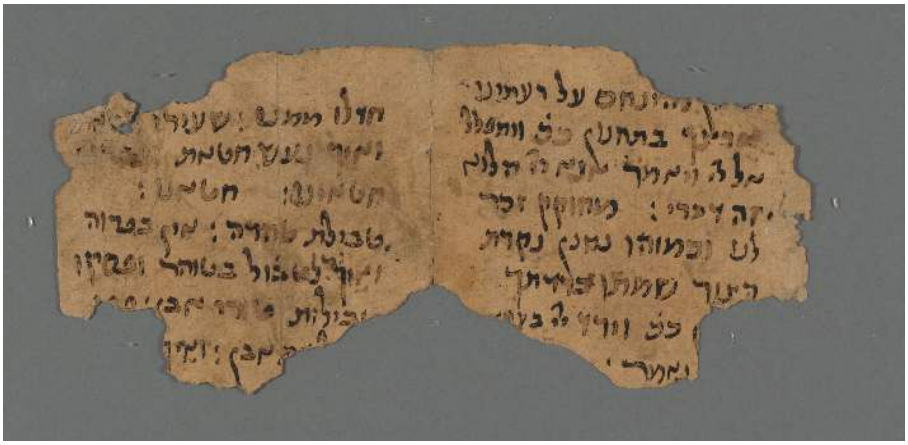
***PIYYUT*: פִּיּוּט**

Exploring the Rich Tradition, History, Texts and Expressions of *Piyyutim* פִּיּוּטִים

The Babylonian (Iraqi) Jewish Experience Resonates
Through the Translation, Commentary, and Musical Approaches to Five Piyyutim



Cairo Geniza Fragment
Piyyuṭ (L-G Lit. 1.18)
Torn bifolium of *piyyuṭim*.
F. 1r contains part of the *f*, אין לנו כהן גדול and other seliḥot.

Brian Shamash

A Master's Project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Academy for Jewish Religion's
Master of Arts Degree in Jewish Studies & Rabbinical Ordination

Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas - Advisor

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Abstract

This project delves into the captivating world of piyyut, exploring the rich history, diverse texts, and expressive power of this ancient and modern Jewish poetic tradition. With a particular focus on the Babylonian (Iraqi) Jewish experience, we examine five unique piyyutim, offering a glimpse into their historical context, textual analysis, and musical interpretations.

Through a blend of scholarly research and practical application, we uncover the profound spiritual and cultural significance of piyyut. From the ancient melodies of the Babylonian tradition to the contemporary adaptations of these timeless compositions, we witness the enduring legacy of piyyut in shaping Jewish identity and prayer.

Join us on a journey as we explore the historical development of piyyut, its role in Jewish liturgy and life-cycle events, and its impact on contemporary Jewish music. By examining the specific piyyutim presented in this work, we gain a deeper appreciation for the artistry, emotion, and theological depth embedded within these poetic expressions.

Dedicated to my parents and family

Ann Shamash who blesses us with constant ingenuity, artistry and creativity

Maurice Shamash who models deep love for family

and our Babylonian Jewish heritage with faith in God

My wife Emily who shares in this journey with constant love and support

My children Ella, Maya, and Ethan who fill our world with brilliant light and and hope

I love you all so much!

Gratitude to my friends, teachers, and mentors

For their partnership and assistance on various aspects of this project

Dr. Samuel Torjman Thomas, Rabbi Dr. Mathew Goldstone, Rabbi Niema Hirsch,

Rabbi Robert Alpert, and Cynthia Mindell

In Memory Of

My uncle Shaul Shamash

who was last seen in Baghdad, Iraq in October of 1972

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Prelude:
The Enduring Jewish Legacy in Babylonia and the Last Jews of Iraq

For millennia, the fertile crescent of Mesopotamia has been a cradle of civilization, a place where diverse cultures and faiths intertwined. Within this rich land, the Jewish people have etched their enduring legacy. From the Babylonian Exile in the 6th century BCE, when Jewish captives were forcibly relocated to the heart of Mesopotamia, to the 20th century, when a vibrant Jewish community thrived in Baghdad, the story of Iraqi Jewry is a poignant testament to the resilience of the Jewish spirit.

The Babylonian Talmud, a cornerstone of Jewish law and tradition, was composed in this very land. The renowned Saadia Gaon, a towering figure in Jewish intellectual history, hailed from Baghdad, and his teachings illuminated the Jewish world. For centuries, the city of Baghdad served as a beacon of Jewish learning and culture, attracting scholars and mystics from far and wide (Rejwan, 1985).

Yet, the golden age of Iraqi Jewry was not confined to the distant past. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the community flourished, contributing significantly to the intellectual, economic, and cultural life of Iraq. Jewish schools, hospitals, and social organizations provided essential services to the community and beyond. Prominent Jewish figures held high positions in government and society, leaving an indelible mark on the nation's history (Somekh, 2007).

