

MUSIC IN JUDAISM

by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel July 8, 2018

This essay is reprinted from the book, “The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values” published by Urim, or the upcoming books, “The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values: Man to Man” or “The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values: Man to G-d” to be published in the future. This essay is not intended as a source of practical halachic (legal) rulings. For matters of halachah, please consult a qualified posek (rabbi).

Music affects most people profoundly. Music that touches us affects our emotions, mood, and enhances our feelings. Studies have shown that music even affects the fetus of a pregnant mother, and that the effects often remain later in life.¹ The idea of music’s effect on the fetus was already known thousands of years ago, as the Sages said² that even in the womb, the fetus sings a type of music. The combination of lyrics and music can sometimes change our attitudes. For the religious person, music is the language of the soul. Since music is connected to the spirit of man, every religion has its own unique melodies and compositions. How does Judaism view music? How does music continue to impact Judaism and Jews today?

ALL OF JUDAISM IS AFFECTED BY MUSIC

Music is present in and impacts all aspects of Jewish religious life, even today. In prayer, the specific melodies of each prayer service set the particular mood for each particular service. Each melody is called a *Nusach*, and the *Nusach* for the daily Morning Prayer differs from the Afternoon Daily Prayer, which differs from the Evening Prayer. The mood and music of each service is intentionally different and is represented by each prayer service’s unique *Nusach*. Certain parts of the prayer are required to be sung in melody³. Shabbat has its own unique *Nusach*, as do the Jewish holidays. The rabbis⁴ emphasize that the melodies of Shabbat should be different from the melodies of the weekday prayer. The regal atmosphere and seriousness of the Days of Awe can be felt by the particular *Nusach* of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The month that contains many Jewish holidays is named *Tishrei*, which, according to one opinion, is derived from the Hebrew word *Shira* – song, and the name of the holiday of Pesach, according to one opinion, is derived from the two Hebrew words *Pe Sach* – the mouth speaks/sings⁵.

Another example concerns the prayer announcing the New Moon and upcoming month. Some⁶ have the custom that the melody in this particular prayer should be sad in announcing Rosh Chodesh Av, to reflect the mood of this specific month. Thus, Jews do not recite many prayers, but they actually sing them.

Central to Jewish life, along with prayer, is Torah learning. Even here, specifically in learning the Talmud, there is a specific sing-song chant in the way the Talmud is read and studied. Anyone who has entered the classic Beit Midrash has heard the melodies of Jewish learning. The rabbis of the Middle Ages⁷ write that a specific melody was learned for reciting the Talmud before it was written down, in

¹ Dr. Alexandra Lamont, University of Leicester, 2001

² Sotah 30b

³ Tur, Orach Chaim 51

⁴ Rabbi Chaim Palagi, Kaf HaChaim 28:24

⁵ Likutei Maharan, Mahdura Kama 49

⁶ Eliyahu Rabba, Orach Chaim 284

⁷ Tosafot, “*Vhashone*” on Megillah 32a

order to remember it better. Shelah writes⁸ that those sections of the prayer service that come from the Talmud should be sung in the “melody specific to the reading of the Mishna.” Thus, the Talmud is not only learned, it is chanted.

Jewish Scripture also has its unique melodies. The Torah must be read with the specific melody called the trop, indicated by the music notes found in most Chumashim-Torah texts today. The Talmud⁹ frowns upon anyone who does not read the Torah publicly in the synagogue with the correct musical notes, and the rabbis¹⁰ rule that if the wrong notes are recited (in many cases), one has not fulfilled the obligation of reading the Torah in the synagogue. The Haftarah, words of the prophets, read each Shabbat after the Torah reading, has a different melody than that of the Torah. Each Megillah read on different holidays has its own melody, reflecting the atmosphere and mood of the holiday. So, for example, the sadness of the Temple’s destruction can be heard in the sad melody of the Eicha Megillah read on Tisha B’Av night and again in the Tisha B’Av Haftarah the next day. Megillat Esther has a happy melody, reflecting the joyous nature of the holiday and the final outcome of the story. (In fact, it is customary to read the sad parts of Megillat Esther to the melody of Eicha read on Tisha B’Av).

