

Holy Music on Shabbat

שאלה / Question:	2
Beyond a simple T'shuvah / Answer	2
1. Music in General, and in Connection with M'lakhah	3
1.1 - Music in General	3
Biblical References to Music	3
Talmudic References to Temple Music	4
Music Leading Text as a King does his Army	4
Music Silenced due to Temple Destruction	6
Excessive Mourning Discouraged	7
1.2 - Some Talmudic sources on Shabbat Music	8
1.3 - Later Codes on Shabbat Music	10
1.4 - Modern Sources on Shabbat Music	12
1.5 - Halakhic Change and Music	14
Contemporary Conservative and Orthodox Approaches	14
Halakhah per Reb Zalman and Jewish Renewal	16
1.6 - Summary: Music, Shabbat and Mourning	19
2. Humility, Arrogance, Dignity, Etc., for Leaders and / or Musicians	21
2.1 - Mishnah Avot on Humility	22
2.2 - Talmud on Arrogance	23
2.3 - Rambam on Arrogance	26
2.4 - Shulchan Arukh on Egotistical Chanting	29
2.5 - Hasidic Teachings on Boldness and Humility	30
Whistle as Effective Prayer	30
Two Pockets	31
R' Nachman: Important Dust	32
R' Nachman: Boldness	33
2.6 - Mussar on Humility	33
2.7 - Additional Contemporary Discussions of Humility	36
Joey Weisenberg on Musical Humility	37
3. Aspirational Humility, Grounded on Respect and Esteem	39

R' Nachman on Dots and Soul-Songs	39
Proactively Enriching Prayer	43
4. Deep Music	44
Music as an Aid to Prophecy	44
Kenny Werner: Creating Music From One's Depth	45
5. Conclusion	45
תשובה / Answer:	47
6. Personal Epilogue	48

שאלה / Question:

What to aim for, to keep in mind/heart, when I play violin in a musical group at a song-oriented Shabbat *davening*?

I have often participated musically in Jewish prayer services as well as in devotional chanting groups. Especially on Shabbat, I would like my contribution to fit with the spirit of the group, and the essence of the day.

Beyond a simple *T'shuvah* / Answer¹

The question of whether playing instruments on Shabbat (or any time) might be one with a simple Yes-No, *Mutar-Asur* answer. And of course, different streams of Judaism will give different answers to this relatively circumscribed question. However, when we add the element of making the music a spiritually rich and appropriate contribution, the answer needs to go beyond a simple Yes-No towards a more nuanced, more far-reaching response.

Here are some of the related issues that are worth addressing:

- Whether music is permissible at any time, given rules about mourning the lost Temple

¹ Thanks to Reb Natan Margalit for valuable comments and guidance with earlier drafts of this work

- Whether it is permissible, given rules about honoring Shabbat, for me to use musical instruments at services on Shabbat
- How to make my contribution a humble offering, as opposed to a domineering or ostentatious performance
- How, as a musician, do I enhance the service as a spiritual experience, for myself and for all

1. Music in General, and in Connection with *M'lakhah*

1.1 - Music in General

Biblical References to Music

There are many Biblical references to music². To cite a few³:

Ex. 15:20

כ וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֲחוֹת אַהֲרֹן, אֶת-הַתֵּנָף--בְּיָדָהּ; וַתֵּצְאֵן כָּל-הַנָּשִׁים אַחֲרֶיהָ, בַּתִּפִּים וּבְמַחֲלֹת.	20 And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.
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Ps. 150

ג הַלְלוּהוּ, בַּתִּקְעַ שׁוֹפָר; הַלְלוּהוּ, בְּנֶבֶל וּכְנֹר.	3 Praise Him with the blast of the horn; praise Him with the psaltery and harp .
ד הַלְלוּהוּ, בַּתֵּנָף וּבְמַחֲלֹל; הַלְלוּהוּ, בְּמִנִּים וּבְעֹגֶב.	4 Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instruments and the pipe .
ה הַלְלוּהוּ בַּצִּלְצְלֵי-שִׁמְעַ; הַלְלוּהוּ, בַּצִּלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה.	5 Praise Him with the loud-sounding cymbals ; praise Him with the clanging cymbals .

Ps. 92 (Psalm for Shabbat)

² See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_music_in_the_biblical_period

³ For some other Tanakhic and related references, see <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/5678?lang=bi>

ד עֲלֵי-עֲשׂוֹר, וְעֲלֵי-נָבֶל; עֲלֵי הַגִּיּוֹן בְּכִנּוֹר.	4 With an instrument of ten strings, and with the psaltery; with a solemn sound upon the harp.
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and [Num. 10:10](#)

י וּבְיוֹם שִׂמְחַתְכֶם וּבְמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם, וּבְרָאשֵׁי חֲדָשֵׁיכֶם--וַיִּתְקַעְתֶּם בַּחֲצֹצְרוֹת עַל עֲלִיתֵיכֶם, וְעַל זִבְחֵי שְׁלָמֵיכֶם; וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְזִכָּרוֹן לִפְנֵי {אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. }פ	10 Also in the day of your gladness, and in your appointed seasons, and in your new moons, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt-offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace-offerings; and they shall be to you for a memorial before your God: I am the LORD your God.' {P}
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Talmudic References to Temple Music

The Mishnah, e.g., [Arakhin 2:3](#), speaks of instruments used in the Temple even on, *especially on*, holidays:

אין פוחתין מעשרים ואחת תקיעות במקדש ולא מוסיפין על ארבעים ושמונה. אין פוחתין משני נבלין ולא מוסיפין על ששה. אין פוחתין משני חלילין ולא מוסיפין על שנים עשר. ובשנים עשר יום בשנה החליל מכה לפני המזבח. בשחיתת פסח ראשון, ובשחיתת פסח שני, וביום טוב ראשון של פסח, וביום טוב של עצרת, ובשמונת ימי החג, ולא היה מכה באבוב של נחשת אלא באבוב של קנה, מפני שקולו ערב. ולא היה מחליק אלא באבוב יחיד, מפני שהוא מחליק יפה.

There are never less than twenty-one blasts in the Temple and never more than forty-eight. There are never less than two harps, nor more than six. There are never less than two flutes, nor more than twelve. On twelve days in the year the flute was played before the altar: At the slaughtering of the first pesah, At the killing of the second Pesah, On the first festival day of Pesah, On the festival day of Atzeret (Shavuot), And on the eight days of Sukkot. And they did not play on a pipe [abuv] of bronze but on a pipe of reed, because its tune is sweeter. Nor was anything but a single pipe used for closing a tune, because it makes a pleasant finale.

Music Leading Text as a King does his Army

In his book [Torah of Music](#)⁴, [Joey Weisenberg](#) (whom we will consult again [below](#)), writes about how music "helps us to understand the verses of Torah". His train (melody) of thought goes somewhat as follows⁵:

⁴ Weisenberg, Joey. *Torah of Music*. New York: Hadar Press, 2017.

⁵ On p. 23. Thanks to Josh Fleet for helping me find these sources

[Nehemiah](#), in the eponymous Bible book, writes about Torah-reading in the Second Temple period. One verse about this reading gets interpreted in terms of music in the [Talmud](#), and also in [Zohar](#). Specifically, [Nehemiah 8:8](#) says

וַיִּקְרְאוּ בַסֵּפֶר בְּתוֹרַת הָאֱלֹהִים מִפֶּתֶשׁ וְשׁוֹם שָׁכַל וַיְבִינוּ בַּמִּקְרָא:

They read from the scroll of the Teaching of God, translating it and giving the sense; so they **[caused them to understand/] understood the reading.**

On that verse, one opinion in [BT Meg. 3a](#) says

וְשׁוֹם שָׁכַל אֵלּוּ הַפְּסוּקִין וַיְבִינוּ בַּמִּקְרָא אֵלּוּ פִּסְקֵי טַעְמִים

“And they gave the sense,” these are the divisions of the text into separate **verses**. “And they **caused them to understand the reading**,” these are the **cantillation notes**, through which the meaning of the text is further clarified.

[Daniel](#) also gets interpreted in terms of the musical expression of Biblical (Torah?) texts. Consider the verse, [Daniel 12:3](#):

וְהַמִּשְׁכִּלִּים יִזְהָרוּ כְּזֶהֱרָה הָרָקִיעַ וּמַצְדִּיקֵי הָרָבִים כְּכּוֹכָבִים לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

And the knowledgeable will be radiant like the **bright expanse of sky**, and those who lead the many to righteousness will be like the stars forever and ever.

There is discussion of this verse in [Zohar 1:15b.10](#) and [1:15b.11](#):

וְהַמִּשְׁכִּלִּים יִזְהָרוּ, כְּגֹוֶזֶא דְתַנּוּעֵי (נ"א דְטַעְמֵי) דְמַנְגְּנִי, וּבְנִגּוּנָא דִּילְהוֹן אֲזֵלִין אֲבַתְרִייהוּ אֲתוּן וְנִקְוִדִי, וּמִתְנַעֲנֵן אֲבַתְרִייהוּ כְּחִיָּילִין בְּתַר מַלְכֵיהוֹן.

"**And they who are wise shall shine**", like the movement of the players-musicians (or of the cantillation marks used by players), and according to their tunes, so follow the letters and the vowels. They [i.e., the letters and vowels] follow them [i.e., the tunes / markings / movements], just like soldiers follow their king. [my translation]

וְהַמִּשְׁכִּלִּים יִזְהָרוּ, אֲתוּן וְנִקְוִדִי. כְּזֶהֱרָה נִגּוּנָא דְטַעְמֵי. הָרָקִיעַ אֲתַפְּשֻׁטוּתָא דְנִגּוּנָא כְּגֹוֶזֶא אֲנִן דְּמִתְפַּשְׁטִי בְּפִשְׁטוֹ וְאֲזֵלוּ בְּנִגּוּנָא. וּמַצְדִּיקֵי הָרָבִים אֲנִן פְּסוּקֵי דְטַעְמֵי דְפִסְקֵי בְּמַטְלִיָּהוֹן דְּבִגִּין כֹּה אֲשַׁתְּמַע מְלָה

The words "And they who are wise shall shine" allude to the letters and the vowels that shine, and "the brightness" alludes to the tune of the cantillation marks. "The firmament" [/ sky] alludes to the expansion of the tune, namely all those intonations that flow and expand along as the tune flows. "And they who turn many to righteousness" alludes to the music of the cantillation marks that bring the journeying to a pause and enable the meaning of the words to be heard clearly.

Zohar beautifully characterizes the letters and vowels following, as it were dancing to, the associated music of the text. The 'music' of our Biblical texts could perhaps be understood simply as the musical notation, i.e., the cantillation marks. But 'music' may very well also encompass the 'execution' of the marks, i.e., the chanting of text with cantillation or other melodies.

Joey argues that in BT Meg. the music merely helps to amplify the text, whereas in Zohar, the music becomes like a king, leading the text. I'm not sure that I fully agree with Zohar's claim of royal domination, at least in terms of determining the literal meaning of words. However, Joey's sources do provide some basis for the claim that our Biblical texts gain expressive power, and even nuance of meaning, when they are chanted.

We will revisit the idea of there being more to holy texts than just the words, when we look at the story of the whistle [below](#).

Music Silenced due to Temple Destruction

After the destruction of the Temple, some early sources prohibited music in general. For instance [BT Sotah 48a-b](#) prohibits singing, post-Sanhedrin (i.e., post-Temple), in various situations, even on weekdays.

אמר רב הונא זמרא דנגדי ודבקרי שרי דגרדאי אסיר רב הונא בטיל זמרא
אמר רב יוסף זמרי גברי ועני נשי פריצותא זמרי נשי ועני גברי כאש בנעורת

Rav Huna said: The song of those who pull ships and lead the herd is permitted, for their singing assists them to establish a rhythm in their work. However, that of weavers is forbidden, as they sing only for their own enjoyment. The Gemara relates that subsequently, Rav Huna nullified all types of song...

Rav Yosef said: If men sing and women respond, this is licentiousness. If women sing and men respond, it causes the evil inclination to burn as if one were setting fire to chips of kindling.

The latter ruling suggests that non-licentious, non-antiphonal song might be permitted. Perhaps the cause of work-efficiency mentioned by R' Huna could serve as the basis for similar justifications for synagogue music, at least singing, in order to enhance prayers.