However, the idyllic existence of Iraqi Jewry was shattered by the tumultuous events of the mid-20th century. While the world grappled with the horrors of the Holocaust in Europe, Jewish communities in Iraq and the surrounding Middle East faced their own struggles, fueled by the rise of Arab nationalism and the reverberations of the

Nazi genocide which led to increasing persecution and discrimination. The Farhud of 1941, a violent pogrom that claimed the lives of hundreds of Jews, marked a turning point (Bashkin, 2012). The subsequent decades witnessed a mass exodus of Iraqi Jews, as they sought refuge in Israel and other countries.

Today, while the physical presence of Iraqi Jewry in their ancestral homeland is now gone, their enduring legacy remains a testament to the power of faith, resilience, and the enduring human spirit.

Introduction to the Project

This project explores the rich world of *piyyut* פִּיּוּט (Jewish poetry), with a special emphasis on the Babylonian (Iraqi) Jewish tradition. Through the examination of five unique *piyyutim* (pl.), we will delve into their historical context, uncover deeper meanings within the texts, and analyze their distinctive musical expressions. What are the deeper meanings hidden within the beautiful poetry of piyyut פִּיּוּט? What are the ancient melodies that may have persisted to today from the Babylonian (Iraqi) Jewish tradition and what are some newer piyyutim and musical settings which define piyyut as an ongoing endeavor? And how can we, today, enhance our experience and the transmission of these sacred texts to ensure that this rich legacy is not only preserved but also brought to life for future generations?

By providing translations, commentary, and practical applications, this work aims to enhance the legacy of Babylonian piyyut, making these powerful poetic and musical treasures accessible to a wider audience. This exploration will illuminate how these ancient expressions capture a unique spirituality and ethos, bringing us closer to the heart of Jewish tradition and fostering a deeper connection to our Creator.

This project, including recording and research, is needed at a moment in time when those who lived in modern-day Iraq and are still alive are aging. The musicological research is necessary to ensure that the texts, melodies, and traditions are preserved now and in future generations. The commentaries are necessary to capture and expand the interest of others, providing study sources that can help deepen *kavanah* and a further connection to our Creator.

This project can serve as a valuable resource for congregations to learn and apply Babylonian Jewish melodies and piyyut texts. As the melodies are often simple melodically but vary rhythmically, the output of this research and the musical notation will make these texts more accessible and attractive for Jewish music teachers, Hazzanim, musicologists, educators, and lovers of Jewish song all over the world.

I am particularly suited for the expansion of this project as I am a unique Hazzan currently serving a community that will appreciate and savor the learning derived and because of my familial heritage, as my father grew up in Baghdad, Iraq. I am also suited for this project as I have previously written a Master of Music dissertation including textual and musical analysis. I currently live in Great Neck, New York, home to a diverse hub of Jews from a variety of backgrounds including a high concentration of Jews of Iraqi and Babylonian descent who can be interviewed, recorded, and sourced.

Chapter 1: Introduction to Piyyut

פִּיּוּט *Piyyut*, stemming from the Hebrew root meaning "to embellish" or "to adorn," embodies poetic expressions within Jewish liturgy. A piyyut is an additional hymn incorporated into the established Jewish liturgy. The term originates from the Greek word for “poetry,” ποιητής (Liddell & Scott, 1940). An individual composing a piyyut *or* performing פִּיּוּטִים *piyyutim* is called a פַּיְטָן *payyetan [also spelled paytan]*. Within Iraqi and other Arab-Jewish circles, piyyutim are called שְׁבָחוֹת colloquially pronounced *Shbachoth,* a Hebrew term meaning praises (pl.) or glorifications. As explained by Dr. Merav Rosenfeld-Hadad, “One of the most ancient and valuable religio-cultural assets of the Judaeo-Arabic culture in general, and of the Babylonian Jews, in particular, is the Paraliturgical Song, which is called by the Babylonians Shbaḥoth and known in Israel as piyyutim (Rosenfeld, 2022).” Today, because of the wide circulation of the term piyyut in Jewish communities and the dispersion of Iraqi/Babylonian Jews the term Shbachoth is in less circulation.

Piyyutim are Jewish liturgical poems, often infused with deep emotion and rich imagery, that enhance and expand upon traditional prayers. While primarily woven into synagogue services for *Shabbat,* holidays, and special occasions, their use extends beyond the synagogue walls. Piyyutim grace *Shabbat* tables, bringing spiritual depth to family meals. They mark life-cycle events like weddings and *brit milah*, adding layers of meaning and tradition. Some piyyutim even find their place in communal gatherings and celebrations, connecting individuals to their heritage through shared song and verse. Whether enriching formal prayer, enhancing personal reflection, or fostering communal bonds, piyyutim offer a powerful and poetic expression of Jewish spirituality.

The piyyut has long been a post-biblical vehicle for expressing a high-register Hebraic response to Jewish life in the Diaspora. Often ensconced in localized trends, be they linguistic and/or musical, piyyutim involve the interaction between text, sound, thought, and historical memory. In contemporary Jewish life, piyyutim have also moved beyond the liturgical and paraliturgical function to navigate modern Hebraic culture in Israel as part of a globalized context of popular music. (Torjman-Thomas, 2024)

Chapter 2: Historical Development and Context

The development of piyyut composition unfolded in three distinct periods before the emergence of paytanim in Spain and North Africa.[1] Originating in *Eretz Yisrael* between the 4th and 6th centuries CE, early piyyutim, often drawing inspiration from Midrashic literature, were composed by pivotal figures like Yosé ben Yosé[2], Yannai, and Eleazar Ha-Kaliri (Carmi, 1981; Zafrani, 1964). This initial period laid the groundwork for the classical period (mid-6th to 8th centuries) and the later Babylonian period (mid-8th to 11th centuries) (Carmi, 1981). The vast scope of this poetic tradition is evident in Israel Davidson's *Thesaurus of Medieval Poetry*, which catalogs over 35,000 piyyutim (Davidson, 2017).