According to Rabbi Yonah, adding Jewish song to any regular meal can turn that meal into a *Seudat Mitzvah*, a repast of mitzvah.¹¹ Thus, music is an integral part of all of Jewish religious life.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC IN JUDAISM

Music is not only vital to Judaism and Jewish life today, it was central to the Creation and the continuation of the world. The verse¹² says that “the heavens declare the glory of G-d, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.” In explaining this verse, the rabbis¹³ clarify that the form of this declaration is through daily music of the heavens and the earth, which sing to G-d, and that without this daily song, G-d would not have created the world at all. And this Midrash goes on to say that all the rivers, mountains and all parts of nature sing to G-d daily. Rabbi Nachman takes this idea one step further and says that each blade of grass and each animal have its own particular melody that it sings¹⁴. Another Midrash¹⁵ explains that G-d prefers the song of man over the song of angels, because the angels sing to G-d on a regular basis, the same time each day, while man sings out to G-d spontaneously. In fact the very first song sung by the Jewish people to G-d was the Song at the Sea following their miraculous salvation by G-d from the Egyptian armies¹⁶. Rashi¹⁷ explains that this song was completely spontaneous. According to one source, this song was the first time that man ever sang to G-d,¹⁸ despite all the previous interactions of G-d with man in the Torah. In fact, one opinion writes¹⁹ that if not for the daily song of human beings to G-d, He would not have created the world to begin with. Another opinion is that the entire purpose of Creation itself was for music and song²⁰.

⁸ Cites by Mishne Berurah and Be-er Haitaiv on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 50

⁹ Megillah 32a

¹⁰ Mishne Berurah, Orach Chaim 142:4

¹¹ Shaarei Teshuva, Hilchot Megillah 791

¹² Psalms 19:2

¹³ Midrash, Otzar HaMidrashim, Rabbi Akiva 4

¹⁴ Likutei Maharar, Mahdura Batra 63

¹⁵ Midrash, Otzar Hamidrashim, Kedusha 7

¹⁶ Exodus 14:31-15:1

¹⁷ Rashi commentary on Exodus 15:1

¹⁸ Midrash, Shemot Rabbah 23:4

¹⁹ Midrash, Otzar HaMidrashim Rabbi Akiva 6

²⁰ Midrash, Otiyot Rabbi Akiva 1

Song in the Temple was so crucial that atonement could not be achieved for a sacrifice in the Temple unless song accompanied it.²¹ Similarly, any sacrifice brought to the Temple which lacked the song to accompany it, invalidated the entire sacrifice.²² In fact, the highest form of service to G-d, according to the Talmud, is music and song.²³ The Zohar²⁴ explains that the reason the Levites, who sang in the Temple, were called Levites, is because they joined together (גלויים) in unison to sing to G-d. One who sings to G-d in this world is assured that he or she will sing to G-d in the Next World as well.²⁵

The central book of Judaism, the Torah itself, is called a song, *Shira*²⁶. Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin²⁷ explains why the Torah is referred to by this term. He states that every song has lyrics and feelings that are implied beneath the surface and not plainly stated. So, too, the Torah's main ideas and deeper concepts are not found in the plain text, but must be understood on a hidden, more subtle level, like a song. Ideas in the Torah, like in a song, are intentionally subtle and implied, and not openly written. Perhaps, in addition, just as a song has many levels of understanding, the Torah is intended to be understood on many levels. And just as a song contains many feelings and moods within it and varies from person to person, so, too, the Torah generates different feelings and moods for different people. Finally, just as a song inspires people, deeply moving them to action and change, so too, the Torah is meant to inspire individuals to act and to change.

MUSIC IN THE BIBLE

At the very beginning of human history, in the first few hundred years after the creation of man, the Torah tells us that music and musical instruments were already developed and part of the culture of human beings.²⁸ Singing in praise of G-d as a reaction to victory attributed to Him is fairly common in the Bible. Not only did the Jews sing at the Sea (as mentioned above), but the Jewish people also sang after the miracle of the well provided them with life's sustenance, water, in the desert.²⁹ When the Jews were victorious over the feared and more powerful Canaanites, the prophetess Deborah and the general Barak spontaneously sang in praise after the victory³⁰.

We also see numerous times in Scripture when the playing of music inspired a prophet to feel G-d's presence and prophesy. When Elisha the prophet wanted to connect with G-d, he took a musician to play for him, and then G-d did indeed appear to him³¹. A group of prophets were inspired to prophesy when music was produced from a combination of the instruments that included the lute, tambourine, flute, and harp³². King David designated several people to become musicians and play the harps, lutes

²¹ Erchin 11a

²² Midrash, Bamidbar Rabbah 6:10

²³ Erchin 11a

²⁴ Zohar II:19a

²⁵ Ben Yehoyada commentary on Sanhedrin 91b

²⁶ Deuteronomy 31:19

²⁷ Haamek Davar, Introduction to Genesis

²⁸ Genesis 4:21

²⁹ Numbers 21:17

³⁰ Judges 5:1

³¹ II Kings 3:14-15

³² I Samuel 10:5-6

and cymbals³³. Similarly, when King Saul felt that G-d's presence had left him, he summoned a young harpist to play music in order to inspire him and regain his connection with G-d.³⁴ The musician who inspired King Saul was none other than young David, the harpist, son of Yishai, who later became King David.

