

Musical and Ritual Practices in the German Synagogue

by Moshe Berlove

In the popular mind, the term *Nusah* Ashkenaz is often taken to be synonymous with the common practice of synagogues which follow an Eastern European *Nusah*. Specifically, the common usage of *Nusah* Ashkenaz is to denote the Lithuanian subdivision of the Eastern European *Nusha'ot*. The *Nusah* of other parts of Eastern Europe, such as most parts of Poland, is usually termed *Nusah* Sephard. This is a misnomer resulting from the superimposition of some Sephardic features on the common *Nusha'ot* of these locales, under the influence of *Hassidut*, which in recent times has dominated these areas. It is therefore surprising that the term *Minhag* Ashkenaz refers to a separate branch of the Ashkenazic *Nusha'ot* - that of parts of Western Europe or Southern Germany. This Western European

branch, along with the commonly known Eastern European branch, and a virtually obsolete French branch, comprise the full scope of the Ashkenazic *Nusha'ot*.

The focus of this paper will be on the practical - the differences the worshiper will notice upon entering a German synagogue. Although, basically, this will be an exploration of the *Nusah* in the musical sense, it is impossible to separate the musical component from the liturgical area. To some degree, the specific musical treatment of various *Tefillot* is a function of when the *Tefillot* are or are not recited and in what manner. For example, a *Tefillah* might in one *Minhag* be recited on special occasions only, in another on a daily basis. Similarly, a given *Tefillah* may be recited responsively and in another in