Piyyutim that were composed in various genres of Hebrew liturgical poetry span from the first centuries of the Common Era through the beginning of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish enlightenment movement from the 1770's to the 1880's. Enthusiasm for piyyut continues even today in prayer services, home observances worldwide and especially in modern-day Israel with a resurgence of performances in pop-culture television talent shows and music festivals (Sperling). In ancient times, piyyutim were supplemental at times for the set *t'fillot*, ensuring variety in the obligatory prayers, particularly on *Shabbatot* and chaggim (festivals).

As the prayers gradually became fixed, piyyut sections were integrated into specific places within the established prayer patterns. While the majority of the extensive piyyut literature focuses on embellishing major holy days, early piyyutim

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[1] The Sephardic Golden Age piyyut poetry flourished in Muslim Spain between the 10th and 12th centuries and significantly shaped Jewish liturgical and cultural expression. (Zwartjes, 1994)

[2] Piyyutim by Yosé ben Yosé are found in the book *פיוטי יוסי בן יוסי Piyyutei Yosi ben Yosi* (Mirsky, 1991)

during the 4th to 6th centuries CE from the Land of Israel, Babylonia and surrounding areas witnessed a prolific production of liturgical compositions for regular *shabbatot*, fast days, and even weekdays. Special sets of piyyutim were also crafted to enhance obligatory prayers during private occasions such as weddings, circumcisions, and mourning services. These compositions serve as a bridge between the sacred and the artistic, offering worshippers a means to connect with the divine through creative linguistic expression and musical and vocal techniques that bring us back thousands of years.

> “The public record clearly indicates that the 'people' have been involved with the public recitation of piyyutim as if they were in a love affair with a beautiful and exotic creature they might not be able to approach easily but with whom they, nevertheless, cannot take their eyes off of. The Rabbis, on the other hand, have been at much more pains to focus their eyes on the beauty they behold. "Too long," they might say, or "too difficult," they might complain. Or, "too intrusive," were they to speak about the keva (fixed part) of the statutory prayer service. To follow the unfolding story of piyyut and its history is to be engrossed in a soap opera that includes love, honor, jealousy, rule-breaking, rule-bending, loyalty to tradition and the re-writing of that very framework (Kasper, 2014).

Ultimately, from the vast number of poems composed as alternatives to fixed prayers, expressions of thanksgiving, enhancements to worship, and vehicles for musical interludes, the finest poetry has been preserved and integrated into the diverse *siddurim,* prayer books and machzorim, Holiday prayer books of the Jewish people, regardless of their geographic location or denominational affiliation.

In the world of piyyut we know well today from our siddur, using acrostics is a common practice. This is seen in famous piyyutim like *El Adon*, אֵל אָדוֹן where each line follows the Hebrew alphabet, and לְךָ דוֹדִי *L'cha Dodi,*which spells out the name of its composer, Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz. However, this wasn't always the case. The initial composers of piyyutim did not affix their names through acrostics, and manuscripts from that period do not retain their identities. The earliest known *payyetan*, Yosé ben Yosé, typically attributed to 5th-century CE Palestine/Eretz Yisrael, didn't sign his name within his compositions. See the example below of *ḥata'nu seliḥa* by Yosé ben Yosé. However, scribes copying manuscripts later included his name in his works. As of the 6th century CE, payyetanim commenced the practice of signing their creations (Fleischer, 1975).

The earliest piyyutim date back to the Talmudic period (c. 70 – c. 500 CE) and the Geonic periods (c. 600 – c. 1040 CE). These compositions predominantly originated from Eretz Yisrael or the neighboring region of Syria. This geographical origin was crucial, as only in these areas was the Hebrew language cultivated with sufficient stylistic correctness and expressiveness to meet the demands of liturgical poetry. While Hebrew was used in other regions for religious study and legal texts, it was in *Eretz Yisrael* and Syria that the language retained a vibrancy and poetic richness. This linguistic environment fostered the development of piyyutim, allowing poets to experiment with diverse literary devices, intricate wordplay, and allusions to biblical and rabbinic sources, ultimately giving rise to a unique and powerful form of Jewish liturgical expression (Goldschmidt, 1970).

The earliest prayer manuscripts from *Eretz Yisrael,* discovered in the Cairo Geniza, often feature piyyutim. This is because these liturgical elements needed to be

written down; while the wording of basic prayers was generally memorized, there was a supposed prohibition against documenting them. Manuscripts from the Cairo Geniza sometimes leave ambiguity regarding whether the piyyutim, which frequently expanded on the themes of basic prayers, were intended as supplements or replacements, or if they predated the fixation of the basic prayers. Notably, piyyutim, especially those attributed to Eleazar Kalir, often employed cryptic and allusive language, heavily referencing Midrash (Baskin, 2011).