Over the last 3000 years, King David, as a musician, has inspired millions or possibly billions of people with his musical compositions. Today, in modern Hebrew, the word for music and the word for poetry is identical – *Shira*. One might think that the famous words of David, the Psalms, were composed only as poetry, as it is recited mostly today. But it is clear from the Psalms themselves (the basis for most of Jewish prayer) and from King David's background that these 150 paragraphs were composed as songs, not poetry. The introduction to many of the Psalms connotes musical pieces. The term "*Mizmor*" translated today as simply "Psalm," actually indicates a melody and occurs in 58 different Psalms. The term "*Lamenatze-ach*" begins 53 different Psalms, and is translated as either "To the chief musician" or "For the conductor." Some form of the Hebrew word *Shir*-Song occurs in 43 Psalms and is often the first word, indicating that the paragraph should be sung. Thus, the entire Psalms was undoubtedly composed as songs to be sung or music pieces to be played. Moreover, the Bible calls King David the "sweet singer of Israel,"³⁵ in addition to giving recognition to his skill as a harpist.

One Midrash³⁶ explains that many famous people in the Torah wanted to sing to G-d, but because of King David's outstanding voice and musical abilities, they held back and let David later sing their words to G-d. Targum Yonatan³⁷ disagrees with this Midrash, and says that ten figures in the Bible actually sang to G-d prior to King David. These songs to G-d began with Adam, the first man, continued with Moses (mentioned above), Joshua after the battle in Givon when the sun stood still,³⁸ and the prophetess Chana.³⁹ King Solomon, King David's son, also sang to G-d. The final song, says Targum Yonatan, will be sung when all the Jews return to Israel from the Diaspora, as mentioned in Isaiah⁴⁰.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN JUDAISM

At the very beginning of human development, musical instruments were already created and used.⁴¹ Musical instruments always seemed to accompany Jewish singing. In describing the scene of the Song by the Sea, King David⁴² depicts the people singing, followed by those playing the musical instruments, as the word *Shira* indicates singing with one's mouth and *Nagen* indicates playing musical instruments.⁴³ Musical instruments played properly seem to inspire everyone. The Talmud⁴⁴ describes the harp of David that was above his bed, and played by itself every night at midnight. This inspired King David to learn Torah all night. One commentary⁴⁵ compares the harp/violin/lute (*Kinor*) to G-d giving light

³³ I Chronicles 25:1

³⁴ I Samuel 16:14-23

³⁵ II Samuel 23:1

³⁶ Midrash, Shir HaShirim Rabbah 4:5

³⁷ Targum Yonatan, Introduction to Shir HaShirim

³⁸ Joshua 14:13

³⁹ I Samuel 2:1

⁴⁰ Isaiah 30:29

⁴¹ Genesis 4:21

⁴² Psalms 68:26

⁴³ Malbim commentary on 68:26

⁴⁴ Berachot 3b

⁴⁵ Ben Yehoyada commentary on Berachot 3b

to the world, rearranging the Hebrew letters of this instrument to 26 (*Kaf* and *Vav*) as the numerical value of G-d's ineffable name, and *Ner*, light. Thus, the playing of this instrument was through the Divine spirit.

The most prominent mention of musical instruments in Jewish ritual took place at the daily sacrifices in the Temple, and at the annual *Simchat Beit Hashoeva*-Water Ceremony, that took place on Sukkot in the Temple area. The Mishna⁴⁶ tells us that the sounds of the musical instruments in the Temple were so loud that people not only heard the Levites singing in Jericho, but they also heard the clanging of the cymbals, the sounds of the flutes and the sound of the Shofar and trumpets blowing.

