

The background image shows the interior of a synagogue, characterized by a series of overlapping arches and columns. The architecture is illuminated with warm, golden light, creating a sense of depth and grandeur. The columns are decorated with intricate carvings, and the arches are supported by a network of smaller arches, creating a complex, layered structure. The floor is made of stone tiles, and the overall atmosphere is one of historical and cultural richness.

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## ***K'riat ha-torah* in the Maroka'i Community of Brooklyn: Negotiating New Boundaries of Diaspora Identity**

by *Samuel R. Thomas*

The way cantillation is practiced in Brooklyn's Maroka'i community reflects the process of ethnicization that has been defining and communicating boundaries of a pan-Maroka'i ethnic identity. The codification of specific melodic motives is a result of a transnational impulse to define communal identity in diaspora. Audio recordings and the Internet, two important means for inscribing and sharing an otherwise oral tradition, have been catalysts for this ethnicization. However, what is most important to ethnicization is that community members reiterate these motives every day in synagogue practice, and transmit them to the next generation locally through tutoring and classes. Cantillation practices dominate the Maroka'i layer of diaspora consciousness.

Processional and *bimah* songs are two important additional types of musical expression during *K'riat ha-torah*. Processional songs are liturgical pieces. While the liturgical texts are the same as those used in most Sephardi communities, the melodies continue to resound as distinctively Maroka'i. *Bimah* songs are short songs, for which sometimes only an incipit is performed. The repertoire is wide-ranging and includes a number of modern compositions. Whereas the specifics of *t'amim* practice in the Maroka'i community emphasizes a pan-Maroka'i ethnic identity, a direct result of emigration and diaspora, *bimah* and processional songs are used to iterate a hybridized ethnic identity that emphasizes both Maroka'i and Sephardi layers of diaspora consciousness. The use of certain *bimah* songs also indicates the symbiotic relationship that exists between Brooklyn's Maroka'im and members of other local Sephardi communities. While the chief concern of this article is to show that the musical practices found in *K'riat ha-torah* in Brooklyn's Maroka'i community are vital for constructing a layered diaspora consciousness—and primarily Maroka'i and Sephardi layers—there is necessary contextual information on *K'riat ha-torah* that also shows a consciousness of the Yerushalmi (Levantine Sephardi) diaspora.

In Maroka'i synagogues, as soon as the *k'riah* begins, silence is essential. I have been struck by the meticulous nature of the practice of silence when visiting Maroka'i synagogues in France, Israel, and Morocco. Conversations or even whispers during the *k'riah* will prompt stern glances and outright silencing at Brooklyn's Netivot Israel synagogue. Chatting between recitations is considered acceptable, especially if the time is used to discuss the current parashah (portion). On my many visits to other synagogues, I have never observed the same attention to decorum during *k'riah* as in Maroka'i synagogues.

In the Teivah (*Aron ha-kodesh*) of Sephardi synagogues it is common to find an additional scroll containing haftarat (prophetic writings, selected excerpts from which are read after the Torah reading). This scroll is also handwritten on parchment, and its case is similar to but much smaller than a Torah case. Each Haftarah usually corresponds to a particular theme or moment in the Torah text read on that occasion. Whereas a Torah scroll is a necessity for a congregation, a haftarat scroll is a luxury, and many congregations simply rely on a printed book.



Figure 1: Iraqi Torah (CJA)



Figure 2: Torah scrolls at Netivot Israel synagogue

Most Sephardi congregations have a designated *ba'al k'riah*. His primary job is to chant the Torah audibly and according to the *minhag* (customary style) of the community. He must be intimately familiar with the Torah text, including anomalies in the pronunciation of certain words and versification.

He must also be familiar with the community's *minhagim* (customs) as they relate to melodic and linguistic approaches to cantillating the text. According to Amram Abesoror, the *ba'al k'riah* at Hesed l'Avraham synagogue, a Maroka'i *ba'al k'riah* can use *tsiltsulim* (ornamentations; embellishments) only if they add to the cantillation and do not distract the listener from the text or render the cantillation in an unfamiliar style (A. Abesoror, July 14, 2010). The purpose of a designated *ba'al k'riah* is to perform the Scripture reading clearly and in a manner familiar to community members.

There are occasions when someone besides a designated *ba'al k'riah* may perform Torah cantillation. In the event of a Bar Mitzvah, the honoree will usually perform part or all of the parashah as a rite of passage. On the anniversary of a Bar Mitzvah, that person may wish to cantillate an *aliyah* as a commemoration of this important life-cycle event. Similarly, if a distinguished person in the community joins the *ba'al k'riah* at the *bimah* and is learned in the text and cantillation, he may want to perform. At Netivot Israel synagogue, when visitors come to the community from other parts of the Maroka'i diaspora, they are often offered an opportunity to perform part of the *k'riah*. These guest performances confirm for community members that the cantillation tradition they use in Brooklyn is shared worldwide (R' G. Bouskila, May 10, 2008). In contrast, if a guest is unfamiliar with the community's style of cantillation, as in the case of a visitor from another Jewish ethnic community, he will usually demur from performing the *k'riah*. As Albert Abitbol responded when I asked him why a particularly distinguished individual did not perform his own *k'riah*, "he's a fuzz-fuzz [slang term for Ashkenazi]. He can't do it like us, so he just goes up [to the Torah] and listens" (p.c., A. Abitbol, May 30, 2009)<sup>1</sup>. Community members would not have been pleased with such a change to the cantillation. Furthermore, in the case of an Ashkenazi visitor to a Maroka'i synagogue, the pronunciation of the Hebrew would also be different. This would surely exacerbate the unfamiliar nature of such a *k'riah*. Thus, while there are occasions for others to perform *k'riah*, a designated *ba'al k'riah* remains preferable.