Incorporating piyyutim into Jewish services primarily served as an embellishment, enhancing the overall experience for the congregation. One theory posits that this practice arose due to restrictions on Jewish prayer. In the 12th century CE, Samau'al Ibn Yahya al-Maghribi, a Jewish convert to Islam – who moved from Baghdad to what we know as Maragheh, East Azerbaijan province, Iran, explained that the Persians had banned Jews from conducting regular prayer services. Faced with this obstruction, Jews created alternative means for liturgical expression by relying upon piyyutim as a vehicle for intertwining passages from their prayers. They introduced various melodies to these invocations, assembling at prayer times to recite and chant the piyyutim collectively. This differed from regular prayer, which lacked melody and was recited solely by the service conductor. When the Muslims, granting Jews *dhimmi* status (entering into a pact with the Islamic state in exchange for protection and a special tax), took control and permitted regular prayer, piyyutim evolved into an acceptable and even commendable tradition for holy days and joyous occasions (Seroussi, 2007).

Piyyutim were traditionally associated with *Eretz Yisrael,* and the Babylonian Geonim actively discouraged their use. (Langer 1998) They sought to restore what they

considered the statutory wording of prayers, asserting that any *hazzan* employing piyyutim lacked scholarly credentials. It remains unclear whether their objection was any use of piyyutim or only to their intrusion into the core of statutory prayers.

Scholars categorizing liturgies from later periods often maintain that the prevalence of piyyutim in a given liturgy reflects influence of usage coming from Eretz Yisrael rather than Babylonia. Adhering to the Geonic strictures, the framers of the Sephardic liturgy omitted early Eretz Yisrael piyyutim, such as those of Kalir, from their rite. However, these piyyutim persisted in the Ashkenazic and Italian rites.

Representative Payyetanim from Various Eras "Authors of Piyyut"

Pre-Classical Eretz Yisrael (up to the 5th century CE)

- יוסף בר יוסף - Yose bar Yose (5th century CE) - Eretz Yisrael

Classical Eretz Yisrael (6th to mid-8th centuries CE)

- אלעזר בן קליר - Eleazar ben Qallir (6th-7th centuries CE) - Eretz Yisrael - Pioneer of liturgical poetry
- יהושע הכהן - Joshua HaKohen (7th century CE) - Palestine
- פנחס הכהן בן יעקב - Pinḥas HaKohen ben Yaakov (8th century CE) - Tiberias, Eretz Yisrael
- שמעון בר מגס הכהן - Simeon bar Megas HaKohen (6th century CE) - Eretz Yisrael
- ינאי - Yannai (6th century CE) - Eretz Yisrael
- יוחנן הכהן בן יהושע - Yoḥanan HaKohen ben Yehoshua (7th century CE) - Eretz Yisrael

Post-Classical Eretz Yisrael and the Middle East (mid-8th to 13th centuries CE)

- בנימין בן יהודה - Benjamin ben Judah (late 9th or 10th century CE) - Middle East, perhaps Iraq
- סעדיה גאון - Saadia Gaon (early to mid-10th century CE) - Iraq - Philosopher, Talmudist, and Poet
- שלמה סולימאן אל-סנג'רי - Shelomo Suleiman al-Sanjāry (9th century CE) - Middle East (Syria?)

Apulia (Southern Italy)

- עמיתאי בן שפטיה - Amittai ben Shefatya (mid- to late 9th century CE) - Oria, Italy

Lombardy

- שלמה הבבלי - Solomon Ha-Bavli (mid-10th century CE) - Lombardy, Italy
- קלונימוס בן יהודה - Kalonymus ben Judah (10th century CE) - Italy

Iberian Peninsula - the Spanish Period

- דונש בן לברט - Dunash ben Labrat (mid- to late 10th century CE) - Iberia - Introduced new poetic forms
- יהודה הלוי - Yehuda Halevi (c. 1075-1141 CE) - Spain - Poet, Philosopher
- שלמה בן יהודה אבן גבירול - Solomon ibn Gabirol (1021-1058 CE) - Spain - Philosopher, Poet
- שמואל הנגיד - Samuel HaNagid (11th century CE) - Spain - Vizier, Poet
- אברהם אבן עזרא - Abraham ibn Ezra (11th-12th century CE) - Spain - Polymath, Poet
- שלמה בן יהודה גאיט - Solomon ben Judah Ghayyat (12th century CE) - Spain

Post-Spanish Piyyut

- יהודה בן שמואל מרגנשבורג - Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg (12th century CE) - Regensburg, Germany
- שלמה הלוי אלקבץ - Shlomo ha-Levi Alkabetz (16th century CE) - Safed, Israel - Author of "Lecha Dodi"
- יוסף בן עורי שרגא - Joseph ben Uri Sheraga (17th century CE)

Settings and Functionality of Piyyut

Imagine stepping into a synagogue or ancient prayer space from centuries ago. The Hazzan's voice rises and falls, reciting the familiar prayers, but then, something new emerges – a poem, rich with imagery and emotion, woven into the service. This is a piyyut, a Jewish liturgical poem that adds depth and artistry to the traditional prayers.

