method**

Data were collected via review of publications, document review, and interviews with ensemble members. The Temple Emeth Library is the primary source for documents and materials about the choir, which are primarily news clippings and announcements. Informational interviews were conducted with the Rabbi and Cantor of the temple, the director of the choir was interviewed both for information as well as her perspective of the choir. Rehearsal and performance observations were conducted during the five-month study period.

An email (the ensembles’ preferred method of communication) was sent informing the study and its intent as well as an announcement to Kol Emet by the director of the choir. The interviews were somewhat purposive. The choir members were selected based on years in the ensemble, with an attempt to capture the reflections of those long tenure and recent membership to achieve some balance. When data saturation was reached, those that had not already been contacted for an interview were not solicited. An attempt was made to interview a range of ages, experience in music and the choir. The interviews were somewhat purposive. The choir members were selected based on years in the ensemble, with an attempt to capture the reflections of those long tenure and recent membership to achieve some balance. When data saturation was reached, those that had not already been contacted for an interview were not solicited. An attempt was made to interview a range of ages, experience in music and the choir. 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distraction and delay inherent in note-taking on the part of the interviewer. Interviews were conducted according to the method of naturalist inquiry as described by Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993). In this method, while there is an interview itself is allowed to flow freely, enabling the subject to offer thoughts occur naturally or to elaborate on a given question resulting in information within a stricter scenario. The interviews were coded and data triangulated to reveal common results. Several recurring themes emerged in the interview process. Those themes are discussed here.

Background in the Literature

Research specifically on participation in adult choirs in synagogues appears to be limited. Bell (2000) investigated adult community choruses and Friedmann (2007) explored the musico-spiritual experience on the part of synagogue music. But attention to the musico-spiritual experience on the part of membership of Jewish musical ensembles has not been investigated in the larger community. Brief attention is given by Friedmann and Stetson (2008) to the role of synagogue choirs as a part of Jewish worship services.

Participation in choral ensembles, particularly religious ones, appears to be of interest. In 2009 the Chorus Impact Study by Chorus America confirms that participation in community choirs is 18.1% nationally and that there are approximately 216,000 religious choirs. Among the choir participants surveyed, 38% of Americans belong to volunteer religious choirs. It should be noted, however, that the surveyed religious choirs were likely volunteer choirs. One can assume that the participant survey number would increase with the addition of synagogue volunteer choirs. Bell (2004) interpreted the results of the 2003 Chorus Impact Study as they refer to community choruses and their activities.

In June 2010 the Survey of Jewish Choral Activity in North America was conducted by the Zamir Choral Foundation. The purpose of the survey was to discover the level of participation, demographics, and impact of synagogue choral activity. The results of the survey of over 2,000 respondents were published in the results of this study, including areas regarding music education specific to Jewish worship, connections made between singing and sacred texts, sharing of a musical experience and the attainment of a spiritual experience, all of which received responses of over 60%.

Books on synagogue choirs do not seem to exist. Idelsohn (1992) provides a comprehensive book on Jewish music, but choirs are only mentioned in the background history of hazzanut and the changing compositional style of music in Reform service. Rubin and Baron (2006), in their history of Jewish music, discuss the development of the volunteer choir and its eventual role of support for the ca. Friedman points out that the introduction of synagogue choirs was part of the Reform service. He and Stets that there was an imposition of “Western aesthetics,” including a more controlled performance of the music that led first to the introduction of choirs followed by a phenomenon of congregational singing. Singing in the synagogue was congr with the influence of the more dominant choral presence (2008).

Jewish music and its transmission have been given in-depth study by Judah Abraham Schwadron and Mark L. Kligman. Cohen (2009) presents the historical perspective.
development and education of the cantorate, including and relevant to this study discussion of the Reform denomination’s movement toward song-leading on cantors. His examination of “place” (2008) in music traditions and transmission revealing look at music in the Reform summer camp tradition. The conclusion from that case study hold implications when considering music in the synagogue comprehensive description of Jewish religious denominations and secular practice and otherwise, Schwadron (1983) discusses the need for adaptation, a track of Reform movement. While he does not discuss synagogue choirs or instruments (to mention the traditional ban on their use), the development of the music in this paper is in large part due to the adaptive nature of Reform Judaism. Sch (1970) reminds us that Jewish music is not easily defined as it is that of a diaspora, therefore musical tradition and practice may vary widely. Kligman’s research Jewish practice (2003, 2008) reminds us of the critical importance of congregations’ participation in Jewish ritual practice. While Syrian Jewish worship is substantially different than American Reform style, his underscoring of the importance of the role of the cantor in leading ritual chanting is a connection between the two.