According to R' Ovadia Yosef, a leading voice in the contemporary Sephardi diaspora, Sephardim must make a special effort on *Shabbat zakhor* to hear the *k'riah* according to a Sephardi *minhag*. R' Yosef insists that because there is a special commandment from the Torah to remember the story of Amalek's attack on the Israelites in the desert (Devarim 25), not hearing this

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1 It was already clear to me that this individual was not Maroka'i because when he blessed the Torah, he sang the blessing in the Ashkenazi style. Therefore, when I saw that he did not perform his own *k'riah*, I asked Albert whether he was allowed to.



parashah in a familiar *k'riah* can be problematic. R' Eli Mansour, a popular rabbinic authority in Brooklyn's Sephardi community, adds that "every person should ensure to hear the reading from somebody who reads according to his own family tradition"<sup>2</sup>

Specifically addressing Sephardi students who attend Ashkenazi yeshivot, however, R' Yosef adds that "the Sephardi accent is the authentic one. Their [meaning: Ashkenazim] accent is wrong. They are stubborn and don't want to change."<sup>3</sup> This challenging statement by R' Yosef was made in support of R' Meir Mazuz, an important rabbinic figure in the Maroka'i diaspora community, who rebutted a claim made by a leading Ashkenazi rabbi in Israel that Sephardim do not pronounce God's name correctly. According to this Ashkenazi authority, Sephardim have been remiss for some time in failing to carry out the halakhah to hear *Parashat zakhor*. While insisting that any approach is acceptable, R' Mansour adds his voice to this linguistic argument by contending that the modern Sephardi pronunciation of God's name is more historically accurate. To support his argument, he references well-known Sephardi poets Shlomo Ibn Gabirol (the eleventh century) and Yehuda Halevi (the twelfth century):

Rabbi Shelomo Ibn Gabirol, in his rhyming *Az'harot* hymn, writes, "Anokhi adonai, k'ratikha b'sinai." He clearly intended for Hashem's [God's] Name to rhyme with "Sinai," even though the final vowel in Hashem's name is a *Kamats*, and the final vowel of "Sinai" is a *Patah*. This proves that he pronounced the two vowels identically. Similarly, Rabbi Yehuda Halevi wrote in the "Mi kamokha v'ein kamokha" hymn which we sing on *Shabbat Zakhor*, "Bimei horpi mi-kadmonai, bi dibeir ru'ah adonai." The word "mi-kadmonai"—which ends with the *Patah* sound—is used to rhyme with Hashem's name. Likewise, in the famous "Tsur mi-shelo" hymn which we sing on Shabbat, the word "emunai"—which ends with a Patah vowel—is used to rhyme with Hashem's name ("Tsur mi-shelo akhalnu bar'khu emunai, savanu v'hotarnu kidvar adonai"). These and other examples

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2 Eli Mansour, "Purim-Shabbat Zachor Pronunciation," Daily Halacha, March 18, 2011. *The Daily Halacha* is an email listserv generated and distributed by Syrian Rabbi Eli Mansour, covering a wide range of topics related to *halakhah* (Jewish law) and *minhag* (custom). He often cites rabbis with differing perspectives before explaining why a particular perspective is appropriate for the Sephardi community.

3 Alpert, Yair, "Chacham Ovadiah: Sefardim Should Make Their Own Parshas Zachor, Ashkenazi Havarah is Wrong," *Matzav.com*, March 18, 2011, <http://matzav.com/chacham-ovadiah-sefardim-should-make-their-own-parshas-zachor-ashkenazi-havarah-is-wrong-2>

clearly testify to an ancient Sephardic tradition to pronounce the *Kamats* as a *Patah*<sup>4</sup>.

While Shlomo Man<sup>5</sup> and the halakhic authorities he cites seem to be satisfied with correct grammatical pronunciation, privileging syntax above all else, these Sephardi rabbinic authorities clearly insist that followers also recognize the importance of aural elements in *k'riah*—Hebrew phonetics and cantillation. While it seems that their argument is related more to *minhag* than to halakhah, at some point *minhag* and halakhah can become intertwined and indistinguishable. Halakhah is often touted as more important than *minhag*, but in this case boundary building according to *minhag* is given greater importance as an expression of specific Jewish ethnicities, promoting a strong boundary between Sephardim and Ashkenazim.

A subsection of Man's chapter, "Changes in the Melody of *K'riat ha-torah*," focuses on parsing differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardi *minhagim*, specifically with regard to melodic approaches to the cantillation of certain passages of Torah on special occasions. While Man does not make specific reference to "Sephardi," he uses the phrase, "There are places where..." and regularly references the *Mishnah b'rurah*—a text citing differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardi *minhagim*—to suggest deviations from the normative (Ashkenazi) approach (Man 1991:155-158). Despite efforts to codify *halakhot* related to the *ba'al k'riah*, there is clearly room for *minhag* to prevail as an acceptable and indeed crucial marker of differences in Jewish ethnicity.