Which instruments were actually present in the Temple each day? Maimonides⁴⁷ writes that although the number of Levites singing in the Temple was unlimited (the minimum was twelve), there would be twelve different instruments in the Temple, and the musicians were not limited to Levites or Kohanim, but they had to be distinguished individuals. He also stresses that *Shira* is music produced vocally, but the number of instruments varied widely. There would be from 2-6 lyres, 2-12 flutes, 2-120 trumpets, and a minimum of 9 harps, without any upper limit. Yet, there would be only one cymbal. With all these instruments, the melody would only be played by a single (cane reed) flute, as this instrument produced a pleasant sound.⁴⁸ The instruments in the Temple service were so important that a maestro had to be appointed to supervise and coordinate this activity.⁴⁹

The sound of the trumpet in the notes that we normally associate on Rosh Hashana with the Shofar was sounded each day in the Temple with the trumpet – *Chatzotzra*⁵⁰. At least 21 of these sounds of *Tekiah-Teruah-Tekiah* were sounded each day, and on special holidays up to 48 of these sounds were heard. These included three at the opening of the Temple gates each morning, nine during the daily morning sacrifice, and nine during the daily afternoon sacrifice.

The musical instruments and the mood of the once a year Sukkot celebration were quite different from the daily sacrifice. The Mishna⁵¹ describes the scene. Men of piety danced juggling torches as the flutes played and torches were behind them in this night procession. Harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets were among the many instruments that accompanied the dancing, as the Levites stood on the 15 steps of the Temple Courtyard. As the procession finished at dawn, two Kohanim-Priests, each with a trumpet (*Chatzotzra*) in his hand, sounded the notes of *Tekiah*, *Teruah* and then *Tekiah* again four separate times.

WHICH IS THE ESSENCE OF JEWISH MUSIC – INSTRUMENTS OR SINGING?

Having seen the importance of both singing and musical instruments in the Temple as well as in all aspects of Jewish life, the question arises: which is paramount – the voices singing, or the playing of the musical instruments that accompanied the daily service? Is the essence of Jewish music the instruments or the voices? This question is actually debated in the Talmud.⁵² Rabbi Yossi believes that

⁴⁶ Mishna Tamid 3:8

⁴⁷ Maimonides, Hilchot Kli Mikdash 3:3-4

⁴⁸ Maimonides, Hilchot Kli Mikdash 3:5

⁴⁹ Shekalim 5:1

⁵⁰ Mishna Sukkah 5:5

⁵¹ Mishna Sukkah 5:1, 4

⁵² Sukkah 50b

the instruments are the main musical component of the Temple service, while the rabbis believe the singing is the most important factor. This argument has tangible implications in Jewish law. Anything that is connected to the daily Temple service may violate the Shabbat. Normally, musical instruments would not be permitted to be played on Shabbat. However, if Rabbi Yossi is correct, they would be played in the Temple on Shabbat, since they are essential to the service, while if the rabbis are correct, only singing would be permitted on Shabbat. Maimonides⁵³ seems to rule as a compromise position between both opinions. Generally, the musical instruments were not permitted on Shabbat, indicating that the vocal singing is more important. But the lone flute that played the melody was permitted on Shabbat and Festivals, even though it violated the Shabbat, indicating that this instrument was essential to the music.

Musical instruments in Judaism are more than simply the means to produce a sound. The instruments themselves often have symbolic and moral concepts within them. For example, the Midrash⁵⁴ says that the harp used by King David (in addition to “a north wind blowing at midnight that led to the harp playing by itself”) specifically had seven strings. The seven strings represent natural law that we live by and that King David lived by. For example, in Judaism there are the seven day weekly cycle, seven-week cycles and seven-year cycles, representing the system of nature. Within this cycle of nature are also the seven notes of the musical scale. But in the future, says the Midrash, the harp in the Temple will have eight strings, which symbolizes the supernatural, or what goes beyond nature. Thus, circumcision is done on the eighth day because its performance represents the rectifying of nature (Maharal, Tiferet Yisrael, Ch. 2). So, too, the miracle of Chanukah was eight days, indicating its “beyond nature” aspects. The Third Temple will have aspects that go beyond natural law, represented by the eight string harp.

MUSIC IN JEWISH PRAYER

Although we noted above the importance of music as part of each Jewish prayer service, there are some specific issues relating to Jewish prayer and music.

It is logical that music must be an integral part of prayer. Since, according to one opinion⁵⁵, today’s prayer takes the place of the daily sacrifices in the Temple, and because we saw above that a daily sacrifice without song is invalid⁵⁶, then music certainly should be an integral part of our prayers in the synagogue. The person who leads the prayer service is today called the Chazan, *Shliach Tzibbur*, the Cantor. A rabbi in the Middle Ages writes⁵⁷ that if a person who is blessed with a great singing voice chooses not to use it to be a Cantor and sing to G-d, it is preferable that such a person (who deprives G-d of his gift) should not have been born. However, if this person does use his voice for holiness and prayer, he is to be praised.