The need for Reform congregations to define themselves comes in part through the style employed. This emergence of the choir into greater prominence was not the need for a more expanded art-aesthetic dimension, but was also a manifestation of a fundamental change in the very religious experience itself (Friedmann & Stets). The connection between singing, although not choral, and worship was investi

Jeffrey Summit (2000), who studied the role of music in several congregation denominations. Issues of spiritual connection, worship style and musical choir were investigated. While adult synagogue choirs were not specifically included, the findings apply when considering the activity of singing in the choir and the connections made by its members. Summit points out that “[f]or many Jews, the choice of musical settings function as a basic, defining component of identity” (p. 4). The ability to attain a spiritual connection may be a component of identification with one denomination or another.

The topic of spirituality and music has been investigated by those in the field of music therapy. Lipe (2002) and Aldridge (1995) look at this intersection and its religious role in music therapy. A sense of spirituality achieved through music listening, transcendence and hope, creating an avenue of comfort. Those dealing with issues are demonstrated to benefit from music therapy, in particular because perceived generation of spiritual effects. Lowis and Hughes (1997) attempted to understand inherent spirituality contained in music but were unable to definitively do so. Their quantitative tests conducted on retired persons did demonstrate that people state that they consider some music to be spiritual may be “spiritually-minde" themselves, and a significant amount expressed feelings of calm, pleasantness, experienced “nice images.” This suggests an important role for music in music while an inherent spiritual characteristic may not have been proven to exist it is some kind of similar reaction on the part of inclined listeners. Self-identity, connections, well-being, motivation and spirituality were among the results of a study conducted by Hays and Minichiello (2005) on how music functions in the lives of older people. Both ensembles under investigation are populated by adult men of whom, especially in the choir, are in their retirement years.
St. Vincent (2011) compiled over 100 responses from a wide variety of music regarding to their perception of spirituality as a part of music making, listening engagement. While not a scholarly book, it does provide a direct response to spirituality and music. It should be noted that those interviewed for this book represented an equally wide variation of religious philosophy and perspective. An overwhelming response from these musicians is that music provides, for them, a feeling of transcendence, and in some cases, a connection to a higher power.

The presence of spirituality in music or the ability for music to generate a spiritual experience is examined by Palmer (1995) in a broad sense and to encourage educators and researchers to consider this under-considered aspect of music. The study is not restricted to Jewish or Christian music, but is considered an integral, almost-to-define component of Japanese belief as discussed by Matsunobu (2007). Matsunobu (2007) suggests a guide for developing a framework by which to evaluate whether a particular piece of music is spiritual or whether the listener is apt to have a spiritual experience by hearing it. She makes particular mention of a practical application of this framework when considering music education.

The Musical Activities at Temple Emeth

Temple Emeth is a Reform Jewish congregation located in Teaneck, New Jersey—a town situated approximately seven miles west of New York City. The synagogue building is modern as is the sanctuary where both ensembles rehearse and perform. Typical for most synagogues, there is a raised area (bima) upon which stands a pulpit (each at a lectern) and most recently, the band during the music service. The area (called "the pit" although it is not below ground level) where the choir performs. The congregation sits in rows of cushioned seats facing the bima and straight ahead at the ark which contains several Torahs. The ark doors are well-covered with a weaving commissioned for the temple.

Temple Emeth is often described by those in the congregation, and confirmed synagogue's cantor, Ellen Tilem, to be a "singing congregation" (personal interview, February 9, 2010) meaning that the congregation as a whole sings willingly and seems to particularly enjoy the musical component of worship. The music of the Temple Emeth Band is liturgical, ranging from formally composed music to camp songs. Temple Emeth has a children's choir, Etz Chaim, for grades 4 through 7, a teen choir, Shir Chadash, and the two subjects of the study: the volunteer choir Kol Emet and the Temple Emeth Band. In addition to the key accompanies the Cantor at all services, guitar is often used as an accompanying instrument at family-oriented services and Bar or Bat Mitzvahs.