[BT Gittin 7a](#) reports that Mar Ukva prohibits any and all song, post-Temple -- it's not completely clear, but I believe that זמרא / 'song' probably encompasses both choral and instrumental music.

שלחו ליה למר עוקבא זמרא מנא לן דאסיר שרטט וכתב להו (הושע ט, א) אל תשמח ישראל אל גיל בעמים

They sent the following question to Mar Ukva: From where do we derive that song is forbidden in the present, following the destruction of the Temple? He scored parchment and wrote to them: "Rejoice not, O Israel, to exultation, like the peoples" ([Hosea 9:1](#)).

Excessive Mourning Discouraged

As we shall see, there is abundant Rabbinic discussion of the question of music on Shabbat, which presupposes the acceptance of music in general. A detailed analysis of Temple-oriented music moratoria falls beyond the scope of this *T'shuvah*. However, if music was eschewed in the immediate aftermath of the destruction of the Temple, it may have come back into general use (e.g., not on Shabbat) by the populace with the passage of time, despite the above-mentioned Rabbinic prohibitions. Accordingly, the Rabbis may have simply abandoned the prohibition, out of consideration of popular practice⁶.

Alternatively, even consistent with Rabbinic rejection of music in order to mourn the Temple: Music may have come back into use in the spirit of avoiding 'excessive mourning'. Excessive mourning is deprecated, e.g., in [BT Moed Katan 27b](#), where someone's excessive mourning leads to a cascade of tragedy:

⁶ We will look at some other Halakhic processes that accommodate popular practices, [below](#)

ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב כל המתקשה על מתו יותר מדאי על מת אחר הוא בוכה ההיא איתתא דהות בשיבבותיה דרב הונא הוה לה שבעה בני מת חד מיניהו הוות קא בכיא ביתירתא עליה שלח לה רב הונא לא תעבדי הכי לא אשגחה ביה שלח לה אי צייתת מוטב ואי לא צבית זודתא לאידך מית ומיתו כולוהו לסוף אמר לה תימוש זודתא לנפשיך ומיתא

And Rav Yehuda said further in the name of Rav: Anyone who grieves excessively over his dead and does not allow himself to be consoled **will** in the end **weep for another** person. The Gemara relates that **a certain woman** who lived in the neighborhood of Rav Huna had seven sons. **One of them died and she wept for him excessively. Rav Huna sent a message to her: Do not do this.** But **she took no heed of him.** He then sent another message to her: **If you listen to me, it is well, but if not, prepare shrouds for another death.** But she would not listen **and they all died. In the end,** when she continued with her excessive mourning, **he said to her:** Since you are acting in this way, **prepare shrouds for yourself, and soon thereafter she died.**

Beyond this case of mourning for a family member, excessive mourning specifically for the Temple is also deprecated, as in [BT Bava Batra 60b](#):

תנו רבנן כשחרב הבית...

אמר להן בני בואו ואומר לכם שלא להתאבל כל עיקר אי אפשר שכבר נגזרה גזרה ולהתאבל יותר מדאי אי אפשר שאין גוזרין על הצבור אא"כ רוב צבור יכולין לעמוד בה

The Sages taught in a *baraita* ([Tosefta, Sota 15:11](#)): **When the Temple was destroyed...**

Rabbi Yehoshua **said to them: My children, come, and I will tell you** how we should act. **To not mourn at all is impossible, as the decree was already issued** and the Temple has been destroyed. **But to mourn excessively as you are doing is also impossible, as the Sages do not issue a decree upon the public unless a majority of the public is able to abide by it**

1.2 - Some Talmudic sources on Shabbat Music

[Mishnah Beitsah 5:2](#) prohibits thigh-slapping, hand-clapping or dancing on Shabbat.

משום שבות...לא מטפחין, ולא מספקין, ולא מרקדין

For the following acts he is liable because of *sh'vut*⁷: ...one may not clap hands, nor slap [thighs], nor dance.

The associated gemara, [BT Beitsah 36b](#), attributes the prohibition to the prevention of repairing or constructing musical instruments:

ולא מטפחין ולא מספקין ולא מרקדין: גזרה שמא יתקן כלי שיר

Nor clap one's hands together, nor clap his hand on the thigh, nor dance: All of these are prohibited due to a decree that was made lest one assemble[,] put together a musical instrument to accompany his clapping or dancing.

On [BT Sukkah 50b](#), R' Yosi would allow flutes in the Temple on Shabbat if they are considered essential to the Temple song which accompanies Temple offerings, while the sages hold that instruments are not essential and so forbidden:

ת"ר החליל דוחה את השבת דברי ר' יוסי בר יהודה וחכ"א אף י"ט אינו דוחה אמר רב יוסף מחלוקת בשיר של קרבן דר' יוסי סבר עיקר שירה בכלי ועבודה היא ודוחה את השבת ורבנן סברי עיקר שירה בפה ולאו עבודה היא ואינה דוחה את השבת

The Sages taught: The flute overrides Shabbat; this is the statement of Rabbi Yosei bar Yehuda. And the Rabbis say: It does not override even a Festival. Rav Yosef said: The dispute is with regard to the song that the Levites sang accompanying the daily offering. As Rabbi Yosei bar Yehuda holds that the primary essence of song is the accompaniment by musical instruments, and consequently these instruments are a component of the Temple service and override Shabbat. The Rabbis hold that the primary essence of song is singing with the mouth, and consequently the instruments are not a component of the service; they merely accompany the singing on occasion and therefore they do not override Shabbat.

[BT Eruv. 104a](#) says that some noises might be permitted on Shabbat, while music (perhaps including *acapella* singing) is forbidden.

⁷ Rabbinic decrees to promote Shabbat observance. See Sefaria's [Introduction to Mishnah Shabbat](#) for a bit more on *sh'vut*

אמר ליה רבה לא אסרו אלא קול של שיר

Rabba said to him: The Sages **prohibited only a pleasant musical sound** on Shabbat, not the rasping sound of knocking on a door.

1.3 - Later Codes on Shabbat Music

Maimonides / [Rambam](#), in his Mishneh Torah [section on Shabbat](#), forbids on Shabbat all sorts of sounds that remotely resemble music, including tapping on a table -- lest one repair / complete a musical instrument:

כָּל דְּבַר שֶׁהוּא גִמְר מְלֶאכָה חִיב עָלָיו מְשֹׁם מַכָּה בַּפֶּטִישׁ. וּמִפְנֵי זֶה... אָסוּר לְהַשְׁמִיעַ קוֹל שֶׁל שִׁיר בְּשִׁבְתָּ בֵּין בְּכָלִי שִׁיר כְּגוֹן כְּנוֹרוֹת וְנִבְלִים בֵּין בְּשֶׁאֵר דְּבָרִים. אֶפְלוּ לְהַכּוֹת בְּאַצְבַּע עַל הַקֶּרֶקַע אוֹ עַל הַלֹּחַ אוֹ אֶחָת כְּנֶגֶד אֶחָת כְּדֶרֶךְ הַמְשׁוֹרְרִים אוֹ לְקַשֵּׁקֵשׁ אֶת הָאֵגוֹז לְתִינוּק אוֹ לְשַׁחַק בּוֹ בְּזוּג כְּדִי שִׁישְׁתֵּק כָּל זֶה וְכִיּוֹצֵא בּוֹ אָסוּר גְּזֵרָה שְׂמָא יִתְקַן כָּלִי שִׁיר

[One who does] anything that is the completion of the work [on something] is liable on account of "striking with a hammer." And because of this, one who scrapes a minimal amount or one who fixes a vessel in any way that it can be fixed is liable. Hence it is forbidden to produce musical sounds on Shabbat - whether with a musical instrument, such as harps or lyres, or whether with other things. Even to tap the ground with a finger or upon a board or one against the other in the way of singers, or to shake a nut for a baby or to play with a bell in order that he be quiet - all of this and that which is similar to it is forbidden, [as a] decree lest one fix a musical instrument.

The [Shulchan Arukh](#) in [O"Ch 338](#), also discusses sound-related prohibitions for Shabbat.

...השמעת קול בכלי שיר אסור, אבל להקיש על הדלת וכיוצא בזה כשאנו דרך שיר מתר...
...יש מתירים לומר לעכו"ם לנגן בכלי שיר בחופות

Producing noise from an instrument is forbidden, but knocking on the door or other things that are not musical are allowed...

There are some who permit telling a non-Jew to play an instrument at weddings.

Note the view permitting music at weddings, and indeed, the practice of having weddings on Shabbat! In departing from the extreme, anti-music

stance of Rambam, O"Ch probably relies on another 12th century [Rishon](#), the [Ra-avyah](#) (in his book, *Avi haEzri*). Indeed, the [Maharal of Prague](#) (in his *Be-er haGolah* [comment on O"Ch 338](#) comment on O"Ch 338) cites the [Tur](#) (by the [R"osh](#)), which while [commenting on 338](#), quotes *Avi haEzri*⁸ as saying

מותר לומר לעכו"ם לנגן בכלי שיר בחופות דאמירה לעכו"ם במקום מצוה שרי ואין שמחת חתן
וכלה בלא כלי שיר

... it is permitted to tell (i.e., request) non-Jews to play musical instruments at weddings, because telling (i.e. requesting) non-Jews (to perform activities otherwise prohibited to Jews by *sh'vut*) is permitted in the context of (i.e., for the sake of) *mitsvah*, and the *mitsvah* of a wedding absolutely requires (the playing of) musical instruments. [my translation]

Some views in O"Ch may even permit Jews themselves to play instruments: In [O"Ch 339](#), the [Rema](#) suggests not to worry about 'fixing' or 'completing' instruments, since the masses do not engage in instrument-building.

והא דמספקין ומרקדין האידנא ולא מחינן בהו משום דמוטב שיהיו שוגגין וכו' ו"א דבזמן הזה
הכל שרי דאין אנו בקיאים בעשיית כלי שיר וליכא למיגזר שמא יתקן כלי שיר דמלתא דלא שכיח
הוא

Today people clap and dance and we do not stop them because it is better that they sin unintentionally . . . There are those who say that today, everything is permitted because we are not proficient in the fixing of instruments, so there is no reason to make decrees preventing the fixing of instruments, as this skill is not pervasive.

However, [R' Epstein](#), in his [Arukh haShulchan](#), commenting on [O"Ch 339](#) objects to Rema's idea that we are not proficient to fix instruments.

והדברים מתמיהים: חדא דקשירת נימי הכנור שכיחא טובא, וכן לגלגלה על היתידות, והיינו
שמגלגלין היתד עד שתשוב הנימא להיות כנכון

⁸ Sorry, could not find *Avi haEzri* (the relevant one, by *Ra-avyah*) online

The words of Rema are incredible (i.e., incorrect): Stringing a violin, and turning pegs to tune the instrument, are widespread, common activities. [my translation]

I wonder, though, whether tuning, or even stringing a violin, counts as completing its manufacture. It may simply be considered part of the normal operation of the instrument.

1.4 - Modern Sources on Shabbat Music

Reform Judaism has long used musical instruments on Shabbat. Writing about [Israel Jacobson](#) in connection with [Reform Judaism](#), Wikipedia says that

On 17 July 1810, he dedicated a synagogue in [Seesen](#) that employed an organ and a choir during prayer and introduced some German liturgy. While Jacobson was far from full-fledged Reform Judaism, this day was adopted by the movement worldwide as its foundation date.

R' Philip Segal wrote a *T'shuvah*⁹ in 1958 saying that our [Conservative] temples / synagogues, just like the Holy Temple, are not limited by *sh'vut*, and thus would allow organ music. This leaning towards equivalence between Temple and synagogue jibes with the sort of paradigm shift developed by [Rabbi Ethan Tucker](#) in a [lecture on Egalitarianism](#), recorded on the ALEPH Moodle and available from [Mechon Hadar](#).

In his lecture, R' Tucker describes, in the context of gender equality, an Halakhic process of incremental change, which, for the gender issues, seems to amount to 'finding loopholes' to include women in some of the cases where they had been traditionally excluded. He goes on to contrast such incremental, 'loophole' change with a more fundamental paradigm shift based on the categories and concepts of the earlier laws: Women, like slaves and minors, had been in a sociological category of 'adjunct', and so women's treatment followed that of slaves and minors. However, our current, prevalent, sociological structures do not relegate women to inferior

⁹ Segal, Philip. [CJLS](#). "Teshuvah on Organs/Shabbat". 1958.

or adjunct status. Thus, laws and limitations based on one's adjunct status could shift their applicability away from women.