Among the earliest forms of piyyut were the קְרוֹבוֹת *qerovot* – literally meaning "close ones." These poems nestled themselves near the heart of the service, acting as introductions to the עֲמִידָה *Amidah*, the central standing prayer. They were like whispers of poetry, preparing the soul for the solemn encounter with the divine.

Think of them as musical preludes, setting the tone and theme for the symphony of prayer that follows. They might evoke the joy of *Shabbat*, the solemnity of *Yom Kippur,* or the historical resonance of a particular festival. The musical dimension of Piyyutim is integral to their essence. Early embellishments known as קְרוֹבוֹת *qerovot* were incorporated into synagogue liturgy, evolving into distinct song forms (Hoffman, 1979).

These early poets, masters of language and faith, sought to enrich the spiritual experience. They included biblical verses and allusions into their poems, creating a dynamic soulful educational environment that wove prayer *a*nd scripture. They gave voice to the community's hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows, transforming individual emotions into shared expressions of faith.

Qerovot express the dynamism of Jewish tradition. They show us how prayer can evolve and adapt while remaining deeply rooted in ancient practice. They remind us that

faith is not static; it's a living, breathing entity that finds new expressions across generations: a rich legacy of spiritual creativity.

Arabic Music

The musical complexity with piyyutim contributed to the establishment of the role of the *hazzan* or professional presenter in synagogues (Idelsohn, 1975). One can draw insights on the complexity and beauty of how to express piyyut musically from this introduction to what we can more broadly call “Arabic music”[3] with understanding that the Jews inhabited, prayed and engaged musically in these lands even prior to the advent of Islam.

Arabic music was solely an aural tradition until the early 20th century when Western staff notation, with minor adaptations, became the standard. This lack of written notation was a deliberate choice by Arab musicians. They prioritized improvisation and creative interpretation, which they felt would be hindered by formalized musical documentation.

As a result, the vast repertoire of Arabic music before the 20th century was passed down through generations orally. While some of this music survives in traditional songs, much has been lost to time. Only the lyrics of many songs have endured through the centuries.

[3] Later in this project paper we will be exploring five piyyutim. I am essentially categorizing all of the musical settings that will be explored as “Arabic music.”

The eventual adoption of Western notation was part of a broader trend of Westernization in Arabic music. This included the establishment of formal music education institutions and the increased use of Western instruments.

With the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of European colonialism in the early 20th century, the Arab world experienced significant political and social shifts. During this time, European classical music had a profound impact on Arab musicians. Many traveled to Europe to study classical music, and as interactions between Arabic and Western music increased, prominent musicians in Egypt and Syria began using Western notation for Arabic music.

This change was reflected in the language used to discuss music. While Arab musicians previously used their own traditional terms for musical notes, they increasingly adopted Western solfege and notation. This shift can be seen in the writings of influential figures like al-Khula'i and al-Shawwa.

Interestingly, the Arabic word for music notation, *nota*, is derived from European languages, as are other musical terms like *tanwit* (to notate) and *mazura* (measure). The Arab world also adopted the fixed Do solfege system and uses the French terms for sharp and flat.

The adoption of Western notation provided significant benefits for Arab musicians. It facilitated the preservation and transmission of their musical heritage and allowed for a unified system for teaching and learning both Arabic and Western music. (Farraj, J. and Shumays, S.A. 2019).

Getting to know the Musical aspects of Piyyut through Maqam

The maqam system is a complex and rich modal type musical system that has been used in Arabic music for centuries. It is a technique of improvisation that defines the pitches, patterns, and development of a piece of music, with the documentation of its origins tracing back to Persia (Maqam - dubsahara 2025). Maqamat are built on scales that are microtonal in nature, differing from the twelve-tone equal-tempered system used in Western music. These scales are constructed by combining smaller sets of consecutive notes called ajnas, which have distinct melodic and emotional qualities.

The maqam system has also been an integral part of Jewish music for centuries, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (The Maqām in Arabic Music, 2025). Sephardic congregations, in particular, have preserved musical practices derived from the Maqamat tradition, utilizing them in prayers and piyyutim (Yedid, 2025). For example, Aleppine and Jerusalem-Sephardic communities pre-determine specific maqamat for each Sabbath and festival (The Maqām in Arabic Music, 2025). The practice of contrafactum, where sacred lyrics are set to secular Arabic melodies, has further contributed to the integration of maqamat in Jewish musical traditions (Yedid, 2025).

Payyetanim and composers have employed various poetic forms, musical scales through maqamat, and linguistic devices to create piyyutim that resonate both intellectually and emotionally (Boyarin, 1990). In the intricate world of piyyut music, the concept of maqam reigns supreme as a cornerstone of melodic expression. Imagine maqamat as melodic modes, similar to Western modes like major or minor, but imbued

with their own distinctive character. Each maqam delineates a specific set of intervals, scales, and melodic patterns, creating a unique musical atmosphere or mood.