Kol Emet

"Kol Emet" (literally "voice of truth") is a recent name for the choir (in use for approximately seven years) and it was simply known as the Adult Choir for most of its history. The choir was founded in 1954 by a temple member and it has been a lay leader (non-clergy) or cantor. The current choir director, Jacqueline Gutman, is a lay leader who is trained as a choral and instrumental music director. Kol Emet's...
The Temple Emeth Band

several Shabbat services a year and some special occasions, and is an institute.
High Holiday services. There is no audition to join the ensemble and the core
numbers sixteen, although it will swell to over twenty for the High Holiday se
addition of members that sing only for those services. Both the Cantor and t
acknowledge that the core ensemble is a sizable group for a volunteer temple

During the liturgical year the choir rehearses on a weekly basis and works on
composed for choir as opposed to singing only from song sheets. Rehearsals
the sanctuary of Temple Emeth, in the area that the choir occupies during ser
rehearsals are conducted in the traditional manner; after a vocal warm-up, th
through a given piece conducted by the director after which the director point
important elements, explains what needs improvement, often demonstrating
and explains the place of the piece in the service. Careful attention is paid to
technique and it is clear that the rehearsal does not represent a "run-through
piece, but a careful approach to preparation and learning.

In addition to Shabbat services and special events at the Temple, the choir of
participates in the Union for Reform Judaism Annual Choir Festival that attrac
tCentral to Northern New Jersey and on average there are ten to twelve choirs
participating. In May 2010 the choir performed a special concert at the Temp
celebrating twelve years of directorship by Jacqueline Guttman.

The Temple Emeth Band

The Temple Emeth Band was formed in 2001 as a result of the institution of a
"Music Service." While singing and chanting is an essential element of Jewish
especially at Temple Emeth, the Rabbi at that time, Arturo Kalfus, sought to i
new style of service modeled after one that had been successfully running at
Conservative congregation in New York City. That service featured non-stop
congregants were encouraged to dance and participate with instruments, a fo
generally unfamiliar to traditional worship practice. Worship services in the R
movement have long utilized organ, piano and guitar, and the service institut
Emeth would represent an expansion of the role and presence of music. The
different configurations) on all songs, and congregants are encouraged to sing
It is a departure from the typical service in that there is no reading from the Rab
do not give a sermon, and a greater musical interaction is obvious. The insti
occurring performance group.

The ensemble members, a mix of professionally trained and amateur, were re
Cantor based on her knowledge of their musical abilities. Two members requ
the band after the establishment of the music service, but beyond that there
for new participants to join. The group is made up of violin, flute, conga dru
percussion, melodica, keyboard, bass and guitars. Not all instruments play o
there are a variety of sounds and timbres as a result. Additionally, not all bai
are able to perform at each service. They are not replaced by substitutes so
music service the music may take on a different character. In contrast to the re
rehearsals are ad hoc, approximately once a year, the objective being to lea
and work on issues in the existing repertoire. Occasionally there will be a reh
the liturgical year but there is no defined schedule. The rehearsals do not run

http://www.stthomas.edu/rimeonline/vol10/shansky.htm
guidance of a director. The Cantor makes her musical needs known and the group as a collective. Occasionally I will make suggestions related to voicing or ensemble but it is otherwise not an autocratically run band.

Generally the music used is not composed for the ensemble and they rely on the music I have composed some original pieces and created some arrangements as has another temple member. While each instrument is “part,” this is a loose concept and there is much improvisation. The monthly services do not habitually include Kol Emet although they do collaborate with the band on an occasional basis. While each instrument is not habitually included in Kol Emet although they do collaborate with the band on an occasional basis.

"It’s How I Pray"

Several consistent themes emerged from the qualitative interviews conducted as part of the project. While they may not apply to each subject interviewed, the results of the collection reveal that a majority expressed them. These overarching themes include:

- Kol Emet and the Temple Emeth Band each serve to enhance the service and worship experience for congregants.
- Participation in these groups often facilitates a sense of spirituality or worship for its members.
- Participation is due in part to the general enjoyment of making music.
- Participation in the band or Kol Emet is a learning experience, especially in terms of Jewish music.
- Participation is a community activity both within the group (Kol Emet) and for Temple Emeth.

What stood out particularly was that the answers from the choir members were more uniform than those of the band members. There are several possible reasons for this. The choir is led by a conductor, so the direction is more traditional and authoritative. The band is a collective with musical decisions made in part by the Cantor and the group, 2) there are more formally trained or experienced musicians in the group, 3) there may be a lack of experience and knowledge, 3) lacking words, the impact of the prayer for instance may not be as strongly felt. This is supported by Ross when she said “[a]s sung, the words are mostly linked to a text, it is not only suited to the expression of a specific idea, but has the special capability to convey words a heightened significance that the words may not have when merely spoken” (2007, p. 3). The lack of cohesion in the responses from choir members was, ironically, rather uniform.