In a similar vein of evolving categories, today's synagogues play a role in our ritual life very similar to the role played by the holy Temple of yore -- it is no wonder that synagogues are often called 'temples'. Thus the category of Temple may have paradigm-shifted to rest upon synagogues¹⁰. And thus, synagogues might also allow music on Shabbat, just as the Temple did.

Beyond the Conservative endorsement of the use of organ music, R' Joshua Rabin [says on "My Jewish Learning"](#) that [the Conservative movement's] CJLS in 1970 published another *T'shuvah* about music on Shabbat which added other acoustic instruments such as guitar. R' Dorff and Spitz in 2008 advocated even broader permissions, although their position has not been officially accepted¹¹.

Another conceptual / category shift of the sort that Tucker employs might address a traditional objection against the use of instruments on Shabbat: Instruments may need to be tuned, thus leading to the *M'lakhah* of repairing an object, or completing the manufacture of an object, *makeh b'patish* / *tikkun mana*. In my view, the tuning of string instruments, which can happen frequently, even during a performance, is similar to the movement of valves and keys on wind instruments, and can be considered part of the normal function of the instruments, as opposed to repair or manufacture. These activities are analogous to permitted activities of buttoning one's shirt, zipping one's coat, or rolling (tuning?) a Torah scroll to a desired column.

As a matter of communal practice, note that the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism reported in 2013 on a survey about the '[Use of](#)

¹⁰ This shift might contrast with the Reform position, [expressed e.g., by My Jewish Learning](#), 'that they had abandoned the Jewish longing to rebuild the ancient temple in Jerusalem'. Of course, restoration-oriented folks might change the way they view synagogues if the Holy Temple were rebuilt

¹¹ Regrettably I did not find these music *T'shuvot* on the [CJLS](#) website

[Musical Instruments On Shabbat / Yom Tov](#)'. The Executive Summary of the reports starts by saying

Instruments are used on Shabbat or Yom Tov at half of the 365 affiliated kehillot which answered our survey.

1.5 - Halakhic Change and Music

Contemporary Conservative and Orthodox Approaches

In his lecture, "Issues in Halakhah I", recorded on the [ALEPH Moodle](#), and possibly available from [Mechon Hadar](#)¹², R' Ethan Tucker, who champions modern, liberal practices, emphasizes the value of 'Real', not just 'Ideal' Torah, e.g., by distinguishing *l'khatchillah* and *b'di-avad*; we must work in the world as it is (*b'di-avad*), not in some legislative fantasy, or Platonic ideal (*l'khatchillah*). Perhaps more radically, R' Ethan's father, [Rabbi Gordon Tucker](#), in a [T'shuvah about homosexuality](#)¹³, sympathetically cites the view of [Hartman Institute](#) Fellow, [Rabbi Moshe Halbertal](#), about 'legal positivism', the traditional, *yeshivah*-oriented approach which emphasizes the canonicity of early legal texts: P. 10 of R' Gordon Tucker's *T'shuvah* reports that Halbertal (apparently, along with Tucker)

sees positivism (what he calls the "analytic-formalist approach") as a betrayal, *in religious terms*, of the originating essence of halakhah as a way of expressing the living will of God

[Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits](#), in his book *Not in Heaven*¹⁴, mentions some principles that fit the category of *b'di-avad*: e.g., (p. 3) *Acharei rabbim lahatot*, Follow the majority even when they appear to err, which suggests that we respect the widespread practice of using instruments in many progressive synagogues.

Tucker and Berkovits also uphold proactive principles. Tucker respects 'Jewish instincts'. He also reads 'wise and understanding' ([Deut. 4:6](#)) to

¹² I did not find on Hadar's site an offering with that precise title

¹³ See especially pp. 9ff

¹⁴ Berkovits, Eliezer. *Not in Heaven. The Nature and Function of Halakha*. New York: KTAV, 1983.

entail that we must be able to proudly, persuasively offer Torah as an uplifting way of life. Berkovits promotes (p. 11) *D'rakheha dar-khei no-am*, Pleasant ways, and (p. 21) *Tikkun Olam*, Helping to improve the world. These proactive factors support adding music as a powerful and positive component in prayer.

Indeed, R' Berkovits identifies several Halakhic principles for accommodating changing times, some of which might lean towards supporting the use of music in Shabbat services. Among them,

p. 3. Acharei rabbim lahatot (taken out of its negative context of [Ex 23:2](#)), i.e., follow the majority -- if one counts non-Orthodox synagogues and Jews, many do enjoy musical services.

p. 11. D'rakheha dar-khei no-am. Her ways promote sweetness, not harsh bitterness. Music helps sweeten the prayer (and life) experience.

p. 18. Et la-asot Ladonai, heferu toratekha, act for the sake of God ([Ps. 119:126](#)), i.e., taking even extraordinary measures to help people fulfill the spirit of the Torah.

p. 19. A judge must rule according to what he himself perceives. In the present culture, it would probably be clear to a judge that for most people, music can enhance the mood of events of all sorts.

p. 21. Tikkun Olam. Helping to improve the world. The world can benefit from the balm, and sometimes transcendent spiritual power of music.

p. 26. Reasons change in the wake of small changes in circumstances. Prohibitions based on mourning the Temple or repairing items may pale in comparison to the benefits of music, as the 'season of mourning' becomes less intensely present, and as the ordinary machinations of instrument playing seem less like repairing.

p. 30. Bakesh shalom v'rodfeihu. Pursuing peace / fullness. Music can help to elevate both inspiration and humanism, as part of an integrated practice of peace and fullness.

p. 31. Uvata el hashofet asher yihyeh. Per Koholet, don't place too much importance on 'earlier days', when now music can be an important tool for our spiritual intensity.

As mentioned above, in 2013, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism reported on a survey about the '[Use of Musical Instruments On Shabbat / Yom Tov](#)'. The Executive Summary of the article says:

...While the use of instrumental music at Conservative kehillot is a significant issue, the core question (which is reflected in the United Synagogue mission) is how to create **worship which is engaging, uplifting and spiritual**. Instrumental music might **help accomplish that goal**. Each kehilla will need to determine how uplifting, spiritual worship is quantified and put into practice; some kehillot will use instrumental music and some will not. Ultimately, worship which touches the soul must be the goal of every kehilla for every worship experience.

Several of the principles mentioned above by R' Berkovits would support using music to 'help accomplish that goal' of 'worship which is engaging, uplifting and spiritual'. This goal of uplifting spirituality also fits with Reb Zalman's view of Halakhah in general, and Shabbat music specifically, as we shall soon see.

Halakhah per Reb Zalman and Jewish Renewal

Reb Zalman's book on Integral Halakhah¹⁵ eloquently emphasizes a big-picture approach to spirituality and to pressing contemporary issues. He argues that a general purpose of *Mitsvot* is to (p. 51) align us with G-d's will. *Mitsvot* (p. 33) bring out meaning for us, and reduce our resistance to G-d. They help (p. 32) to elevate us to higher levels of ethics and faith.

In general we (p. 67) need to: read Halakhah in the sources, pursue and follow it. New practices (pp. 25-26) must reflect the [Kabbalistic 4 worlds](#), connecting to our past and future and relating to a 'larger field' which should include folks still following the older paradigm. E.g., (p. 74) we might use a physical-variation / *shinui* for operating dishwashers on Shabbat, to mitigate traditional objections. We should, however, (p. 102) overturn decisions due to modern knowledge and techniques. E.g., (pp. 160-162), contemporary civil laws for business are more advanced than our traditional laws -- better to follow 'the law of the land' / *dina d'malkhuta*. We can also 'update' *Mitsvot* with new applications. E.g., (p. 14) traditional

¹⁵ Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman. *Integral Halachah. Transcending and Including*. Victoria. Trafford, 2007.

roof-fences would now suggest the use of seat-belts, (pp. 22-23) Collective honor / *K'vod tsibur* now entails egalitarianism, (p. 20) Weekday-work / *M'lakhah* shifts in meaning to correlate with outcome rather than activity, (p. 31) Eco-kashrut includes issues of animal cruelty / *tsa-ar ba-alei chayim*.

R' Zalman suggests an Halakhic process (p. 93) which

- (a) identifies concerns
- (b) researches our sources
- (c) conducts spiritual experiments, and then
- (d) posits what works now for the original intent of a practice.

In line with this approach, the enhancement of prayer via music has been well-tested experimentally, and a category-shift from Temple to synagogue, consistent with R' Tucker's methodology and R' Philip Segal's *T'shuvah*, thus builds on our tradition in the view of R' Zalman.

Following this approach, we begin with (p. 20) our 'original insight', viz., that prayer needs to be uplifting, inspiring, beautiful, deep, heartfelt, and so on. Then we recreate a given practice in ways appropriate to our current technology and mind-space, (p. 40) connecting the practice to the spiritual vision from which it derives. We (p. 50) anchor our changes in common practice and consensus, (pp. 176) respecting the morphic field of Halakhah by *puk chazi mai ama d'var*, seeing what folks do¹⁶. *Halakhah mi-Sinai* (p. 54) shifts to mean the consensus of the pious, where (p. 49) the pious of our time are those working to enliven Jewish spiritual practice. We (pp. 71-72) experiment first, before committing to a new approach, and humbly (p. 38) learn from mistakes. We also (p. 61) need to bring feminist approaches, as well as (p. 52) the above general priorities, to our practices.

¹⁶ See <https://www.sefaria.org/Eruvin.14b.20?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>, where Abaye asserts this principle in two cases, to two related Rabbis -- Rav Chanan and his son, Rava bar Rav Chanan

In connection with Shabbat, R' Zalman (p. 20) suggests that *M'lakhah* should shift in meaning to correlate with outcomes achieved via delegation or for-hire workers, rather than consisting in certain activities *per se*. Later, speaking of the need to renew / redefine the category of *M'lakhah*, R' Zalman notes (p. 77) in support of music, that the [Psalm for Shabbat](#), Ps. 92 mentioned above, recommends using instruments to praise G-d. He asserts that

musical instruments are a very *shabbosdike* thing. Based on our redefinition of *m'lachah*, however that comes out, we will also need to redefine... in what ways it is permissible to use musical instruments on Shabbat.

In line with his devotion to tradition-oriented intention / *kavanah*, R' Zalman would have us specifically sacralize this use of instruments for Musical-songs / *Shirei Zimrah*, by sanctifying it with the blessings that we use in Shacharit to bracket Verses-of-Song / *P'sukei d'Zimra*.

R' Zalman's opinions, and especially his proviso of sacralization, suggest an appropriate way to use instruments during Shabbat services in Renewal communities.

In line with R' Zalman's overall enthusiasm about using music, R' Daniel, on page 9 of his Introduction to Integral Halachah¹⁷, characterizes the Halakhic process such that it bids us to "evaluate the relationship between precedents and the principles inherited from the past in relation to this specific moment". At this moment in our history, both in Jewish and secular cultures, music plays a significant role in setting as well as amplifying our feelings. Music can help to sweeten and intensify our prayer experience, and so deserves to be allowed and even encouraged.

As well, on p. 17 of his Introduction R' Daniel says that "the halachist is charged with helping people figure out the best way to manifest G-d ... in

¹⁷ Siegel, Rabbi Daniel. *A Personal Introduction to Integral Halachah*. The Integral Halachah Institute.

the lights of our core beliefs, precedent, our vision of a better future, and ... [as] a people for whom G-d is so close". The inspiration which music can facilitate helps us to manifest G-d in our prayers, thus nurturing our feelings of holiness and closeness to G-d.

1.6 - Summary: Music, Shabbat and Mourning

On p. 49 of his book, *Integral Halachah*¹⁸ R' Zalman suggests that we anchor a viable approach to Halakhah in what he calls 'shared consensus', or 'consensus of the pious'. In connection with seeking such consensus, he claims that

the pious of our time are identified by the way in which they bring Jewish spiritual practice out into the world; how they make it come alive.

The central role that the Temple played in our religious lives has (paradigm-) shifted in our time towards community practice in institutions such as synagogues, as well as prayer and other ritual practices in the home. As music was used in the Temple on Shabbat, so now, it seems appropriate to use it in our 'Temple' prayers, that is, in our synagogues.