To build these captivating melodies, we need the building blocks, the ajnas. Think of ajnas as mini-scales, each with its own distinct flavor. Out of the dozens of maqamat that are used most frequently, a select group stands out as foundational to understanding the essence of Arabic melody. The most common are Rast, Bayati, Hijaz, Nahawand, Ajam, Kurd, Saba, Sikah, and Nikriz. Each one holds the title of the most common maqam associated with its lower jins, representing the 9 most common ajnas in use. They are at the heart and soul of piyyutim and improvisation.

Within the notation of these *maqamat*, certain scale degrees are highlighted as presented by Sam Hyson below. These symbols mark the tonic, the home base of the *maqam*, and the ghammaz, the entrance to an upper jins. The ghammaz is like a secret passage, a pivotal note that allows us to effortlessly glide between different ajnas and *maqamat*. It's like a musical chameleon, changing colors and moods with each modulation.

Nine *Maqamat* With *Maqam* Subsets and Arabic Song Examples

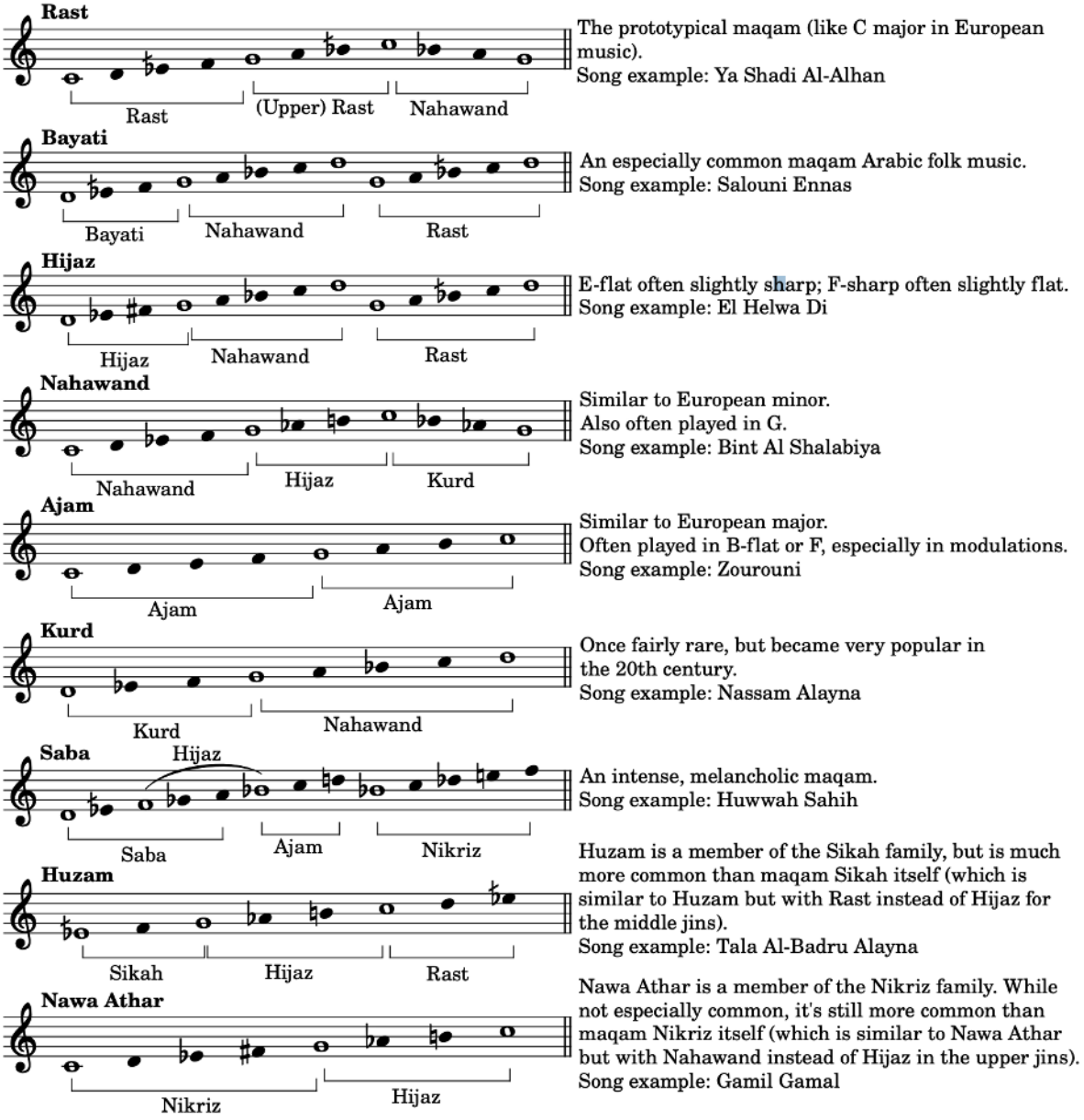


Figure 2.1 (Hyson, 2022)[4]