An entire chapter in the Code of Jewish law⁵⁸ is devoted to Cantors – who is worthy to be a Chazan, who is not worthy, and other related issues. Clearly, being an upstanding individual with outstanding character is a more important criterion in selecting a Cantor than his having a great singing

⁵³ Maimonides, Hilchot Kli Mikdash 3:6

⁵⁴ Midrash, Bamidbar Rabbah 15:11

⁵⁵ Berachot 26b

⁵⁶ Midrash, Bamidbar Rabbah 6:10

⁵⁷ Sefer Chasidim 768

⁵⁸ Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 53

voice.⁵⁹ Concerning the Cantor who has a great voice and chooses to lengthen the service with his singing, Shulchan Aruch writes that if the purpose of singing so many of the melodies is due to the spiritual joy in his heart and the desire to praise G-d, then he should be allowed to continue, as he is performing a great deed. But if the Cantor is singing only to hear his own voice and enhance his ego, then that kind of prayer is despised. Kaf HaChaim⁶⁰ says that a great rabbi who used to complain that the Cantor sang too long in the synagogue was punished in the World to Come, while the simple Jew who sang these melodies in the synagogue was brought with great honor directly to the Garden of Eden.

Throughout the ages, there has been controversy whether it is proper to use non-Jewish melodies in the prayer service. On the one hand, if the music is superior and helps people to be inspired by the prayers and feel closer to G-d, it should be allowed. On the other hand, if the source is non-Jewish, how could it be used in the synagogue? There has been much controversy about this question.

Hundreds of years ago, Rabbi Yehuda Chasid forbade a Cantor from singing non-Jewish songs⁶¹. Rabbi Alfasi, who also lived in the Middle Ages, similarly rules that a Cantor who sings Arabic and/or inappropriate melodies must immediately be removed.⁶² It is clear that if the origin of the melodies is religious but non-Jewish in origin, then they may not be used in the synagogue.⁶³ However, if the origin is purely secular, there remains, even today, an ongoing debate between the great decisors of the 20th and 21st centuries. Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg⁶⁴ forbids using non-Jewish music as part of the Jewish service, claiming it is similar to the sons of Aaron who brought a “foreign” fire into the Holy of the Holies. However, Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef⁶⁵ (and others) sees nothing wrong with combining holy words with secular songs in the synagogue, if it enhances the prayer service and feeling of those who pray.

THE BANNING OF MUSIC BY THE RABBIS

At some point in Jewish history, the rabbis decreed a ban on listening to music. Why? If music is such an integral part of Judaism, why ban it? Apparently, specifically because music is such a powerful force upon a person’s mood and feelings, both positive and negative, the rabbis felt music after the occurrence of certain events was not appropriate. Let us investigate the reasons behind the ban of music for Jews.

The Mishna⁶⁶ states that after the Sanhedrin, the Great Court, disappeared, the rabbis banned music in places where people partied. Why especially then? The Jerusalem Talmud⁶⁷ explains that as long as the Sanhedrin could exert some control on the people, the rabbis were not afraid that the wrong kind of music would lead to debauchery. But now, music would lead to the wrong kinds of celebration, based on the verse Hosea⁶⁸. Music was still permitted for certain professions, but not for others⁶⁹. Rashi⁷⁰

⁵⁹ Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 53:4-5

⁶⁰ Rabbi Chaim Palagi, Kaf HaChaim 28:5

⁶¹ Sefer Chasidim 768

⁶² Responsa RIF 281

⁶³ Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah II:55, 111

⁶⁴ Tzitz Eliezer 13:12

⁶⁵ Yechave Daat II:5

⁶⁶ Mishna Sotah 9:11

⁶⁷ Jerusalem Talmud, Sotah 45a

⁶⁸ Hosea 9:1

⁶⁹ Sotah 48a

⁷⁰ Rashi commentary to Sotah 48a

explains that music was permitted in those professions that used it to assist in their work and improve its pace. Thus, it seems that music that had a purpose, whether to improve work or for a mitzvah, such as at a Jewish wedding, would be permitted.

However, both Tur⁷¹ and Maimonides⁷² later wrote a different reason for banning music as the destruction of the Temple. If that is the reason behind the ban, then all music, even at Jewish weddings, would now be forbidden as a symbol of mourning until the Temple is rebuilt. How does the Code of Jewish Law rule? As is his wont, the Shulchan Aruch⁷³ sides with Maimonides and seems to ban music in all circumstances because of the Temple's destruction. However, Rema, who was the decisor for Ashkenazic Jewry, writes there that for any mitzvah purpose, which would include weddings or celebrating Jewish holidays, etc., music is permitted.