The level of intensity for mourning our lost Temple has also shifted. The value and import of this mourning arise from its help in letting us grieve our people's tragedies and also cherishing our tradition. We continue to mourn the Temple, along with the associated violent subjugation and exile, and the spiritual distancing / 'departure' of [Shekhinah](#). Temple mourning, as well as other tragedies in our ancient as well as modern history, follow a natural attenuation of extreme grief-practices over time. Thus, while music-making in general may have been a good thing to avoid in the immediate aftermath of the Destruction, it is now, in contrast, a good way to live in a full, healthy, spiritually robust way. As 'the best revenge is living well', so also our contemporary version of Temple-mourning (or even more-recent

¹⁸ Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman. *Integral Halachah. Transcending and Including*. Victoria. Trafford, 2007.

Holocaust-mourning) might be to live fully and deeply, adorning our prayer and celebrations beautifully by way of music.

More than mere adornment, music can help us to go beyond words, achieving a deeply felt, even mystical prayer experience. We saw [above](#) some texts from Talmud and Zohar, which claim that music enhances, or perhaps even predominates, in the expression of Biblical texts. As in Bible, so also in prayer. That is, as the spiritual message of our Biblical texts gains power from music, so might our prayers. As [Matthew Fox writes](#)

Music allows us a powerful outlet for our feelings that reach deeper than words. Schopenhauer observed 150 years ago that “only music reveals the irrational to modern man.” Psychologist William James tells that music “is the element through which we are best spoke to by mystical truth....There is a verge of the mind which these things haunt....It alone has the keeping of the password primeval.”

The use of singing and instrumental accompaniment during prayers, whether on Shabbat or at other times, helps to enliven our individual and communal prayer experience, furthering a mission of helping our Jewish spiritual practice 'come alive'. As such, I find encouragement in the Halakhic process of shifting from earlier practices to exclude music, towards the more-inspiring musical usages that one finds in many progressive communities. (More about music going beyond words in the story of the whistle, [below](#).)

Of course, given the different approaches in various streams of Judaism, the question of using instruments in a given community must also defer to community customs / standards. So my musical participation will of course depend on the prevailing custom of the community in which I am participating. In general, however, as R' Zalman endorses above, 'musical instruments are a very *shabbosdike* thing', especially if I sacralize their use with a *b'rakhah* along with the intention of Shabbat prayer enhancement.

Takeaway 1: Music is appropriate for Shabbat services, given community support and holy intention. Make a *b'rakhah*.

2. Humility, Arrogance, Dignity, Etc., for Leaders and / or Musicians

When leading prayers, either leading directly as a designated cantor or *Sh'liach Tsibbur*, or leading partially, indirectly, through the distinctive and (often) relatively strong voice of a musical instrument, there are so many factors that affect the quality of one's contribution. Aside from technical issues of accuracy in text, tune, and choreography during prayer-services, there are various (perhaps) subtle psycho-socio-spiritual dynamics at play. These factors include humility, arrogance, self-esteem, passion, consideration-for-others, assertiveness, responsiveness, and yearning for depth of artistic and spiritual experience.

Recall R' Zalman's 'Integral' [ideal to align with G-d](#) when / by performing Mitzvot, which ideal would extend to rituals including prayer. Toward this ideal, we can ask how a musician can best help to elevate the prayer experience.

As a musician participating in, supporting, services, one is generally not the 'main leader', and so ideally would be working / playing / praying in sync with that 'main' leadership, for the purpose of supporting the *kahal* and the *davening*. Still, the questions of how present, how sensitive, how passionate, how bold, how responsive, how unfettered, how humble, how arrogant to be -- these questions are similar for both musicians and traditional prayer-leaders.

Moreover, these questions are similar for both leading services and one's general conduct with others in various areas of life. In all areas of life we may seek a balance of [Yin and Yang](#) energies, of qualities such as boldness with qualities such as humility. Let us call this goal Holy Balance.

In the following texts and discussions, the nominal topics are often arrogance, humility, diffidence, ambition, lowliness and such. However, the treatments of these related topics also address, explicitly or indirectly, the whole constellation of questions / issues about musical or liturgical leadership which have been indicated above -- the question and ideal of Holy Balance.

We begin with focus on humility and arrogance.

And: It is worth noting that in Rabbinic texts, as well as in English, there are many similar, related terms for traits such as meekness, humility, shyness, diffidence, and so on. Correspondingly, there are many similar terms for arrogance, pride, and such. Writers sometimes make distinctions of nuance amongst the terms, and not all writers assign the same nuances to the same terms. One hopes that we can look beyond terminological minutiae, and still glean meaningful insights from texts about these terms.

2.1 - Mishnah Avot on Humility

If we synthesize and harmonize several teachings from Avot, we get a picture of humility as a balance between making oneself small, and taking leadership, between gentle passivity and bold assertiveness.

In [Avot 2:5](#), Hillel says

הוא (הלל) הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אֵין בּוֹר יָרָא חֲטָא, וְלֹא עִם הָאָרֶץ חֲסִיד, וְלֹא הַבִּישָׁן לִמָּד, וְלֹא הַקָּפֶדָן מְלַמֵּד, וְלֹא כָּל הַמְרַבֶּה בְּסִחוּרָה מְחֻכִּים. וּבְמָקוֹם שֶׁאֵין אָנָשִׁים, הַשְׁתַּדֵּל לִהְיוֹת אִישׁ:

He used to say: A brute is not sin-fearing, nor is an ignorant person pious; nor can a timid person learn, nor can an impatient person teach; nor will someone who engages too much in business become wise. **In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man.**

Hillel's statement is structurally regular in that most of the phrases are of the form No X is Y. However, of current interest is the last phrase: If there are no men around, then be a 'man'. In context, and ignoring the (unfortunate but typical) gender bias of the period, Hillel is saying that one must boldly step up to serve a community when no one else is available.¹⁹

A bit later, in [Avot 4:4](#), R' Levitas promotes extreme humility:

רַבִּי לִוִּיטָס אִישׁ יִבְנֶה אוֹמֵר, מֵאֵד מֵאֵד הָיִי שְׂפֵל רוּחַ

Rabbi Levitas a man of Yavneh said: be exceeding humble [of] spirit

However, precisely what may constitute humility may require some clarification. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, [discussing humility](#) in connection with political leaders (including Israelite kings and Moses), cites yet another passage from Avot. He says

[Humility] means honouring others and regarding them as important, no less important than you are. It does not mean holding yourself low; it means holding other people high. It means roughly what Ben Zoma meant when he said ([Avot 4: 1](#)), "Who is honoured? One who honours others."

Humility is not simply about holding back or making oneself small -- it entails honoring both others and self.

2.2 - Talmud on Arrogance

[BT Sotah 5a](#) presents a debate over how much arrogance, or indeed whether any arrogance at all, is appropriate. Many of the opinions recommend extreme humility, and some endorse a bit of arrogance. Rava suggests that the matter is (even paradoxically) complex:

¹⁹ With respect to the gender bias, and stereotypes about 'being a man', Douglas Adams' [ironic comment](#) comes to mind:

In those days spirits were brave, the stakes were high, men were real men, women were real women and small furry creatures from Alpha Centauri were real small furry creatures from Alpha Centauri.

ואמר ר' אלעזר כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח שכינה מיללת עליו שנאמר (תהלים קלח, ו) וגבוה ממרחק יידע

And Rabbi Elazar says: Concerning **any person who has arrogance within him, the Divine Presence wails over him. As it is stated:** “For though the Lord is high, yet regards He the lowly, and from the haughty He is pained [or: He knows only] from afar” ([Psalms 138:6](#)).

So arrogance / *gasut ru-ach* is bad.

...

אמר רב חסדא ואיתימא מר עוקבא כל אדם שיש בו גסות הרוח אמר הקב"ה אין אני והוא יכולין לדור בעולם שנא' (תהלים קא, ה) מלשני בסתר רעהו אותו אצמית גבה עינים ורחב לבב אותו לא אוכל אל תקרי אותו אלא אתו לא אוכל

Rav H̥isda says, and some say that Mar Ukva says: Concerning **any person who has arrogance within him, the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: He and I cannot dwell together in the world, as it is stated:** “He who slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I destroy; he who is haughty of eye and proud of heart, him will I not suffer [*oto lo ukhal*]” ([Psalms 101:5–6](#)). These verses should be understood as follows: **Do not read** the verse as: “*Oto lo ukhal*”; rather, read it as: *Itto lo ukhal*, meaning, **with him, I cannot bear to dwell**.

Arrogance / *gasut ru-ach* is very bad.

...

א"ר חייא בר אשי אמר רב ת"ח צריך שיהא בו אחד משמונה בשמינית א"ר הונא בריה דרב יהושע ומעטרא ליה כי סאסא לשבולתא אמר רבא בשמתא דאית ביה ובשמתא דלית ביה

Rav H̥iyya bar Ashi says that Rav says: Despite the opprobrium assigned to one who exhibits the trait of arrogance, **a Torah scholar must have one-eighth of one-eighth** of arrogance. **Rav Huna, son of Rav Yehoshua, said:** And this minute measure of arrogance **crowns him as the awn** of bristle-like growth on the top of the husk. **Rava said:** **A Torah scholar who has arrogance should be excommunicated, and one who does not have arrogance at all should be excommunicated as well.** As such, he must have only a minute measure of arrogance.

Perhaps a bit of arrogance is good... Or it is both good and bad!?

א"ר נחמן בר יצחק לא מינה ולא מקצתה מי זוטר דכתיב ביה (משלי טז, ה) תועבת ה' כל גבה לב

Rav Nah̥man bar Yitzḥak said: Even a Torah scholar **should not have any arrogance or any part of** arrogance, i.e., not even one-eighth of one-eighth. He explains why arrogance should be avoided entirely by asking: **Is it a small matter that it is written with regard to** arrogance: “Everyone that is proud of heart is an abomination to the Lord” ([Proverbs 16:5](#))?

Although they did not get 'the last word' in this discussion, in the penultimate excerpt above, R' Hiyya, R' Huna, R' Y'hoshua and Rava all seem to endorse at least some arrogance. They suggest that an extreme opposite of arrogance, such as pusillanimity, should be avoided as much as one should avoid abundant arrogance. Their statements literally speak about a 'wise student' / חכם / Torah scholar, but of course, the views could ideally apply to any of us.

Rabbi Judith Greenberg [teaches about humility](#) and mentions a couple of Talmudic passages about the related, reciprocal problem of either too little or too much ego, boldness, arrogance, and such.

She cites BT Sotah 5a and Rava's paradoxical view that having (in her terminology) haughtiness is bad, and that lacking it is bad too. R' Greenberg then recounts the story, from BT Gittin: [55b-56a](#), about a cascade of bad interpersonal behaviors and political machinations, which include Bar Kamtsa's ejection from a feast, and which culminates in a condemnation by R' Zekharya of inaction, (i.e., of failure, per [Avot 2:5](#), to 'step up' and 'be the man'):

אמר רבי יוחנן ענוותנותו של רבי זכריה בן אבקולס החריבה את ביתנו ושרפה את היכלנו
והגליתנו מארצנו

Rabbi Yoḥanan says: The excessive humility of Rabbi Zekharya ben Avkolas destroyed our Temple, burned our Sanctuary, and exiled us from our land.

She also lauds Moshe's balance of humility with action, citing the incident of Miriam's 'leprosy', and noting that

Moses's humility was remarkable not because he held himself in such low esteem, but because he was so aware of his own power and not afraid to act... While he has good reason to remain silent as his sister is punished for criticizing him, Moses cries out to God, "*El na refa na la.*" ("Please, God, heal her.") ([Num. 12:13](#))

Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld, in discussing Rambam (see immediately below), cites the view, given in the above excerpts from Sotah 5a, which advocates

having a 1/64th measure of arrogance. R' Rosenfeld interprets this view as follows:

If you want to be taken seriously — both you and the Torah you teach — you must carry yourself about as a Torah scholar.

2.3 - Rambam on Arrogance

[R' Rosenfeld notes](#) that Rambam's statements about arrogance and 'middle-paths' are somewhat difficult to reconcile: In [De-ot 1:5](#), Rambam starts out by praising excessive restraint, calling some extreme restraints 'devout'. Nonetheless, he concludes by recommending the 'middle-path'.