In most Sephardi synagogues, one *aliyah*—usually the sixth—is repeated to accommodate additional *olim*. If someone returned from a trip the previous week, he can come to the Torah for *birkhat ha-gomeil* (blessing for deliverance from danger).<sup>6</sup> In Sephardi synagogues it is common for more *aliyot* to be inserted as a means to honor more than the requisite number of individuals. For example, if visitors come to the synagogue for a special occasion (a Bar Mitzvah, a baby naming, or an upcoming wedding) or if someone needs to say *Birkhat ha-gomeil*, it is common to add *aliyot*. In Maroka'i synagogues the opening three verses of the sixth *aliyah* are reread; these three verses can serve for multiple *aliyot*, and be reread many times back-to-back. In other Sephardi synagogues the insertion of additional *aliyot* is carried out by further segmenting the second *aliyah*; instead of the *aliyah* for *levi* being completely

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4 *Ibid.*

5 *Zot ha-torah: Hilkhotei k'riat ha-torah* (Zikhron Ya'akov: K'far Binyamin), 1991.

6 *Birkhat ha-gomeil* is a blessing of thanks for safekeeping, recited on Shabbat upon one's safe return from a trip or any harrowing experience (such as surgery or an attack).

read as usual, it will be truncated to make room for additional *aliyot*, thus preventing any duplication of the text.

R' Eli Mansour explains that the number of *olim* from each category—Kohen/Levi, Yisrael—culminates with eight *aliyot* for each group by week's end.<sup>7</sup> On Shabbat, the Kohanim and Leviyim receive one *aliyah* each during the *K'riat ha-torah* of Shaḥarit (morning service) and Minḥah (afternoon service); Yisrael receives five *aliyot* during Shaḥarit and one during Minḥah. During Shaḥarit on Mondays and Thursdays, the only other occasion in a regular week for *K'riat ha-torah*, each group receives one *aliyah*. Thus Kohen/Levi and Yisrael each have eight *aliyot* per week. According to R' Mansour, this practice was instituted in Jewish tradition as a means to ensure equitable distribution among different segments of the community. He again blurs the line between custom and law, elevating *minhag* to the status of halakhah by emphasizing that customs like this should not be taken lightly:

These insights underscore the importance of the traditional customs we observe. Even after viewing just a small glimpse of some of the profundity underlying our customs, we immediately recognize their significance and deep meaning. We must therefore cherish them and carefully observe them, and never belittle them or consider their observance unimportant.<sup>8</sup>

Upon approaching the Torah, a Sephardi *oleh* will greet those already on the *bimah*: *Ha-shem imakhem* (May God be with you).<sup>9</sup> The congregation then responds: *Y'varekh'kha ha-shem* (May God bless you). In Maroka'i

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7 Eli Mansour, "Customs Observed by One Who is Called to the Torah," *Daily Halacha*, January 10, 2010.

8 *Ibid.*

9 This practice is thought to originate in the biblical *Book of Ruth*, where Boaz (Ruth's husband) exchanges these greetings with his field workers (Ruth 2:4). According to R' Eliyahu Biton, the Maroka'i *minhag* is to bow when saying this and to refrain from saying *Maranan* (Gentlemen) before the *Ba'al k'riah* begins (Biton, *Darkhei avoteinu*, 2006). In Sephardi synagogues in Brooklyn, I have never witnessed these details being followed. In Maroka'i synagogues, the practice of proclaiming *Ha-shem imakhem* is noticeably less popular, but congregants do respond when it is said. The absence of these practices in Brooklyn may be due to the time spent in Ashkenazic yeshivot by a great portion of the Maroka'i Jews, especially the rabbis, since the congregation follows the rabbi. *Ha-shem imakhem* is never said in Ashkenazi synagogues. In fact, while I was attending an Ashkenazi synagogue, a Yemenite acquaintance commented to me before he ascended the *bimah* for an *aliyah*, that the congregation would not know how to respond when he said *Ha-shem imakhem*, "because they are Ashkenazi!" He was correct. The congregation remained silent, save for two or three of us Sephardim in the room.

and other Sephardi synagogues, blessings pronounced by the *oleh* before and after the *k'riah* are often barely audible to congregants, even those sitting nearby.

During the entirety of *k'riah*, one or two individuals (not *olim*) stand on either side of the Torah, usually the *gabbai* (synagogue manager) and the *somekh* (assistant to cantor). In Sephardi synagogues only a *somekh* is necessary, though most Sephardi communities also have both. The *gabbai* is a layman caretaker of the synagogue whose duties generally include being a point person for all sorts of organizational activities in the community. However, for *K'riat ha-torah* he usually has the honor of picking the *olim*. Of course, on a special occasion such as a Bar Mitzvah or the Shabbat before a bridegroom's wedding, he will make sure that these individuals have *aliyot* first before doling out the remainder to others in the community. In Maroka'i synagogues, at the beginning of *K'riat ha-torah*, before the Torah is removed from the *aron*, it is customary for the *gabbai* to stand with the rabbi and auction *aliyot* to potential *olim* in exchange for promises of future charitable contributions. After each auction, the rabbi blesses the winner and implores the gathered to respond with a hearty *amen!* During each *aliyah*, the *gabbai* takes his place to the right of the Torah, following the text in a printed book.

A *somekh* (assister) stands to the left of the Torah. His role is more important to the *ba'al k'riah* than that of the *gabbai*. Following along in a printed book, he uses hand gestures to cue specific *t'amim*, signaling to the *ba'al k'riah* the different ways the text should be intoned. These cues signify grammatical clauses, the ending of verses, syllabic emphases, or certain types of melodic markings. He also provides correct Hebrew pronunciations when necessary. Today, with the ubiquity of printed copies of the Torah text, most congregants are eager to help out with this duty. Nevertheless, it is the responsibility of the *somekh* to help the *ba'al k'riah* perform his duty as well as possible.