The Perceived Role of the Ensembles

It was clear from the interviews that the perception on the part of the participants is that the music they perform serves to enhance the service for the congregation. A variety of descriptions were offered such as “facilitate,” “mal provide a distraction.” One subject, in discussing the choir singing the powe prayer said, “being in the choir box and looking out, you see something that’s remarkable and it hits you...what you see is that genetic/DNA reaction to the service what you start to see is people crying” (personal interview, December 2, 2009).

One area of uniformity was that the choir and band members did not view their performance as a performance in the manner of an event that an audience quietly observes. Many registered concern that it might be perceived that way by congregants who obstruct participation. It appeared of great importance to all interviewed that...
congregation sees the ensembles as guides or means of entry to musical part
the service. As one subject observed,

Certainly when we perform at a service it feels like worship and it feels re
that there’s this connection that I feel, and that I think we feel as a group
congregation and they’re happy and they’re smiling because we’re singinç
that they’re familiar with and they’re into it and we’re doing a nice job an
that energy that happens (personal interview, February 21, 2010).

The observation that congregants joined in singing or, in the case of the musi
up and dance appeared to bring a great deal of satisfaction to the musicians.
particularly acute for the members of the band. There is a strong sense of in!
between the music of the band and the response of the congregants in atten
cer service is thought to be a more successful one when there is a higher level of
congregational participation. The connection between the choir and the cong
noted by Cantor Tilem as she defined the role of Kol Emet to “raise the music
spiritual intelligence of the congregation” (personal interview, February 9, 20:

While it was noted by a few that their participation represented a form of “w
understood that to be in the form of providing a service to the congregants; t
“work” can, however, have an impact on the individual musician’s own respor
worship experience.

Music/Religious Education

Participation in these ensembles as a form of music education was viewed diff
band members and choir members. Without knowledge of the characteristics
learning, most of the band members’ perception of music education is that it
and teacher-directed. It was notable that until the concept of informal learnir
discussed in the interview, music education as a participatory aspect was mos
except by two subjects. This was particularly true for those with formal musi
training or substantial performance experience. Once lifelong/informal learnin
were explained and discussed, the idea that participation in the Temple Emet
form of music education was grudgingly accepted. There appeared to be sign
resistance to the idea that this activity represented a learning opportunity. H
learning Jewish melodies, increased confidence in improvisation and perform
aspects of music education that were acknowledged.

By contrast, most of the choir members acknowledged their participation as ii
and/or religious education. Many directed their comments to vocal education
literacy via the director, others mentioned that they have learned new Jewish
to a greater understanding of Jewish liturgy or the Jewish worship process in

An understanding of the Jewish worship service and its liturgy was an area of
that many of the subjects pointed to. One subject remarked, “I’ve grown son
knowledge of Judaism. That you can’t take away. I therefore know Jewish mi
like it…” (personal interview, January 20, 2010).
While the thoughts of the congregation were not solicited for this report, Cant suggested that it is through the singing of the choir that many of the congreg exposed to and learn much of the new music that is emerging from the Refon

**Participation in Music Activities**

Although the focus of this project was to discover what spiritual connections through synagogue music participation, the enjoyment of making music as ar this activity cannot be ignored.

All of those interviewed expressed a love of singing or playing their instrumer given reason for joining Kol Emet was a positive experience with choral singing school or college. The enjoyment derived from playing one's instrument was the band members.

A sense of community, both of the ensemble and the synagogue, is a part of enjoyment factor. Both groups expressed a sense of community about their i ensembles. For the choir members, it seemed that the opportunity to sing wi of great importance. This was an element of the band members' responses, l to include the participation and response from the congregation. In addition, i subjects from both ensembles acknowledged a sense of community about the themselves, the choir being the more cohesive in this aspect.

**Spirituality**

John P. Miller defined spirituality as, "... not confined to institutional religion b concerned with the connection we can feel between ourselves and something mysterious, and wondrous" (2000, p. 140). Rabbi Steven Sirbu, spiritual lead Emeth, explained that spirituality is "what is meaningful to the individual" (p interview, January 26, 2010). It is with these definitions in mind that the que spiritual connection through ensemble participation was pursued with the mei Emet and the Temple Emeth Band.

The subject of spirituality proved a difficult one for the members interviewed. seemed to be the word itself; its meaning and highly personal nature. The re question of whether there was felt some kind of spiritual connection when par the band or choir were immediate and often passionate, but not uniform. Sin question about music education, there appeared to be a difference in respons subject was a choir member or band member. Again, the choir members wer uniform in their responses and the band members much less so.