ומי שהוא מדקדק על עצמו ביותר ויתרחק מדעה בינונית מעט לצד זה או לצד זה נקרא חסיד. כיצד. מי שיתרחק מגבה הלב עד הקצה האחרון ויהיה שפל רוח ביותר נקרא חסיד וזו היא מדת חסידות. ואם יתרחק עד האמצע בלבד ויהיה ענו נקרא חכם וזו היא מדת חכמה. ועל דרך זו שאר כל הדעות. וחסידים הראשונים היו מטין דעות שלהן מדרך האמצעית כנגד שתי הקצוות. יש דעה שמטין אותה כנגד הקצה האחרון ויש דעה שמטין אותה כנגד הקצה הראשון. וזהו לפנים משורת הדין. ומצוין אנו ללכת בדרךים האלו הבינונים והם הדרךים הטובים והישרים שנאמר (דברים כח ט) והלכת בדרךיו

One who controls himself with increased restrictions, and distances himself even from the mean tendency,² *Shabbat*, 30-31. G. a little one way or a little the other way, is called devout. How may one do it? One who will distance himself from the extreme point of **arrogance** and become **exceedingly humble** is called devout for, this is the tendency of piety. If one distances himself to the mean point only and practices **meekness** he is called a wise man for, this is the tendency of wisdom. A like pathway exists in all the rest of the tendencies. The ancient devotees diverged their tendencies from the middle-path facing the two extremes; some tendency they bent opposite to the last extreme and some tendency they bent opposite the first extreme. This is more than being within the limits of the law.³ *Baba Mezi'a* 30a. G. **As for us, we are charged to walk in these middle-paths, which are the good and straight paths**, even as it is said: "And thou shalt walk in His ways" (*Deut.* 28 9).

Later, however, in [De-ot 2:3](#), Rambam seems to champion only extreme humility

ויש דעות שאסור לו לאדם לנהג בהן בבינונית אלא יתרחק מן הקצה האחד עד הקצה האחר. והוא גבה לב. שאין דרך הטובה שיהיה אדם ענו בלבד אלא שיהיה שפל רוח ותהיה רוחו נמוכה למאד. ולפיכך נאמר במשה רבינו (במדבר יב ג) "ענו מאד" ולא נאמר ענו בלבד. ולפיכך צו חכמים מאד מאד הוי שפל רוח. ועוד אמרו שכל המגביה לבו כפר בעקר שנאמר (דברים ח יד) ורם לבבך ושכחת את ה' אלקיך

And, yet, there are certain tendencies which man is forbidden to follow in the middle-way, but must distance himself from extreme to extreme. The good way is not merely that man be meek, but that he should be humble-spirited, then his spirit will be extremely lowly. This is the reason why it is said of Moses

that he was very meek (Num. 12.3) and not merely meek. This is also the reason why the sages commanded saying: "Be exceedingly humble of spirit" (Pirkei Avot 4.4). They, moreover, said: "He who is of a haughty heart denies the head principle" (Sotah, 4b), even as it is said: "Thine heart be then lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God" (Deut. 8.14); and they also said: "Isolated be he in whom there is a haughty spirit, even a little thereof" (Sotah. 5a).

R' Rosenfeld then tries to reconcile Rambam's two views above. He suggests that our private humility should contrast with our public dignity:

We must distinguish between our own personal attitude about ourselves and our behavior within society. ... [O]ur personal self-image must be entirely self-effacing...

Yet even so, ...[a]s self-effacing as I am within, I must carry myself about knowing my place in society and the world.

...

Whatever you think of yourself within, you do a disservice to your children, your students, and the world at large by disgracing yourself to an extreme. As a matter of fact, you do the same disservice to yourself... There is no room for arrogance within, yet neither is there for openly carrying yourself about like a born loser. We must know who we are and what we represent, and to a very small extent (as the Talmud put it, to 1/64th), we must see to it that the world takes note.

R' Rosenfeld closes with an important clarification about the concept of 'humility' under discussion:

There is another type of "humility" which the Rambam does not discuss but which should be mentioned before we move on. There is a form of false humility which although often referred to in English with the same term is actually quite a different animal: **low self-esteem**. A person suffering from this does not recognize his talents at all. He sees himself not as a unique creation of G-d, endowed with the talents to fulfill his unique mission in this world. But rather, he **sees himself as too poorly-endowed to be of very much good**. He wastes himself, likely wallowing in self-pity wishing he had someone else's talents or mission in life.

Such a shortcoming did not even enter the Rambam's discussion. This is not "humility" — recognizing one's talents but realizing they come from G-d. It is pitiable self-delusion. And there is **no more room for this in Judaism any more than there is for arrogance**. Perhaps even worse than imagining your talents are yours and not G-d's is failing to recognize you have talents in the first place. I am a nobody; I cannot fulfill any mission in life — and so I won't even bother trying. Such an attitude is not only wrong; it is tragic. It is a tragic waste of G-d's most valuable and precious possession in this world — a human being. And **as humble as we must be** regarding ourselves, we must never lose sight of the fact that each and every one of us is G-d's priceless creation.

Whatever it means to limit arrogance, R' Rosenfeld claims that we nonetheless should bolster our self-esteem, our sense of being cherished as a Divine creation.

Rambam, in the [fourth of his Eight Chapters](#), again discusses humility and some related, desirable traits from the 'middle-path':

וכן ... **והסלסול** ממוצע בין ההתנשאות ובין הנבלה, **והענוה** ממוצעת בין הגאווה ושפלות הרוח...
וטוב לב ממוצע בין הנבלה ויתרון טוב הלבב

Likewise, ...**dignity**, [is the mean] between haughtiness and loutishness; **humility**, between arrogance and self-abasement...and **magnificence [literally good of heart]**, between meanness and profusion²⁰

...

We all, and so also musicians participating in prayers, should seek the middle-paths, which Rambam describes, of dignity, humility and good-heartedness.

לב טוב קורים מי שכל כוונתו להטיב לבני אדם בגופו ובממנו ועצתו בכל יכולתו בלתי ששיגהו נזק או בזיון והוא האמצעי, **הנבל** הוא הפך זה והוא מי שאינו רוצה להועיל לבני אדם בדבר אפילו במה שאין בגו חסרון ולא טורח ולא נזק, והוא הקצה האחרון, **ויתרון טוב הלבב** הוא שעושה הדברים הנזכרים בלב טוב, ואפילו אם ישיגהו בזה נזק גדול או בזיון או טורח רב או הפסד מרובה, והוא הקצה הראשון

A man is called **magnificent [or good-hearted]** whose whole intention is to do good to others by personal service, by money, or advice, and with all his power, but without meanwhile bringing suffering or disgrace upon himself. That is the medium line of conduct. The **mean [loutish] man** is one who does not want others to succeed in anything, even though he himself may not thereby suffer any loss, hardship, or injury. That is the one extreme. The **profuse man**, on the contrary, is one who willingly performs the above-mentioned deeds, in spite of the fact that thereby he brings upon himself great injury, or disgrace, terrible hardship, or considerable loss. That is the other extreme

...

Good-heartedness, which Sefaria (the source for the above translations) here translates as 'magnificence', entails helping others whole-heartedly while at the same time not harming or demeaning oneself.

ובושת פנים ממוצע בין העזות **והביישנות**

and **modesty** [is the mean], between impudence and **shamefacedness**

²⁰ Note that 'ממוצע' / 'the mean' indicates the middle-path, not any cognate of 'nasty' -- though he also mentions *naval* / 'a mean [or loutish] person'

פי' נראה מדברי רבותי' ז"ל **שבוישן** אצלם הוא מי שיש לו רוב בושת, **ובוש פנים** הוא הממוצע מאמרם לא הביישן למד, ולא אמרו אין בוש פנים, ואמרו בוש פנים לגן עדן, ולא אמרו **הביישן** לגן עדן

The explanation of these latter terms, gleaned from the sayings of our sages (may their memory be blessed!) seems to be this. In their opinion, **a modest man** is one who is very bashful, and therefore **modesty** is the mean. This we gather from their saying, (Pirkei Avot 2:5) "A shamefaced man cannot learn". They also assert, (Pirkei Avot 5:20) "A modest man is worthy of Paradise", but they do not say this of a **shamefaced** man

There is a close linguistic connection in Hebrew between *boshet panim* / 'shy- or shame-of-face' on the one hand, and *bay'shan* / 'a shy or bashful person' on the other hand. *Boshet panim* designates Rambam's middle-path, which Sefaria consistently translates as 'modesty'. However, Sefaria inconsistently translates Rambam's term for the undesired extreme, *bay'shanut* -- sometimes translated in terms of 'shamefaced', and sometimes in terms of 'modesty'.

Of course, as noted [above](#), terms related to humility, shyness, etc. are nuanced in various ways according to different Rabbinic sources. In our current context, Rambam explains *bay'shan* as **מי שיש לו רוב בושת** / 'one who is very bashful', while he suggests the middle-path of *boshet panim* / modesty. As a service leader, or musician contributor, we should aspire to modesty. Nonetheless we should aspire to contribute, with all the dignity, skill, talent and good-heartedness that we can muster.

2.4 - Shulchan Arukh on Egotistical Chanting

The [Shulchan Arukh](#), [Orach Chayyim](#) (O"Ch) denigrates cantors whose motives are less about joy in serving G-d, and more about selfish enjoyment and aggrandizement. In [O"Ch 53.11](#) it says:

ש"ץ שמאריך בתפלה כדי שישמעו קולו ערב אם הוא מחמת ששמח בלבו על שנותן הודאה להש"י בנעימה תבא עליו ברכה והוא שיתפלל בכבוד ראש ועומד באימה ויראה אבל אם מכוין להשמיע קולו ושמח בקולו ה"ז **מגונה** ומ"מ כל שמאריך בתפלתו לא טוב עושה מפני טורח הצבור:

A leader who lengthens the prayer so that people will hear his pleasant voice: if it was because of the joy in his heart that he gives thanks to God, may He be praised, in pleasantness, a blessing shall come upon him. And this is the one who would pray with weighty intention and stands in dread and fear, but if he intends to make his voice heard and rejoice in his voice, behold this is **detestable**. And in any case, anyone who lengthens his prayer does something that is not good because of burdening the congregation.

This condemnation of egoism over sincere, devotional passion fits with R' Zalman's and Integral Halakhah's general stance towards *Mitsvot*. The aim is to elevate, to align us with G-d, as opposed to more-selfish, egoistic goals.

The [Mishnah B'rurah](#), in connection with the above pericope of O"Ch, has a note on the word מגונה / 'detestable', with story from [Sefer Chasidim](#). At [53.35](#), Mishnah B'rurah says:

מגונה - איתא בס"ח בשעה שרשב"ג יצא לד' ליהרג אמר לר' ישמעאל כה"ג אחי מפני מה אני יוצא ליהרג א"ל שמא היית דורש ברבים ושמח לבך ונהנית מד"ת א"ל אחי נחמתני

'Detestable' -- There is in *Sefer Chasidim* [the story] that when [R' Shim'on ben Gamliel](#) was on his way to be executed [by the Romans], he asked R' Yishma-el the High Priest: Why am I going to be killed. R' Yishma-el answered: Maybe when you taught / interpreted in public, it made you happy -- you derived enjoyment from words of Torah. R' Shim'on [thanked him, and] said: You have comforted me²¹. [my translation]

Happily, O"Ch does not take a view that is quite as extreme, as self-abnegating, as the view espoused in *Sefer Chasidim*. Rather, O"Ch seems to condone one's own enjoyment while contributing, as long as the enjoyment centers on the holy work, rather than on narcissistic, egotistical satisfaction.

2.5 - Hasidic Teachings on Boldness and Humility

Whistle as Effective Prayer

How does one balance skill vs. sincerity, decorum vs. passion, in public spiritual practice such as prayer-services? This question about [Holy](#)

²¹ Per that [page of Sefer Chasidim](#), in pericope 8 and its note 14, he may have been comforted that he had not committed a more grievous sin. Or perhaps he took comfort simply by knowing just what specifically was his sin

[Balance](#) reverberates in a somewhat well-known Hasidic story, a story which appears in many variants²². The story addresses Holy Balance in the case of a simple, illiterate person who whistles as his expression of prayer. My favorite version of the whistle story appears on pages 322-324 in Ani Tuzman's, *The Tremble of Love*²³. Towards the end of the long day of Yom Kippur services, Yisroel, the [Baal Shem Tov](#), to the growing discomfort of the congregation, lingers in prayer, as if unable to accomplish what needed to be prayed...

Suddenly, a piercing whistle sounded... A poorly dressed boy blew a second time on a small shepherd's pipe..."We pray each day," Yisroel's voice boomed. "*And you shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.* Just now, a pure sound issued with heart, soul, and all the might of this child has lifted the rest of our prayers.