In most Sephardi synagogues, when an *oleh* descends from his *aliyah* on the *bimah*, it is customary to shake or even kiss the rabbi's hand. Maroka'i rabbis are very careful not to allow congregants to actually kiss their hand, pulling it away just as they get close. It was explained to me that this is a gesture of humility, as the rabbi does not want to be treated like a haughty king (p.c., R' Gad Bouskila, May 10, 2008). Instead, the rabbi will place his hand on the congregant's head and give a short parting blessing.



## *T'amim*

My informants have always put the melodic motives in the foreground of any discussions about *t'amim*. In Brooklyn's Maroka'i community, the *t'amim* function as a prescriptive musical notation system for a clear set of melodic motives. As Abesror explains, "I've been exposed to all the styles—Ashkenazi, Mitsri (Egyptian), Yerushalmi (Levantine Sephardi). They are all beautiful. But we [Maroka'im] pronounce each *ta'am* more. We try to be very clear" (p.c., A. Abesror, July 14, 2010). The *t'amim* motives are conceptualized, taught and learned, and ultimately practiced as part of the process of ethnicization in the Maroka'i diaspora community. Performing the *t'amim* properly, by expressing the melodic motives in a clearly recognizable way, is of the utmost concern in the community. The musical expression given to each of the *t'amim* is the most important aspect of practice that distinguishes Maroka'im from many other Jewish ethnic groups, including other Sephardi groups.

Maroka'im divide the 24 *t'amim* symbols into 19 specific melodic motives. Certain combinations of *t'amim* are often presented together since they often appear together in the texts. However, sometimes these combinations are broken up or spread out over multiple words, in which case the melodic motives will be truncated or extended, respectively. In **Figure 3**, the name for each *ta'am* or common combination of *t'amim* appears as a transliteration of the Hebrew appears below the staff. The corresponding melodic motif appears in the staff notation. The figure ends with a tone row of six pitches. This cannot rightfully be considered a mode or hexatonic scale, as there is no centralizing of the tonic as a resolution point for the melodic motives. It is interesting to note that this tone row does not correspond to any particular *tab'* (*makam*-like mode) found in the Maroka'i classical Ala-Andalusit genre. However, a correlation can be drawn between how the two systems, *t'amim* tone row and Ala-Andalusit *tubū'* (plural), are practiced. Both systems skip certain notes or treat them as only passing tones as a common way of approaching melodic construction. In Figure 3, these passing tones are notated as filled-in note heads in the tone row at the bottom of the staff notation.

Zar - ka \_\_\_\_\_ Ma-kaf sho-far ho-leikh se-gol-ta Pa zeir Ga - dol \_\_\_\_\_

Tal - sha \_\_\_\_\_ Til - sha \_\_\_\_\_ Az-la gei- reish\_ Pa seik\_

R' - vi - a Sh'-nei gei-r'- shin \_\_\_\_\_

Dar ga \_\_\_\_\_ T'- vir \_\_\_\_\_ Ma-a-rikhTar-kha\_ At-nah Sho-far m' hu pakhKad- ma \_\_\_\_\_

T'-rei kad- min \_\_\_\_\_ Za-keif\_ ka-ton Za keif ga- dol \_\_\_\_\_ Shal she - let

T'-rei ta'a- mei \_\_\_\_\_ Y'-tiv Sof pa-suk

Figure 3: Amram Abesror, Recorded July 14, 2010

A number of specialist informants in the community have verified that these melodic motives are in fact accepted as standard in Maroka'i *t'amim* practice. Dan Bouskila, an excellent and very precise *ba'al k'riah* at Netivot Israel synagogue, R' Kakon, a professional hazzan, R' Avraham Amar of the Sephardic Home, and R' Gad Bouskila have all corroborated that Maroka'im use this repertoire of melodic motives for the *t'amim*.

### Motivic Development and Variations in Performance

Some variation is expected in the performance of *t'amim* motives. Abesror explains that one type of variation, *tsiltsul* (decoration, ornamentation), is intentionally applied to *t'amim*. If a *ba'al k'riah* expresses the *t'amim* motives clearly, then *tsiltsul* will be welcomed and appreciated as beautification, not distraction.

The basic *t'amim* are the basic [sic]. You can say a *Zarka* this way [motions a variation]. It is always the same. You can hear the *Zarka*. No matter how good the hazzan (cantor), you can still hear the *Zarka*... [sings two variations of *Zarka*] ... Some people [*ba'alei k'riah*] would go on, make it fancier. But you will always feel the *Zarka* (p.c., A. Abesror, July 14, 2010).

These melodic variations should not be viewed as corruptions of the core melodic motives, but rather as motivic developments. In R' Kakon's performance of the *t'amim* (Figure 4), it is apparent that little variation exists.

Zar - ka \_\_\_\_\_ Ma - kaf Sho - far ho - leikh\_ se - gol - ta

Pa - zeir Ga - dol \_\_\_\_\_ Tal - sha \_\_\_\_\_

Az - la Gei - reish Pa - seik\_ Ra - vi<sup>3</sup> - - a

Sh'nei gei - r' - shin \_\_\_\_\_ Dar ga\_ T' - vir \_\_\_\_\_

Ma - a - rikh\_ tar - ha\_ At - nah\_ Sho - far m' - hu - pakh\_ Kad - ma\_

T' - rei ka - d' - min\_ Za - keif\_ ka - ton Za - keif ga - dol\_

Y' - tiv Sof\_ pa suk

Figure 4: R' Michael Kakon, Recorded November 17, 2004

From a closer examination of the performance of three separate *t'amim* motives, by three different people in the community: *Zarka*, *Azla geireish*, and *Darga T'vir*, will become clear that the integrity of the melodic motives is still intact, and that *tsitsulim* such as the appoggiatura employed by R' Bouskila at the conclusion of *T'vir* should not be heard as disruptive to the overall clarity