Within the band this split seemed to again occur along the formally trained/e untrained/less experienced lines. Those with more formal training were less I acknowledge a spiritual sensation, but did point out features of the experien be identified as spiritual. It should be noted, however, that those features ap present at other musically satisfying experiences as well, giving rise to the th more trained and seasoned musician experiences some kind of spirituality by music making and not by the connection to a religious rite. Anthony Palmer, the power of music and the self said, "music holds some special capabilities t toward a higher self" (1995, p. 98).

There may be two reasons for the difficulty in making a spiritual connection:
1. As instrumentalists, the band members don't sing the words of the prayers thereby detaching them from the meaning of the prayer.

2. The issue of playing as "work," as discussed earlier. When the music service is going well, there is a heightened spiritual connection, albeit ill-defined. When this, one of the subjects stated that when it seemed less like work, they are more able to a personal feeling or connection while performing.

There was some acknowledgement of a special “feeling” when it came to play temple, perhaps due to the presence of the temple “family.” One subject, who is professionally trained, explained that, “it’s like coming home to my family and play music. It’s nice to be surrounded by family and friends and make music” (interview, March 3, 2010). This connection or feeling of “being moved” by music outside of the synagogue as well, although it was noted that there is something about performing at the temple. As a participant-observer, I concur that while “connection” when performing music generally, I note a unique sensation when as part of a worship service at Temple Emeth.

The choir members were not as uniform in their responses here as they were of the choir at the synagogue, but a high number of them (eight of the twelve felt strongly that their choir participation represented a form of worship or spiritual experience. Those that responded in the affirmative did so quite emphatically. In some cases, a sense of “connection,” being “uplifted,” the music having “meaning” was a catalyst for participation in Kol Emet. One subject commented, “The music is very transfiguring. You go to another place...I find myself in a very glorious place inside” (perso interview, December 4, 2010). This sentiment is not uncommon in Jewish musical experience. Ross who states that, "music has always been an integral part of Jewish experience, and thus, is described as transcendental" (2007, p. 1).

Not understanding the specific words of Hebrew did not seem to cause an issue. An understanding of the prayer and its place in the service was a component of Kol Emet was to better learn the order of the service and meaning of the prayer.

One cannot ignore, however, the possibility that this spiritual sensation is caused by group music making more than any particular prayer. Most of the members do not participate in any other musical ensemble, so this is their singular opportunity to involve themselves in group singing. However, even those singers that work with groups found the experience of singing in Kol Emet a spiritual one. This may be due to factors: 1) they are singing at their own synagogue and the community connection contribute to the overall spiritual sense and 2) the other groups may not be as oriented and the experience is therefore missing that component.

Conclusion

Cantor Tilem spoke of the “feel of the service and the music” when discussing spirituality during the music service. Rabbi Sirbu pointed out the impact on the music as, "mak[ing] the words of prayer uplifting and spiritual...[we] expe words in a beautiful way." This unidentifiable “feeling” or “experience” is best as spirituality or spiritual connection that occurs by virtue of engaging in a relationship that is supported by music.
Obviously all of those interviewed had their own unique perspectives and questions. But the passion with which they answered the question about spirituality to conclude that participation in Kol Emet or the Temple Emeth Band does opportunity for spiritual connections through music in a religious setting at that personal music development is taking place. At minimum, their participation further education about the worship service thereby creating the atmosphere of spirituality. It is clear that cultural and religious education is a component of participation and for some participants has represented the sole means of obtaining education. For those for whom there is no conscious connection, the role of teacher to enhance the service and serve as leader for prayer is of primary importance and suggests that the presence of one or both of these ensembles is a conduit for spirituality on the part of the congregation.

Seeking a meaning through music may be part of the overall search for a Jew and music’s important role in the service is likely a part of this search. Tisdell points out that, “part of this ongoing reclaiming of cultural identity and productive knowledge can be expressed through music…” (2001, p. 14). This was the case for Kol Emet members who joined the choir as part of an effort to reconnect with Judaism. Thomas G. Long writes:

Part of the joy of worship is to know the motions, know the words, know! The vital congregations knew their order of worship and moved through it with familiarity. What is more, the worshippers had active roles – speaking, singing, moving – and many of these they could perform from memory (in Frishman, p. x).

Long is reflecting on past practice, suggesting that much of what had been considered practice has, to some degree, been lost. It seems that through the activities of choirs and synagogue instrumental ensembles, those past practices can be revitalized and once again, congregants can experience their own sense of spirituality.

References


http://www.stthomas.edu/rimeonline/vol10/shansky.htm


**About the Author**

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