The story suggests that one's passion, one's sincerity, are essential constituents of effective prayer. Along these lines, one's full-hearted, sincere offering of musical accompaniment would be valued over relatively uninspired, pedestrian modes of prayer.

If we imagine the whistle as blending the boy's passion with and complementing the simultaneous chanting of words (by other congregants), then this story might be a good example of music aiding, enlivening, perhaps even 'leading' the words. This would jibe with Joey Weisenberg's interpretation of Zohar that we saw [above](#).

Two Pockets

Another [story about Holy Balance](#), also somewhat well-known, comes from [R' Simcha Bunam](#):

ואנכי עפר ואפר, אמר שכל אחד ואחד צריך להיות לו שני קעשענשס להשתמש בו בעת צרכו, בקעשיננע א' בשבילי נברא העולם (סנהדרין דף ל"ז) ובהקעשיננע השני אני עפר ואפר, אלא שהרבה טועין ומשתמשין בהיפך ממה שצריכים להשתמש

Rabbi Bunam said to his disciples:

²² Some of them show up in [this search](#)

²³ Tuzman, Ani. *The Tremble of Love* (Hatfield, MA: Dancing Letters Press, 2016)

Everyone must have two pockets, so that he can reach into the one or the other, according to his needs. In his right pocket are the words: 'For my sake was the world created,' and in his left: 'I am earth and ashes.' [The] only problem is that many utilize the wrong pocket.²⁴

We are all, both vitally important to the world, but also, ultimately simply, dust of the world temporarily constituted in a way to help raise holy sparks.

R' Nachman: Important Dust

[R' Nachman](#), a champion (and probably himself a seeker) of optimism and self-esteem²⁵, makes dust even more important. In Likutei Moharan [he writes](#):

וְהַצַּדִּיק הוּא בְּחִינַת עָפָר הַנִּל, כִּי הַצַּדִּיק הוּא יְסוּד עוֹלָם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב (משלי י"כ"ה): וְצַדִּיק יְסוּד עוֹלָם; וְכָל הַדְּבָרִים עוֹמְדִים עָלָיו, וַיֵּשׁ לוֹ כֹּחַ הַמּוֹשֵׁךְ

...

Now, the tzaddik is the aspect of the abovementioned dust. For he is the world's foundation, as it is written (Proverbs 10:25), "the tzaddik is the foundation of the world." All things stand on him, and he has an attracting force...

Looking to R' Nachman's ideal, we can identify ourselves in general, and specifically those functioning as a service-leading 'Tzaddik', with the foundational force and function of dust in the above text.

Note that dust can be considered very lowly, unimportant, 'merely' dirty. Accordingly, the Tzaddik is very low-key, even humble. However, in its packed form on the ground, dust is also the foundation on which other things stand or move about. Thus a 'dusty' Tzaddik in fact (spiritually) supports all things that stand or move about. It might be a bit metaphysical or anachronistic, but perhaps R' Nachman is thinking about dust as 'substance' in general, substance which exerts (spiritually) a gravitation-like force of attraction. So also the Tzaddik, in the way of humble but foundational, substantive dust, exerts a (spiritual) attracting force.

²⁴ Last sentence is my translation

²⁵ See Green, Arthur (1992). *Tormented Master: The Life and Spiritual Quest of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav*. Jewish Lights Publishing.

R' Nachman: Boldness

Perhaps directly related to our aspiration of Holy Balance, the following text from R' Nachman speaks to the importance of boldness for anyone pursuing Torah (and similarly, anyone pursuing spirituality, holiness, and so on). [He says](#):

אך הוא יודע זאת, על ידי העזות והתורה של כל אחד ואחד, אם תפלתו היתה כהוגן אם לאו. כי יש שני מיני עזות; כי יש עזות דקדושה, שאי אפשר לקבל את התורה כי אם על-ידי זה העזות דקדושה, כמו שאמרו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה (אבות פ"ב): לא הביטין למד; וכמו שאמרו רבותינו זכרונם לברכה (ביצה כה): מפני מה נתנה תורה לישראל, מפני שעזין הן; וכמו שאמרו (אבות פ"ה) הוי עז כנמר. ובשביל זה התורה נקראת עז, כמו שכתוב (תהילים כ"ט: י"א-י"א): ה' עז לעמו יתן, (וכמו שפירש"י, וכן בזבחים קט"ז). כי אי אפשר לבוא אל התורה, כי אם על ידי עזות דקדושה.

However, he knows this—whether his prayer was proper or not—by means of the boldness and the Torah of each person. For there are two types of boldness. There is a holy boldness, without which it is impossible to receive the Torah. As our Sages said: The bashful person does not learn (Avot 2:5). They also taught: Why was the Torah given to Israel? because they are bold (Beitza 25b). And: Be bold as a leopard (Avot 5:20). And this is the reason the Torah is called “bold,” as is written (Psalms 29:11), “God give boldness to His people.” For it is impossible to approach the Torah without holy boldness.

וכנגד זה יש להפוך, עזות מן הסטרא אחרא, שמשם באין תורות אחרות. שהן תורות של הון, ושהם בחינת פסילים, כי כל מי שיש בו עזות, בידוע שלא עמדו רגליו אבותיו על הר סיני -- נדרים כ.

Contrasting this, there is the reverse, the brazenness of the Other Side. From there comes other Torah, their Torah. For they are the aspect of idolatry, because, [as our Sages taught:] Whoever is brazen-faced, it is certain that the feet of his ancestors did not stand at Mount Sinai (Nedarim 20a).

In contrasting 'holy boldness' vs. 'brazenness of the Other Side', Torah vs. Idolatry, R' Nachman's teaching can be read as characterizing proper boldness in terms of our Holy Balance.

2.6 - Mussar on Humility

The [Mussar movement](#) manifests currently in institutions such [The Center for Contemporary Mussar](#) and the well-cited [The Mussar Institute](#), whose founder, Dr. [Alan Morinis](#), has published several books related to Mussar.

However, we also have Mussar resources that are several hundred years old. Consider, e.g., [Duties of the Heart](#) by [Bachya Ibn Paquda](#), a traditional classic text of Mussar²⁶ from the late 11th century.

Dr. Morinis discusses Ibn Paquda in his [teaching about humility](#), reporting about his

...posing a question: on what do the virtues depend? His [Ibn Paquda's] answer is clear: "All virtues and duties are dependent on humility." This is a principle all later Mussar teachers have endorsed—the first leg of the spiritual life involves the cultivation of humility—called anavah or shiflut in Hebrew.

Unfortunately, "humility" sounds so much like "humiliation" that it's easy to get a very wrong impression of this soul-trait. In the traditional Jewish understanding, humility has nothing to do with being the lowest, most debased, shrinking creature on earth. Rav Kook says it well:

Humility is associated with spiritual perfection. When humility effects depression it is defective; when it is genuine it inspires joy, courage and inner dignity.

Mussar teaches that real humility is always associated with healthy self-esteem. Lack of self-esteem leads to unholy and false feelings of worthlessness.

Being humble doesn't mean being nobody: it just means being no more of a somebody than you ought to be. After all, Moses, who is considered the greatest of the prophets, is described in the Torah as "very anav [humble], more than any other men who were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

If a leader as great as Moses was so humble, then there is surely more to humility than the shrinking meekness we ordinarily associate with the term.

Too little humility—what we'd call arrogance or conceit—is easily seen as a spiritual impediment, but the opposite is also true. Too much humility also throws a veil across the inner light of the soul.

Healthy, dare we say 'holy' humility comes along with healthy self-esteem.

The passage from *Duties of the Heart* alluded to by Morinis, which claims that humility underlies all virtues and duties, appears, I believe, in the "[Sixth Treatise \[which is\] on Submission](#)":

²⁶ Though Sefaria categorizes it instead under 'Philosophy'

זזה מחייב שתהיינה כל המדות הטובות והחובות סמוכות לכניעותו והיא ראש ותחלה להן, והדין נותן בעבור זה שלא תתכן מדה טובה למי שלבו ריק מהכניעה לאלהים ויש בלבבו מאומה מן הגאווה והגדולה

Hence, it follows that all moral qualities are secondary to the trait of **submission**, which is the head and beginning of all of them. And it follows logically from this, that no piety can possibly exist in one whose heart is devoid of submission to G-d or has in it any trace of arrogance or pride.

Note that 'כניעות' and 'submission' are among the many apparent synonyms for what we are usually calling 'עניויות' and 'humility'. Dr. Morinis goes on to cite the

Talmud where it says: “Anyone who sets a particular place for himself to pray in the synagogue, the God of Abraham stands in his aid, and when he dies, people say of him, ‘this was a humble person’” ([Brachot 6b](#)).

Where is the humility in sitting in the same place in the synagogue whenever you come to pray? The answer is that by fixing yourself to one spot, you thereby free up all the other space for others to use.

This example helps us frame a Jewish definition of humility as “**limiting oneself to an appropriate amount of space while leaving room for others**.” Sitting in a predictable place, you make room for others to occupy their own spaces, too. Zechariah ben Avkulas gave up too much of his “space,” considering that the space a person can occupy can be physical, emotional, verbal, or even metaphorical.

Applying an emendation from Rabbi Nadya Gross²⁷, I believe the following formulation expresses some of the qualities of [Holy Balance](#):

Takeaway 2: Holy Balance entails: Taking up the appropriate amount of (energetic and physical) space for the current situation.

Takeaway 2 is further bolstered by another modern source in the Mussar tradition, that is, the great early-twentieth-century Rabbi, [Rav Abraham Isaac Kook](#). R' Kook was known as a thinker, a *posek* and a kabbalist. Some of his teachings contribute to our Mussar literature. For example, his book, [Middot ha-Ra-ayah](#), has a chapter about *anavah* / humility.²⁸ Dr.

²⁷ In personal conversation

²⁸ Thanks to my friend, and Mussar teacher / scholar, R' David Jaffe, for steering me towards this book

Morinis paraphrases some of this chapter in his teaching quoted above. Here are some salient excerpts from R' Kook's [chapter](#):²⁹

כל-זמן שהענוה מביאה עצבון היא פסולה וכשהיא כשרה מוסיפה היא שמחה, גבורה וכבוד פנימי

Whenever humility brings sadness, it is deprecated / invalid. When it is valid ('kosher') it adds joy, courage and inner dignity.

לפעמים אין צריכים להתיירא מגדלות, שהיא מרוממת את האדם לפעול גדולות, והענוה כולה מבוססת על גדלות קדושה כזאת

Sometimes we do not need to fear [and so to eschew] greatness, which elevates us to perform great deeds. Indeed, humility is completely based on such sacred greatness.

מהזמן שסובלים בו ממחשבות והרגשות של גסות-הרוח, לוקחים כח לנצח כל המדות הרעות שמיסוד השפלות, ולתן ברק חיים לשכל הטהור המזוקק. ומחברים אח"כ את מדת הענוה והשפלות וכל מעלותיה עם אותם היתרונות שנלקחו מתמצית הטוב שבטומאת הגאווה

From the periods when we suffer with thoughts and feelings of arrogance, we can derive strength later to prevail over all the evil qualities [of arrogance] that [arise] from the foundations of lowliness, and thus we give a flash of vitality towards a pure, refined intellect. And then we connect the attributes of humility and lowliness³⁰, along with all their virtues, with the same benefits that are derived from the essence of goodness that are [buried] in the impurity of arrogance.

R' Kook seems to encourage us to 'step up' and contribute, with courage, greatness and joy, having transmuted into pure, holy humility any impurities of aggrandized self-importance, or, for that matter, any impurities of enervating, depressing, poor self-esteem.

2.7 - Additional Contemporary Discussions of Humility

Of course, humility in those who are leading groups can have a greater impact / contribution than in private interactions. Relative to leaders, R' Jonathan Sacks reports, in his above-mentioned discussion on the ['Greatness of Humility'](#):

Harvard Business Review published the results of a survey that showed that "The best leaders are humble leaders."³¹ They learn from criticism. They are confident enough to empower others and praise their contributions. They take

²⁹ With my translation

³⁰ R' Kook seems to treat *anavah* / 'humility' and *shiflut* / 'lowliness' as synonymous

³¹ Jeanine Prime and Elizabeth Salib, 'The Best Leaders are Humble Leaders', Harvard Business Review, 12 May 2014.

personal risks for the sake of the greater good. They inspire loyalty and strong team spirit.