[4] “maqamat (sg. maqam) – Arabic melodic modes ajnas (sg. jins) – tetrachords or mini-scales, the building blocks of Arabic melody Out of the dozens of Arabic maqamat, these are some of the most foundational to the understanding of Arabic melody. Each one is the most common maqam associated with its lower jins, which together represent the 9 most common ajnas: Rast, Bayati, Hijaz, Nahawand, Ajam, Kurd, Saba, Sikah, and Nikriz. (In most of these cases, the lower jins and the maqam share the same name). All of these maqamat except Nawa Athar are very commonly used in Arabic songs and improvisation. Note: The scale degrees represented by whole note symbols are either the tonic (the root of the maqam) or the ghammaz (the root of an upper jins). The ghammaz is a particularly important pivot note for modulation (switching among different ajnas and maqamat), although other scale degrees frequently function as a pivot notes as well.” (Hyson, 2022)

The influence of *maqamat* is deeply woven into the liturgical music of Mizrahi and Sephardic Jewish communities who trace their heritage back to the Middle East and North Africa. These *maqamat* haven't just shaped Jewish music; they've become an integral part of Arabic and world music traditions as well. As Marks notes, "A key feature of the Sephardic branch is the adoption of the Arab *maqamat* (modal systems) as a vehicle for performing the liturgy" (Marks, 2014, p. 66). This adoption is a testament to the cultural exchange and interaction between Jewish and Muslim communities in shared geographical spaces.

Within Jewish tradition specific *maqamat* are often linked to particular *shabbatot* and holidays, imbuing the melodies used for prayers and piyyutim with a profound emotional depth and captivating variety. This connection between *maqam* and occasion adds a rich layer of meaning and resonance to the religious musical experience, enhancing the spiritual significance of these sacred moments. Each individual *maqam* can express a specific emotion or occasion. “For example, *maqam sabba* refers to pure love of a *mitzvah*; *maqam rast* is the 'father' of all the *maqamat* because they derive from it, and it is therefore used on occasions like Passover, which are basic to many commandments; *maqam* higaz has a melancholy, funereal quality; *maqam* agam is linked with joy and festivity; maqam sikah is the theme for reading from the Torah” (Scherman, 1979).

Here below we present musical notation of eleven maqamat employed within the Jewish context used today in the Jerusalem-Sephardi Liturgy as presented by Cantors Abraham Caspi and Ezra Barnea followed by descriptions of each *maqam's* usage (Marks, 2018).