of the motif. We can also see from **Figure 5** that the performers approach other melodic elements with a concern for keeping the motif clear. The melodic range of the respective motives, the intervallic relationships between tones, and the origination and resolution tones of each melodic motif (with the exception of leading tones or grace notes) are consistent. For example, in every performance of *Zarka*, the origination tone is E, and after the melody ascends, the resolution tone is B. Another important feature of Maroka'i *t'amim* practice is the approach to the *tab'*. As shown in figure 5, the tone G is skipped. Each of the performances in Figure 5, with *tsitsulim* or without, respects this approach to melodic construction. As Abesor emphasizes, no matter how a performer executes the *t'amim*, one must be able to clearly hear and identify the melodic motives. It should be apparent that there are indeed clear melodic motives in Maroka'i practice for each of the *t'amim*.

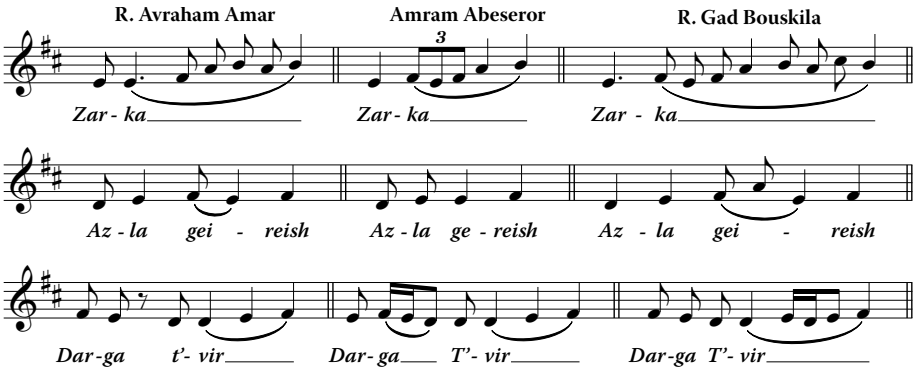


Figure 5: Three expositions of *t'amim*

Rhythmic variations are also bound to appear in different expositions of a motif. After all, most cantillation is performed without a regular pulse. For the *t'amim* motives to remain identifiable, the intra-rhythmic relationships between notes, and specifically the relationship between long and short durations, must be kept relatively intact. For instance, in *Darga T'vir*, the first half of the motif has notes of short duration, while the D, E, F# at the conclusion of the motif must be longer. A durational emphasis on certain notes is also used in characterizing certain *t'amim* motives. For example, in the *t'amim*-combination *Darga T'vir*, the D, E, and F# must be of equal duration. This is also the case for the *ta'am*: *Azla geireish*, where the duration of the last two notes of the motif: E and F#, must be the same and must be as long as, if not longer than, any preceding tones in the motif. Similarly, the duration of the E at the opening of the *Zarka* is as long as any note in the motif. Both R' Amar

and R' Bouskila repeat the E, adding a durational emphasis and making it the longest tone in the motif. Thus, even without an agreed upon or regulated pulse, rhythmic aspects still play an important role in these performances. Each performer has a clear approach to rhythm, so that the *t'amim* motives have consistency and are recognizable.

It is one thing to perform the *t'amim* motives as a learning exercise. However, the actuality of applying *t'amim* to the sacred texts returns us to the question of whether the integrity of a melodic motif can be respected during cantillation, which is very logogenic and where performance is governed by the need to adapt to changing text. The text exerts a general effect on the performance of motives because a variable number of syllables may need to be expressed during a given *ta'am*. Maroka'im resolve this problem by repeating one note to include all the syllables. For instance, in performing the opening verses of *Parashat va-yetsei* (*B'reishit* 28:10-32:3), R' Kakon sings two different passages that use a *m'habbeir* (conjunctive) *ta'am*: *Ma'arikh Tarhah atnah*. He demonstrates and explains how the melodic motif is kept intact despite variations in the number of notes. For example, to execute the word *mi-b'eir* (*ibid.* 28:10), Kakon repeats the D before resolving to the two E's. In another verse (*ibid.*, 28:12) with the *ta'am*: *Ma'arikh Tarhah atnah*, he repeats notes in two places, accommodating the phrase, *magia ha-shamaimah*. He insists, "See, this is still *Ma'arikh tarhah atnah*. You hear it is the same" (p.c., R' Michael Kakon, February 20, 2005). In both examples, the integrity of the melodic motif for *Ma'arikh Tarhah atnah* is respected by reiterating less crucial tones in the melodic motif (**Figure 6**).

*Ma'arikh Tarhah atnah*

Ma - a - rikh tar - ha At - nah

*B'reishit 28: 10*

Va - yei - tsei Ya'a - kov mi - b' - eir sha - va

*B'reishit 28: 12*

V' - ro - sho ma - gi - a ha - sha - mai - mah

Figure 6: R' Michael Kakon, Recorded February 20, 2005



Kakon also makes sure that the intra-rhythmic integrity and the melodic structure of the motif remains intact by bringing the important points in the melodic motif together with the points where the *t'amim* symbols appear in the text (Figure 7). Additionally, he treats the *t'amim* symbols like accents, adding an emphasis on these tones.