What is the status of Jewish music today? (A discussion of non-Jewish secular music today is beyond the scope of this book.) In view of the ban on music, can and should there be Chassidic music concerts where observant singers use words from Scripture? What about recorded music or listening to the radio? There are some more modern Ashkenazic rabbis,⁷⁴ even those who lived in the 20th century,⁷⁵ who rule it is proper to ban all music in all circumstances (like the Shulchan Aruch does). Yet, almost all rabbis permit live music at weddings and Bar Mitzvahs, where the celebration is for a Jewish purpose only. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein⁷⁶ permitted listening to secular music, although he cautions that a spiritual person should not listen to this music. However, music for Jewish purposes and for a mitzvah is clearly permitted.

Chelkat Yaakov⁷⁷ writes that since the ban was never declared for music heard on the radio (radios did not exist at that time), listening to music on the radio is permitted. This would also apply to recorded music. Rabbi Waldenberg⁷⁸ also allows all recorded music to be heard. One modern rabbi⁷⁹ rules that all music is permitted today, as long as the content of the words is not improper. No less an authority than Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ruled⁸⁰ that a Jew can listen to classical music, even during the Omer period of mourning. It is important to understand and remind ourselves that until recent times – except for the case of a Jewish wedding – all live music that was played in communities was usually for occasions that encouraged forbidden revelry. And all music until about one hundred years ago was live music. With the advent of the radio, phonograph, and MP3's of today, listening to music has become a more private rather than public experience. Thus, there seems to be a consensus that if live music is played for a simcha, mitzvah, or to enhance Judaism, it is permitted.

There is one more rather strange custom regarding Jewish music that should be discussed. In some religious circles, there is a custom specific to Jerusalem, where only one instrument (or no instrument at all, but only a drum and a singer) may be used at a Jewish wedding. What is the origin of

⁷¹ Tur, Orach Chaim 560

⁷² Maimonides, Hilchot Taanit 5:14

⁷³ Shulchan, Orach Chaim 560:3

⁷⁴ Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chaim 560:7

⁷⁵ Chayei Adam 137:3, Mishne Berurah on Shulchan Aruch 570:13

⁷⁶ Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim I:166

⁷⁷ Responsa Chelkat Yaakov I: 62 (section 2)

⁷⁸ Tzitz Eliezer 15:33 (section 3)

⁷⁹ Asei Lecha Rav 3:4

⁸⁰ Responsa Halichot Shlomo Sefirat Ha-Omer 14, note #22

such a custom and why is it not universally accepted today? Most observant Jews assume that since the Temple's destruction occurred in Jerusalem itself, this is an ancient custom that is a stringency of the general ban on live music. But this assumption is incorrect. The specific ban on live music in Jerusalem began in the 1860's⁸¹, and was instituted with an oral decree (intentionally never written down) by Rabbi Meir Auerbach, the Kalisher Rav (author of the *Imrei Bina*), who moved to Jerusalem. After a terrible cholera outbreak in Jerusalem in 1865, Rabbi Auerbach instituted this ban, assuming the cholera was some kind of Divine warning. He was supported by Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin. Many in Jerusalem never accepted this total ban on music, and Rabbi Shalom Elyashiv believes the ban only applies to weddings that take place in the Old City itself, while others disagree. Thus, today, there are some communities which still abide by this total ban of music at Jerusalem weddings, while others do not feel bound by it.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel currently works with Rabbi Berel Wein and the Destiny Foundation as the Director of Education, whose mission is "to bring Jewish history to life in an exciting, entertaining and interactive way." Rabbi Amsel has also served as a teacher, a school principal, and an adjunct professor. He has also taught over 2000 educators how to teach more effectively. Rabbi Amsel has worked in all areas of formal and informal Jewish education and has developed numerous curricula including a methodology how to teach Jewish Values using mass media. Recently, he founded the STARS Program (Student Torah Alliance for Russian Speakers), where more than 3000 students in 12 Russian speaking countries learn about their Jewish heritage for five hours weekly. Rabbi Amsel previously served as the Educational Director of Hillel in the Former Soviet Union. He lives Jerusalem with his wife and has four children and three grandchildren.

⁸¹ All this information is culled from the Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society, Vol. 14, pages 22-24, and footnote 13.