Joey Weisenberg on Musical Humility

Musician, singer, song-writer, [Joey Weisenberg](#) is a prominent, current teacher / leader of spiritual singing. In an online teaching about [humility in relation to music-making](#), Joey says about the Song of the Sea³² that

Moses, the “most humble” leader of our tradition... (and/or his sister Miriam) would compose and sing the first half of each line, and then the entire community of Israel would spontaneously respond with the second half of each line. (Talmud Bavli Sotah 30b) In this way, Moses led and listened, negotiating the full spectrum from silence to sound. His song — which eventually expanded to include the entire Torah — grew from his humility.

I believe Joey may be referring to this part of [Sotah 30b](#):

ורבי אליעזר בנו של ר"י הגלילי סבר לאמר אכל מילתא ומילתא ור' נחמיה ' סבר ויאמרו דאמור
כולהו בהדי הדדי לאמר דפתח משה ברישא

And Rabbi Eliezer, son of Rabbi Yosei HaGelili, holds that the word “**saying**” is referring to **every single word**, as they would repeat after Moses every word. **And Rabbi Neḥemya holds** that the phrase “**and they said**” (Exodus 15:1) indicates **that everyone recited** the song of the sea **together**, and the word “**saying**” means **that Moses began** singing the song **first**; and then the rest of the people sang the beginning after him and they all continued in unison.

Joey also alludes to Yalkut Shimoni on *Nakh*, where in [section 889.2](#), a frog responds to King David's arrogance as a composer:

אמרו על דוד המלך בשעה שסיים ספר תהלים זחה דעתו עליו אמר לפניו רבש"ע כלום יש דבר
בעולם שאמר שירה כמותי, נזדמנה לו צפרדע אחת אמרה לו אל תזוח דעתך עליך שאני אומרת
שירה יותר ממך, ועל כל שירה ושירה שאני אומרת אני ממשלה עליה שלשת אלפים משל,
שנאמר וידבר שלשת אלפים משל ויהי שירו חמשה ואלף

They said that when King David finished composing the book of Psalms, his ego went wild and he said, Master of the World, no-one (nothing) could compose song/poetry [as well as] me. A frog appeared and said, calm down, my poetry is better than yours -- for each of my poems, I can find 3000 proverbs/parables, similar to Shlomo in [1 Kings: 5:12](#), who had 5000 poems, 3000 proverbs/parables. [my translation]

Joey then mentions a story from an appendix of [Targum Sheni](#):

³² [Ex. 15:1-19](#)

Once, [King Solomon] took out his father's harp and began to play, and all of the animals gathered from around the world to listen to his heavenly music. At regular intervals, Solomon would stop playing and carefully listen to the animals just as they had listened to him; from them he heard the stories and wisdom of the entire world. (*Targum Sheni*, appendix I) In this way, Solomon merited the right to compose, eventually, "The Song of Songs."

I didn't find this precise story. However, *Targum Sheni*, Appendix I does say (on [p. 270](#)) that Solomon understood the languages of animals (and thus attentive-listening to them would be implied), and that Solomon played music for animals to dance (p. 275). The first statement probably arises from [1 Kings 5:13](#), which indicates that Solomon understood animals.

יג וַיְדַבֵּר, עַל-הָעֵצִים, מִן-הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר בְּלִבָּנוֹן, וְעַד הָאֲזוֹב אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא בְקִיר; וַיְדַבֵּר עַל-הַבְּהֵמָה וְעַל-הָעוֹף, וְעַל-הָרֶמֶשׂ וְעַל-הַדְּגִים.	13 And he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spoke also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.
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About this verse, Nathan Aaberg, in an [online article](#), says:

One inference I would make from verse [4:33] [5:13] would be that not only did Solomon speak about plants, animals, birds, reptiles, and fish but that his wisdom about the natural life around him ultimately came from close personal observation. This, too, tells us something about Solomon. Observing and understanding the natural world takes **patience, prolonged concentration, humility, and attention to the interplay of many different factors**. Doesn't that sound like an ideal foundation for developing wisdom?³³

Listening, so essential to musical or other collaborations, also figures in Solomon's prayer of [1 Kings 3:9](#), in which he aspires to 'heart-listening':

ט וְנָתַתָּ לְעַבְדְּךָ לֵב שֹׁמֵעַ, לִשְׁפֹּט אֶת-עַמִּי, לְהַבִּין, בֵּין-טוֹב לְרָע: כִּי מִי יוֹכֵל לִשְׁפֹּט, אֶת-עַמִּי הַכָּבֵד הַזֶּה.	9 Give Thy servant therefore an understanding ["listening/hearing"] heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to judge this Thy great people?
--	---

³³With my emphasis and some minor edits

3. Aspirational Humility, Grounded on Respect and Esteem

The kind of humble, balanced leadership towards which we aspire may be founded on healthy respect and esteem for self, for other leaders, and for the *kahal*. Rebbe Nachman, with some help from Rav Kook, gives some guidance as to how we might nourish such esteem and respect. This guidance can help us to develop a leadership style which manifests humility in Holy Balance, including love, courage, and presence, while eschewing egotism or arrogance.

R' Nachman on Dots and Soul-Songs

In a proactive, desirably ambitious zone of the constellation of leadership qualities, R' Nachman teaches, in the following excerpted sections from [Likutei Moharan: 282](#), about 'connecting the dots'. The 'dots' initially stand for 'good points' in oneself and in one's kahal, good points which, with persistent, sincere, compassionate discernment, one can always find. Later, R' Nachman also seems to associate these points with musical notes -- perhaps he was familiar with the 'dots'³⁴ used in [modern musical notation](#).

ידע, כי צריך לדון את כל אדם לכף זכות, ואפילו מי שהוא רשע גמור, צריך לחפש ולמצא בו איזה מעט טוב, שבאותו המעט אינו רשע, ועל ידי זה שמוצא בו מעט טוב, ודן אותו לכף זכות, על-ידי-זה מעלה אותו באמת לכף זכות, ויוכל להשיבו בתשובה.

Know, a person must judge everyone favorably (Avot 1:6). Even someone who is completely wicked, it is necessary to search and find in him some modicum of good; that in that little bit he is not wicked. And by finding in him a modicum of good and judging him favorably, one genuinely elevates him to the scale of merit and can bring him to repent.

We should look for even a modicum of good in everyone.

...

וכן צריך האדם למצא גם בעצמו. כי זה ידוע, שצריך האדם לזהר מאד להיות בשמחה תמיד, ולהרחיק העצבות מאד מאד -- כמבאר אצלנו כמה פעמים,

³⁴ As in [this drawing](#)

Likewise, a person must find [some good point] within himself. It is known that a person must take care to be happy always and to keep very far away from depression {as has been explained in our works a number of times}.

And also, we should look for good in ourselves.

...

וְכִמוּ כֵן צָרִיךְ לְחַפֵּשׂ עוֹד, לְמַצֵּא בְּעַצְמוֹ עוֹד אֵיזָה דְּבָר טוֹב, וְאִף שֶׁגַּם אוֹתוֹ הַדְּבָר הַטוֹב הוּא גַּם-כֵּן מְעֵרָב בְּפִסְלֵת הָרַבָּה, עִם כָּל זֶה יוֹצֵיאַ מִשָּׁם גַּם-כֵּן אֵיזָה נִקְדָּה טוֹבָה. וְכֵן יִחַפֵּשׂ וְיִלְקֹט עוֹד הַנִּקְדוֹת טוֹבוֹת

Likewise, he must go on searching until he finds in himself yet another good thing. And although this good thing too is mixed with much impurity, still, he must extract some good point from there as well. Indeed, he must go on searching and gathering further good points.

R' Nachman exhorts us to find the good points in ourselves and in others, even when these good points might be obscured by, mixed in with, impurity. This approach resonates with R' Kook's advice, of a couple hundred years later. R' Kook writes about nourishing a healthy sort of humility, resulting in overall psycho-spiritual happiness. R' Kook's method³⁵ to nourish our humility has us find the essence of goodness even in moments of incipient arrogance.

לְהִתְדַבֵּק הָרַבָּה בַּעֲנוּהָ, וְכָשִׁיבָא לוֹ רַעִיּוֹן שֶׁל גֵּאוּהָ אוֹ הִרְגָּשָׁה גֵּאוּתִיטָה יִקַּח אֶת תְּמִצִּית הַטוֹב שֶׁלָּהּ לְגִבּוּרָה שֶׁל קְדוּשָׁה. וְהַפְסוּלֵת יִשְׁלִיךְ בְּבַחֲלִיהָ, וְאֵז יוֹסִיף עֲנוּהָ עַל עֲנוּהָ וְיִהְיֶה תְּמִיד בְּשִׂמְחָה וְטוֹב לֵב מִשְׁתָּה תְּמִיד שֶׁמֶן הַכֹּל מִקְבֵּל תְּמִצִּית עֵדִינָה הַמִּתְמַצֶּה מֵעוֹמֵק הַמַּדּוּת, דּוֹגְמַת סַחִיטָה עֲנָבִים לִהְיוֹת לִיּוֹן יִשְׁמַח לִבָּב אֲנוֹשׁ

To cling strongly to humility, and when we have an idea or feeling of arrogance we will take the good essence of that idea / feeling and use it for the strength / discipline of holiness. And the leftover, dross of the idea / feeling will be discarded, and we will thereby continually increase in humility and always be joyful and good-natured, as if always feasting. For from anything we will receive a sweet essence, which comes from the depth of [positive] attributes, like the example of squeezing grapes into Wine which gladdens the hearts of humans ([Ps. 104:15](#)). [my translation]

Rather than squeezing grapes, R' Nachman, continuing in [Likutei: 282](#), describes how we go on to string together the found, good points, resulting in the composition and performing of 'soul-melodies':

³⁵ From his [chapter on humility](#), which we mentioned above

ועל-ידי-זה נעשין נגונים, כמבאר במקום אחר (במאמר ויהי מקץ בסי' נ"ד), בחינת מנגן בכלי זמר, שהוא בחינת שמלקט הרוח טובה מן הרוח נכאה עצבות רוח, עין שם. -- והכלל, כי נגינה דקדשה היא גבוה מאד מאד כידוע, ועקר הנגון נעשה על-ידי ברור הטוב מן הרע, שעל-ידי שמבררין ומלקטין הנקודות טובות מתוך הרע, על-ידי-זה נעשים נגונים וזמירות, עין שם היטב

And it is through this that melodies are made. As explained elsewhere, the aspect of playing a musical instrument is the aspect of gathering the good *ruach* from the *ruach* of gloom, depression; see there. -- The principle is that music of holiness is extremely lofty, as is known. In essence, music is made through the separation of good from evil; by selecting and gathering the good points from the bad, melodies and songs are created. Study there well.

Identifying the good points in people is like finding the best, most beautiful notes for a melody.

...

זה בחינת (תהלים קמ"ו:ב'): אַזְמְרָה לֵאלֹהֵי בְעוֹדִי – בְּעוֹדִי דִיקָא, הֵינוּ עַל יְדֵי בְחִינַת הָעוֹד שְׁלִי, שְׁאֵנִי מוֹצֵא בְּעַצְמִי בְחִינַת: עוֹד מַעֲט וְאֵין רָשָׁע כִּנ"ל, עַל יְדֵי אוֹתָהּ הַנִּקְדָּה, עַל-יְדֵי-זֶה אוֹכֵל לְזַמֵּר וְלְהוֹדוֹת לָהּ כִּנ"ל.

This is the aspect of "I will sing to God *b'odi* (while I still have being / while I still have more life)" ([Psalms 146:2](#)). Specifically *with my 'more'*—i.e., by means of the 'yet more' that I find in myself, the aspect of "With just a little bit more the wicked man is not," as explained above. By means of this point I am able to sing and give praise to God, as explained above.[many of my edits of the Sefaria translation]

We find more and more good qualities, in people, more and more beautiful notes for our melodies.

זהו: אַזְמְרָה – אַזְמְרָה דִיקָא, הֵינוּ זְמִירוֹת וְנִגּוֹנִים שֶׁנַּעֲשִׂין עַל יְדֵי שְׁמִלְקֻט הַנִּקְדּוֹת טוֹבוֹת כִּנ"ל

And this is: **I will sing**—Specifically "I will sing"; i.e., the songs and melodies that are made by gathering the good points, as explained above.

The root of the Hebrew verb for 'sing' / *azamra* can also mean 'to gather'.

...