*B'reishit*  
28: 10 Ma - a - rikh tar - ha \_\_\_\_\_ At - nah

Va - yei - tsei\_\_ ya'a - kov mi - b' - eir sha - va

*B'reishit* *B'reishit*  
28: 10 Sof pa- suk \_\_\_\_\_ 28: 11 Shofarm'hu-pakh kad - ma

va - yei-lekh ha - ra-nah va - ya - len sham \_\_\_\_

*B'reishit*  
28: 11 Ma - a - rikh \_\_\_\_\_

va - yish - kav \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 7: R' Michael Kakon, Recorded February 20, 2005

The correlation of melodic and rhythmic elements in each performer's exposition of the *t'amim* shows that clear melodic motives are indeed a part of Maroka'i *t'amim* practice. The performance by R' Kakon is evidence that when *t'amim* are applied to text in cantillation, and melodic motives must be fit to the text, each *ta'am* remains recognizable. This approach to *t'amim* practice is part of the ethos of the Maroka'i community. The notion that *t'amim* motives must be clear is perpetuated throughout the diasporic community, practiced in synagogues on a regular basis, and promoted as an important emblem of Maroka'i identity.

### Comparison with Syrian Jewish Approach to Cantillation

The Syrian style of Torah cantillation uses a different tone row and range, and does not adhere to specific melodic motives. Syrian *ba'alei k'riah* in Brooklyn have a restricted conceptualization of melody during *k'riah*, using only the *Sikah* trichord (Figure 8) in a modal fashion (Ya'ar 1996; Kligman 2009: 140).<sup>10</sup> As confirmed by R' Joseph Dweck, "The *k'riah* is totally in *makam*

10 Avishai Ya'ar, *The Cantillation of the Bible: the Aleppo Tradition* (unpublished PhD dissertation, City University of New York); *Maqam and Liturgy: Ritual, Music*

*Sikah*" (p.c., November 5, 2009). The Syrian approach to creating melody in cantillation centers mostly on adhering to this specific tone row.



Figure 8: *Makam Sikah*

Although three tones do not allow for as much melodic sophistication as the Maroka'i practice, where the tone row is more expanded, there are moments when the *ba'al k'riah* may try to make a melodic differentiation for more obscure *t'amim*, though this practice is not standardized (p.c., Charlie Tobias, January 13, 2012).<sup>11</sup> *Sof pasuk*, the *ta'am* for concluding a line of text, is marked by a resolution to the tonic and by a pause, but these are the only specific melodic cues. Such an approach does not obscure the basic meaning of the text, since the *t'amim* are still used to describe syntactical information. But as shown above, the Maroka'i practice of being meticulous with specific melodic motives can add another dimension to the syntactical information, thus potentially deepening the listener's experience of the text.

*K'riah* in Maroka'i synagogues is performed at a slower pace than in Syrian synagogues, perhaps because Maroka'im are more concerned about the reproduction of specific melodic motives. When asked about Syrian cantillation, R' Dweck remarked, "We just move quickly through the *t'amim*" (p.c., R' Joseph Dweck, November 5, 2009). When asked why, Tobias answered, "We [Syrians] don't have time to waste. We just get it done" (p.c., Charlie Tobias, January 13, 2012).

Syrian Hebrew pronunciation differs slightly from Maroka'i pronunciation as well, particularly the Hebrew letters *Ayin* and *Het*. One can hear similar differences in the spoken vernaculars of Modern Standard Arabic in these countries. Most people in Brooklyn's Sephardi community, including Maroka'im, speak Modern Hebrew. However, in Maroka'i communities the linguistic register of *K'riat ha-torah* is distinguished from spoken Hebrew by emphasizing a Maroka'i Hebrew dialect. The Maroka'i practice of switching the linguistic register through dialect is another facet of the community's approach to language that distinguishes it from the practices of other communities. Today, with an influx of new Israeli *hazzanim* trained in the Yerushalmi style finding employment in Syrian synagogues in Brooklyn, one can hear a more

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and *Aesthetics of Syrian Jews in Brooklyn* (Detroit: Wayne State University).

11 Charlie Tobias is one of the *ba'alei k'riah* at Shaarei Tzion synagogue, a large and important synagogue in Brooklyn's Syrian community.

Iraqi pronunciation of the *Ayin* and *Het*, usually during worship services. However, it remains rare during *K'riat ha-torah*. Most *ba'lei k'riah* still come from Brooklyn's community.

### **Aesthetic Features**

Several informants have suggested to me that beautification of the Torah performance is vital: "That is why Maroka'i is the most beautiful *k'riah*... because we care about the sound, too, for the Torah" (p.c., A. Abitbol, May 30, 2009). Although this concept of *hiddur mitsvah* (beautification of the commandment being performed) extends to other practices in Jewish life, it moves to the foreground in *K'riat ha-torah*. The *ba'al k'riah* and listeners are engaging with a particular notion of their Jewish identity—that for Maroka'im—the text must be rendered as musically as possible for the beautification of the Torah reading.

Two preferred stylistic features that characterize the vocal approach of a *ba'al k'riah* are a nasal tone and a striving for the higher register. Together, these two stylistic features add to the beauty and clarity of the *k'riah*. Clarity is of vital concern; for Maroka'im, the *ba'al k'riah* must produce the proper aesthetic features if he is to be regarded as a master of Torah cantillation. Dan Bouskila, the longtime *ba'al k'riah* of Netivot Israel synagogue until 2010, is known for his ability to produce the proper vocal aesthetics. As Jacob Torjman once commented, "Dan was the best! Unbelievable at *k'riah*" (p.c., Jacob Torjman, April 28, 2012). When pushed to explain, Torjman added that Bouskila delivered the *t'amim* very clearly and was pleasant to listen to. Having often witnessed Bouskila's *k'riah*, I can confirm that his choice of register and his particularly nasal approach to sound production were always very apparent.

### ***T'amim* Practice as a Boundary Builder for Maroka'im**

To see how crucial *t'amim* practice is to the diasporic consciousness of the Maroka'i community, one must recognize that the codification of the melodic motives has resulted from an impulse to develop an ethnic expression accepted by the transnational community as a symbol of identity. *T'amim* practice in Brooklyn is indicative of this impulse and the resultant pan-Maroka'i ethnic identity, a key component in the definition and communication of a specifically Maroka'i layer of diaspora consciousness. Little regard is given today to the regional differences that existed just over a century ago. People do not speak of Fez, Meknes, Marrakesh, or Rabat styles of *t'amim* practice. Instead, most community members simply speak only of a general "Maroka'i" style.

In *The Cantillations and the Melodies of the Jews of Tangier*, Morocco (1993), Ramon Tasat maintains that there is a persistent distinction in the *t'amim* practices of the communities of Tangiers and Casablanca. He suggests that because of the proximity of Tangiers to Spain, a Spanish or more authentically Sephardi style of *t'amim* practice survived there during the centuries after the expulsion from Spain. According to Tasat, a unique aspect of socialization in Tangiers—the fact that the community was comprised almost exclusively of Spanish exiles—helped to protect the community's traditions from change or from assimilating established styles from other parts of Morocco.

Casablanca, however, served as a metropole for migrants from different parts of the country before the mass emigrations of the 1950s and 1960s. One cannot speak of a specifically Casablancon style of *t'amim*, for this cosmopolitan center's Jewish community was quite diverse. For the same reason, this exit point served as a crucible for the early development of a pan-Maroka'i identity. The "Casablanca" style that Tasat refers to is most likely the result of the assimilation of different regional styles into a pan-Maroka'i style. The *t'amim* became an important tool for early ethnicization. The practice of *t'amim* is now central for transmitting to subsequent generations a characterization of a single, larger community identity. Once removed from the homeland, a consciousness of a larger homeland along the modern nation-state borders of Morocco began to emerge.

In support of Tasat's thesis, community members in Brooklyn have at times suggested a distinction between "Spanish" and "French" Morocco, though usually as an example of an anomaly with regard to what is now considered normative. For instance, R' Dahan pointed out that the vocal register of renowned Hazzan R' Haim Louk and the delicate nature of his vocalizations are evidence of the prominence and perseverance of Spanish features in Louk's performance practice (p.c., R' Chaim Dahan, April 4, 2005). Since Louk was born and raised in Casablanca and was a student of the great R' David Bouzaglo, Dahan's remark supports the notion that any cultural division between Spanish and French in the Jewish community of Morocco has dissipated in favor of a pan-Marokai identity in diaspora.

R' Bouskila was born and raised in Casablanca, but his father and extended family were from the Dra'a Valley southeast of Marrakesh. R' Kakon is from Marrakesh. R' Amar is from Casablanca. Amram Abesror is from Meknes, in central Morocco just west of Fez. Discussions about *t'amim* with these gentlemen show that a pan-Maroka'i identity has emerged in practice as a result of diasporic migration. Again, this migration began within Morocco before mass emigration. However, the fostering of a boundary for communal

identity became imperative following emigration from the modern nation-state and the community's dispersal.

Even when performance anomalies present themselves, community members dismiss differences in favor of the accepted norm. For instance, one Shabbat an elder of Netivot Israel, Mr. Chetrit, performed the *k'riah* of his own *aliyah*. Mr. Chetrit, advanced in years, is from the *shleuh* or mountainous village area in central Morocco. While his performance of the *t'amim* was rendered similarly to the standard Moroccan style, he was less concerned with the clarity of each motif, and he truncated the melodic range of motives at times. His pronunciation of the Hebrew differed slightly, with some guttural sounds accentuated even more than usual. His approach was distinctive enough to provoke a strong reaction around the room. Mumbblings exploded after he completed his *aliyah*—along with smiles. The imaginations of many of those present seemed to be tantalized by a hearkening back to a disparate Maroka'i community that predated the formalized Maroka'i *t'amim*-style that we hear today. But when I asked Albert Abitbol what he thought, he just remarked that this was an “old school” way of performing the *k'riah* (p.c., A. Abitbol, May 30, 2009), and no longer the normative way of performing the *t'amim*.

This reaction to a no-longer practiced performance of *t'amim* in the Maroka'i community is indicative of the need to construct a diasporic ethnic identity offering an agreed upon way, tradition, or *minhag* for belonging to the group. The experience of living in a diaspora demands ethnicization. Codification of the melodic motives of Maroka'i *t'amim* represents a necessary communal impulse for dealing with the unprecedented engagement between Jewish ethnic practices from disparate backgrounds. Never before had an entire ethnic Jewish community come into such close contact with so many other ethnic Jewish communities. The reshuffling of Jewish population groups in the last century and the density of Jewish resettlement in Israel and New York have changed the landscape of the community, and never before has the means to develop and sustain transnational ties been so accessible to so many community members. There are now many recordings of *t'amim*, circulated primarily on the Internet on websites such as YouTube or Maroka'i diaspora websites such as dafina.net. But even before the 1990s, tapes were made and children were taught a recorded oral tradition. Yet one must keep in mind that electronic means of recording and consuming are forbidden when the congregation gathers to perform *t'amim* publicly during *K'riat ha-torah*. Consciousness is therefore very important, as individuals draw upon what is embedded in themselves and the community to ensure that what is performed and transmitted is accepted as indicative of Maroka'i identity.