ודע, שמי שיכול לעשות אלו הנגונים, דהינו ללקט הנקודות טובות שנמצא בכל אחד מישראל, אפלו בהפושעי ישראל כנ"ל, הוא יכול להתפלל לפני העמוד, כי המתפלל לפני העמוד, הוא נקרא שליח צבור, וצריך שיהיה נשלח מכל הצבור, דהינו שצריך שיקבץ כל נקדה טובה שנמצא בכל אחד מהמתפלליו, וכל הנקודות טובות יהיו נכללין בו, והוא יעמד ויתפלל עם כל הטוב הזה, וזהו שליח צבור, וצריך שיהיה בו בחינה גבוהה כזו, שעל-ידי-זה יהיו כל הנקודות תאבים אליו, ויהיו נכללין בו,

Know, too, that someone who is capable of making these melodies—i.e., gathering the good points that are to be found in each Jew, even a Jewish sinner, as explained above—he can lead the communal prayers. For one who leads the communal prayers is called the messenger of the people; he must be sent by all the people—i.e., he must gather every good point that is to be found in each of the congregants. All these good points are merged in him, so that when he stands up to pray, it is with all this good. This is the meaning of “messenger of the people.” Thus, he must have within him this exalted aspect, as a result of which all the points are drawn to him and become merged within him.

A leader gathering good notes into melodies corresponds spiritually to the leader harmoniously blending and manifesting the various good points of the people in the community.

ומי שִׁיכּוֹל לַעֲשׂוֹת נְגוּנִים הַנֵּל, דְּהֵינּוּ שִׁיכּוֹל לְדוֹן אֶת כָּל אָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת, אֶפְלוּ אֶת הַקָּלִים וְהָרָשָׁעִים, כִּי מִשְׁתַּדֵּל לְחַפֵּשׂ וּלְבַקֵּשׁ לְמַצָּא בְּכֻלָּם נִקְדּוֹת טוֹבוֹת כִּנ"ל, שְׁעַל-יְדֵי-זֶה נַעֲשִׂין נְגוּנִים כִּנ"ל, זֶה הַצַּדִּיק שְׂאוֹחֵז בְּמַדְרָגָה זֹאת, הוּא יָכוֹל לִהְיוֹת חֲזָן וְשָׁלִיחַ צְבוֹר, דְּהֵינּוּ לְהַתְפַּלֵּל לְפָנֵי הָעַמּוּד, כִּי הוּא יֵשׁ בּוֹ בְּחִינָה זוֹ הַצְרִיכָה לְהַשְׁלִיחַ-צְבוֹר הָהֵגוֹן בְּאַמֶּת, שְׁצָרֶיהָ שִׁיחָהּ בּוֹ בְּחִינָה, שִׁיחָיו כָּל הַנִּקְדּוֹת טוֹבוֹת תְּאֵבִים אֵלָיו וְיֵהִיו נִכְלָלִין בּוֹ כִּנ"ל, כִּי הוּא יָכוֹל לְקַבֵּץ כָּל הַנִּקְדּוֹת טוֹבוֹת שֶׁנִּמְצָא בְּכָל אֶחָד מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל, אֶפְלוּ בְּפוֹשְׁעֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּנ"ל

And someone who can make the aforementioned melodies—i.e., he is capable of judging all people favorably, even the rabble and the wicked, because he persistently searches and seeks to find the good points in all of them, through which melodies are made, as explained above—this tzaddik, since he is on this level, is capable of being the cantor and messenger of the people. That is, he can lead the communal prayers, because he has within him this aspect, which is a necessary requirement to be a truly fitting messenger of the people. For he must possess the aspect whereby all the good points are drawn to him and are merged within him, so that he is capable of gathering all the good points that are to be found in each Jew, even a Jewish sinner, as explained above.

Thus, a good communal leader finds (perhaps 'excavates') the good points / dots of self and others and weaves these points together into lovely, holy, soul-melodies. Metaphorically, the leader aspires thereby to integrate the community into a song or poem of holy goodness.

Further, as a good mentor, the leader might aspire to see, or even *actually* see, some supervenient good qualities beyond the collection of the specific good points to be found in the community, or in each individual. Thus the leader can weave a soul-melody that is greater than the sum of its parts, viz., of its evident good points. This 'going beyond' is another way to interpret the *odi* / 'my more' in R' Nachman's text [above](#).

Along these lines, [Evelyn Glennie](#), in a [TED Talk](#), says that a good musician must of course follow the text / directions / 'dots' of the written music, but must also go beyond what is written. The musician's interpretation, the 'more' that one brings to a musical score, can give life and soul to what otherwise is a dull, *pro-forma* expression of that musical notation.

Proactively Enriching Prayer

In the spirit of "transcend and include", a concept apparently first-championed by Ken Wilber³⁶, we might move beyond a question of 'how much space' one should occupy in a group to 'how one can best enrich the space of a group'.

Some teachings of Rabbi Shefa Gold may help for this higher aspiration. In *The Magic of Hebrew Chant*³⁷, on pp. 57ff, R' Shefa writes about eight spiritual functions, or 'energetic components' that can appear in group situations. She noticed that they were present when the group energy felt complete, "when the energy soared and was transformative". The functions include The Empowerer, who "channels energy... to the center of the group...", The Guide, who "[s]ees and holds to the higher purpose of the group...", The Container, "guardian of the group... containing the energy...", and so on.

Another source, Alana Palm, [lists seven traits](#) of good leaders with 'Confident Humility':

- Remain Open to Feedback (responsive)
- Stay Grounded (soul-centered)
- Practice Gratitude (and generosity)

³⁶ See his [Summary of his psychological model](#)

³⁷ Gold, Shefa. *The Magic of Hebrew Chant* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2013).

- Check the Other Side (open-minded)
- Take Leaps of Faith (do not fear failure)
- Live Into Your Potential (confidence)
- Be Present (listening)

Practicing and exhibiting these teachings, these energetic functions, are a good way spiritually and energetically to enrich one's presence, one's contribution in a group³⁸.

Thus I would recommend that

Takeaway 3: Holy Balance in a group entails: Sufficient presence and skill to spiritually enrich the group experience.

4. Deep Music

Aside from issues related to participation and leadership, music can help us, whether on its own, or in connection with prayer, spiritually to 'go deep', or (paradoxically) equivalently, to 'reach high'. Below are some sources about how music can be an important catalyst, or even an important ingredient, in spiritual experience.

Music as an Aid to Prophecy

There are Biblical sources for music in connection with prophecy. For instance, in [2 Kings 3:15](#). Elisha used music to induce prophecy (indicated by "hand of Yah")³⁹:

טו וְעַתָּה, קְחוּ-לִי מִנְגֵן; וְהָיָה כְּנֶגֶן הַמִּנְגֵן, וְהָיָה עָלָיו יַד-יְהוָה.	15 But now bring me (Elisha) a minstrel.' And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him.
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³⁸ Of course, these practices apply more generally than in musical prayer

³⁹ See [here in Sefaria](#) for a second reference to prophecy, as well as other Biblical references to music

Kenny Werner: Creating Music From One's Depth

Kenny Werner has written a book⁴⁰ which gives progressive exercises aiming at becoming able to perform music while in a meditative state⁴¹.

The following passage⁴² from Werner's book may share inspiration with R' Nachman's [above-mentioned idea](#) about finding points of holiness in oneself (and others):

There is a place inside each of us where perfection exists. The genius, God, lives there. It is the innate ability of each of us... to behave with extreme dignity, ... to channel an endless stream of life-enhancing ideas and celebratory sounds for the uplifting of [hu]mankind... [T]he sound of the Supreme Being manifesting through us. If we surrender our desires, we will hear it... imbued with the light of the universe and its great transforming power... From this space, there is great compassion, and great love, as well as great detachment. A person becomes the supreme enjoyer, observer, and doer... not attached to the results of actions... There is simply the celebration of the doing...

Even irrespective of its role in prayer, our ideal in making music has the 'G-d place' inside us help to 'channel a... stream of life-enhancing ideas and ...sounds for the uplifting of [hu]mankind'. *A fortiori, kal v'chomer*, during prayer.

5. Conclusion

Our approach in this *T'shuvah* may correspond loosely to the kind of 'fusion' that R' Gordon Tucker discusses in [his T'shuvah](#) about homosexuality. We [saw](#) that R' Tucker deprecates 'positivism' (the traditional, *yeshivah*-oriented approach). R' Tucker cites R' Halbertal, who (according to p. 10 of [that T'shuvah](#))

sees positivism (what he calls the "analytic-formalist approach") as a **betrayal, in religious terms, of the originating essence of halakhah** as a way of expressing the **living will of God**

⁴⁰ Werner, Kenny. *Effortless Mastery: Liberating the Master Musician Within* (CA: Alfred Music, 1998).

⁴¹ Werner performs with [Andy Statman](#) on one of my favorite albums: [Between Heaven And Earth: Music Of The Jewish Mystics](#)

⁴² Pp. 77-78

The ideal of Halakhah as an expression of G-d's will fits well with the approach of R' Zalman and Integral Halakhah.

In order to reach this ideal of Halakhah, R' Tucker states (on his p. 25) that

...certain legal methods may perfectly suffice to produce and reflect in law the values of a culture, but eventually prove inadequate by themselves to express in law what needs to be expressed. Traditions other than the familiar legal precedents may then have to be appealed to, borrowed from, and integrated with the received law, in order to create a new law...

Note that if we do not

reflect in law the values of a culture,

then we commit a

a betrayal, in religious terms, of the originating essence of halakhah.

The new traditions that R' Tucker recommends for integration into Halakhic process are Aggadic texts. Going a bit further in our Integral Halakhic process, we have utilized Aggadic sources as well as sources from Mussar and Hasidic traditions, and from contemporary, 'miscellaneous' wisdom.

Earlier we saw that R' Zalman, in his book on Integral Halakhah⁴³, characterizes the general purpose of *Mitsvot* as helping to (p. 51) align us with G-d's will, to (p. 33) bring out meaning for us, to reduce our resistance to G-d, and to help (p. 32) to elevate us to higher levels of ethics and faith.

I might paraphrase or summarize R' Zalman's lesson as follows:

Takeaway 4: Our Spiritual Mission entails: Harmonizing with the G-d field for the greater depth and good of all Creation.

Our spiritual mission asks us to harmonize with, and indeed to help intensify, the G-d field. We aspire to be instruments of Divine harmonization.

⁴³ Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman. *Integral Halachah. Transcending and Including*. Victoria. Trafford, 2007.

A Jewish musician in Eastern Europe was commonly designated a '[klezmer](#)'. The term is an example of [metonymy](#), based on the Hebrew *k'lei zemer*, 'musical instruments'. Insofar as musicians aspire to enrich the spiritual experience of prayer, to serve holiness, they can then match a slightly different designation. For then they would contribute not so much metonymously, as just technicians, musicians, *klezmerim*. Rather, [bi-d'chilu u-r'chimu](#), with awe and reverence, along with humility and musicality, these people show up in a non-metonymic sense, as direct instruments of holiness, *k'lei kodesh*, themselves, along with any instruments they happen to employ.

תשובה / Answer:

Combining our four **Takeaways**:

- **Music is appropriate for Shabbat services, given community support and holy intention. Make a *b'rakhah*.**

As a musician supporting prayer-services, I should aspire and strive to

- **Take up the appropriate amount of (energetic and physical) space given (a) the prayer space (b) the needs of the *kahal*, and (c) the needs of (other) prayer-leaders,**
 - **Be bold where needed yet also responsive, humble**
- **Spiritually enrich my own and the group experience; and thus**
- **Harmonize self and others, musically and spiritually, with the greater G-d field.**

6. Personal Epilogue

Much of the above discussion addresses the topic of a healthy, holy humility in serving as a musician during services, a *klezmer* who acts more-generally as a *k'li kodesh*. The topic of humility as a more-general issue resonates for me in all areas of my life. How to take up enough room to feel supported and appreciated, indeed, even to be able to contribute, while not compromising the room, the support, the spirit, the opportunities of others.

Pursuit of a healthy, holy balance constitutes for me a journey of psycho-spiritual deepening, healing and flourishing, a journey that has no end, but which I shall not abandon.

I intend to follow [Rabbi Tarfon's guidance](#):

הוא הִיָּה אוֹמֵר, לֹא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגַמֵּר, וְלֹא אֶתָּה בֶּן חוֹרִין לְבַטֵּל מִמֶּנָּה...

He [Rabbi Tarfon] used to say: It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it...