## Processional and *Bimah* Songs

There are a number of additional musical expressions during the *K'riat ha-torah* service that serve to characterize diaspora consciousness in Maroka'i identity in Brooklyn. Before and after *k'riah*, there is processional liturgy for carrying the Torah from the *aron* to the *bimah*, where it can be read, and then returned to the *aron*. When *olim* ascend the *bimah* for an *aliyah*, there are well-known para-liturgical songs—*piyyutim* and *pizmonim*—that are sung aloud by members of the congregation. While the songs for the processional liturgy are distinctly Maroka'i, the *bimah* songs used by *Maroka'im* in Brooklyn show the community's familiarity with a wider repertoire that includes melodies from Morocco, from neighboring Syrian communities, and from the Sephardi-Mizrahi fusion popular music style in Israel known as *Musikah mizrahit*. Like the *t'amim*, melodies for processional songs tend to reinforce a distinctively pan-Maroka'i ethnic identity boundary. However, the *bimah* songs show the interactivity between the Maroka'i and Sephardi boundaries of identity, promoting the integration of multiple layers of diaspora consciousness.

## Processional Liturgical Songs

Liturgical texts used for opening the *aron* and proceeding to the *bimah* are standard in most Sephardi synagogues. On Shabbat and festivals, the liturgy commences with the singing of the prayer *Atah har'eita la-da'at* (Unto you it was shown).<sup>12</sup> Maroka'im then add the verse, *Ki mi-tsiyyon tetsei torah* (from Zion came forth the Torah, and the word of God from Jerusalem). This liturgy is performed to a Maroka'i melody (**Figure 9**). Subsequently, an Aramaic prayer, *B'rikh sh'mei d'marei al'ma* (Blessed be the name of the Master of the World), is read aloud; this prayer is also included in Ashkenazi liturgies. As the Torah begins to make its way through the congregation, the Sephardi liturgy continues with the singing of *Ashrei ha-am* (Joyous are the people).<sup>13</sup> Again, this is a Maroka'i melody (**Figure 10**). In Brooklyn, although the Syrian melodies for this liturgy are well known (Kligman 2009:139) even by the *Maroka'im*, they are never sung by Maroka'i congregations, and only on occasion in mixed-Sephardi synagogues.

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12 *D'varim* 4: 35.

13 *Zohar*, "Va-yak'heil," (12: 225).

*Atah hareita*

A - tah har - ei - ta la - da - at\_ ki a - do - nai hu\_ ha - e - lo - him\_

ki mi - tsi - yontei - tsei to - rah u - d' - var a - do - nai mi - ru - sha - la - yim.

*Ashrei ha-am*

Ash-rei ha-am she - ka - kha lo\_ ash - rei ha-am she - a - do - nai e - lo - hav.

Ga - d' - lu la - do - nai i - ti\_ u' - n - ro - m' - mah\_ sh' - mo yah\_ - dav.

Figure 9: Opening Processional Melodies

Once the Torah arrives on the *bimah*, Maroka'im open its case and lift it so all can see the written text. This is called *hagbahah* (elevation), during which male members of the congregation raise the *tsitsit* of their *tallit*, and women their open hands in honor of the Torah. Together, the congregation recites aloud the last portion of processional liturgy before *k'riah*. This piece of liturgy, *V'zot ha-torah* (This the Torah),<sup>14</sup> is sung to *hagbahah* in Ashkenazi communities a bit later, just after *Maftir* has been read from the Torah. Other Sephardim in Brooklyn have the practice of carrying an open Torah during the processional and raising it just before placing it on the *bimah*, thereby alleviating the need for a special moment for *hagbahah*. The Maroka'i practice seems to be an integration of the two prevailing customs.

After *k'riah* is completed, a few additional blessings—for the congregation, the Israeli and American armed forces and for the new month (the Shabbat before it occurs), are pronounced from the *bimah* by the hazzan or rabbi. In Sephardi communities, the return processional begins with the singing of a short liturgical piece: *Yimlokh adonai lolam, elohayikh tsiyyon l'dor va-dor, halleluyah* (God will reign forever, your Sovereign, O Zion, for all generations, Halleluyah!).<sup>15</sup> In Maroka'i synagogues, the honor of singing these verses is always given to a young boy or boys. Again, although the Syrian melody is well known in Brooklyn (Kligman 2009:142), a specifically Maroka'i melody is preferred in the Maroka'i synagogue. The individual who had earlier carried the Torah from the *aron* begins to carry it from the *bimah* through the

14 *D'varim* 4: 44.

15 *Tehillim* 146: 10.

congregation once more, as all sing *Mizmor l'david* (Psalm 29). Though this is the standard text used for the return processional in all Jewish communities, the melody is specifically Maroka'i (Figure 10).

*Yimlokh adonai l'olam*



Yim-lokh a - do nai l' - o - lam el - o - ha - yikh\_\_ tsiy - yon\_\_ l' - dorva - dor ha - l' - lu - yah

*Mizmor l'david*



1. Miz - mor l' - da - vid ha - vu la - do - nai\_\_ ka - vod va - oz ha - vu\_\_ la do nai  
 2. b' - nei ei - lim ha - vu la do - nai\_\_

k' - vod sh' - mo hish ta - ha - vu la - do - nai b' - had - rat\_\_ ko - desh

Figure 10: Return Processional Melodies

The processional liturgy differs in Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities, although there are moments where the texts are the same. There is more similarity among the liturgies of Sephardi communities, but the melodies used in the Maroka'i community are distinct. We can deduce from these musical expressions that a consciousness of the Sephardi and Maroka'i layers of diaspora identity is ever-present.

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