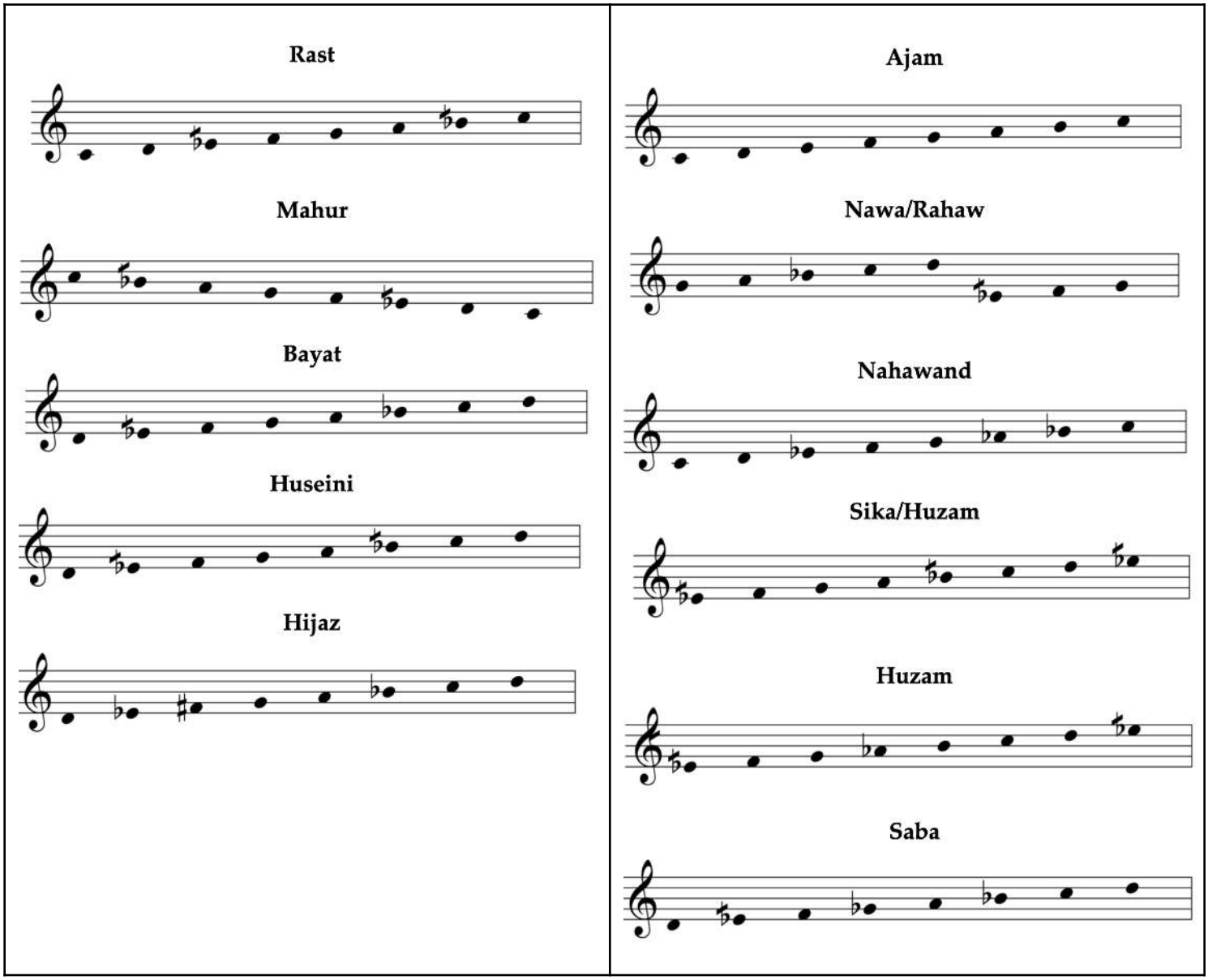


Figure 2.2 The maqāmat used today in the Jerusalem-Sephardi Liturgy (as presented by Cantors Abraham Caspi and Ezra Barnea). (Marks, 2018)

Rast – Performed on every Sabbath in which the first portion of one of the five books of the Pentateuch is chanted, or any other portion dealing with matters of religious law. The association derives from the meaning of *rast* in Arabic, which is related to *r'ais* meaning "head" or "leader".

Mahur – Following the Jerusalem-Sephardi musical tradition, this *maqām* is performed with Biblical portions that involve emotional issues. Although it is similar to *maqām* Rast, its melodic progression is different, and the musical variations are performed around the higher octave tone of the *maqām*.

Bayat– related to Sabbath portions dealing with matrimony and laws of purification. This stems from the proximity of the word B*ayat* to *bayit* (house in Hebrew), a word associated with cleanliness and purification.

Husseini –performed when there is a notion of strength in the Biblical text, associating the word *hosen* (strength in Hebrew), and its phonetic similarity with *Husseini*.

Hijaz – Expressing sadness and mourning, *Hijaz* is heard on Sabbaths whose portions contain references to death. It is also sung when God's thirteen attributes of mercy are read, a subject of profound depth and seriousness.

Ajam – A *maqām* with a happy and celebratory character, performed on Sabbaths whose portions relate joyous events (such as the exodus from Egypt), or celebrations.

Nawa/Rahaw - This *maqām* has a plaintive character, and expresses sorrow and weeping. It is heard on Sabbaths when the weekly Torah portion speaks of exile and slavery.

Nahawand – A happy *maqām*, performed on Sabbaths whose Torah readings contain joyous occasions with motifs of hope.

Sika/Huzam - Performed when the Torah portion deals with the transfer of fire, candles, lamps and oil.

Huzam – By far the most common *maqām* in the Sika family.

Saba – This *maqām* is associated with passages concerning family lines and dynasties, as the word *saba* (grandfather in Hebrew) suggests.

Figure 2.3 Descriptions and usage of 11 maqāmat used today in the Jerusalem-Sephardi Liturgy - as presented by Cantors Abraham Caspi and Ezra Barnea (Marks, 2018).

Through the study and appreciation of these fundamental *maqamat* and their constituent *ajnas*, one gains invaluable insights into the rich and nuanced world of piyyut music, unlocking the secrets of its melodic intricacies and expressive potential. Moreover, recognizing the integration of *maqamat* into Jewish musical traditions, particularly in the context of piyyut, further enriches our understanding of the complex interplay between culture, religion, and musical expression.

Arabic and Hebrew Poetic and Structural Forms in Piyyut

One of the most prominent types of piyyut is the סליחה - S'licha, a penitential prayer that has its roots in the Geonic period. These prayers, often recited on fast days, are filled with expressions of remorse and pleas for forgiveness. Among the most well-known סליחות - *Selichot* are the וְהוּא רַחוּם - "We-Hu Rachum", the אֵל מֶלֶךְ יוֹשֵׁב - "El Melech Yosheb", and the אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵּנוּ - "Abinu Malkenu". These piyyutim often feature the עֲקֵדָה - 'Aḳedah, the story of the binding of Isaac, as a central theme, symbolizing the ultimate sacrifice and repentance.

Another key element of the *Seliḥot* is the וִדּוּי - widdui, or confession of sins. In this section, the initial letters of the lines typically follow the order of the Hebrew alphabet, creating a structured and poignant expression of remorse. The *Selicha* is often framed by the פְּתִיחָה - petiḥah, an introductory section, and the פִּזְמוֹן - Pizmon, a concluding part with a recurring refrain.

For holidays and special Sabbaths, piyyutim take on a more celebratory tone. These piyyutim sometimes mistakenly referred to as יוֹצְרוֹת - yoẓerot, are woven into the fabric of the regular liturgy. Their names often reflect their placement within the prayer service. For instance, מַעֲרִיבִיּוֹת - ma'arabiyyoth are inserted into the evening prayer עַרְבִית - 'arvith, while יוֹצֵר - Yotzer piyyutim find their place in the first benediction of the morning prayer שַׁחֲרִית - shaḥarit, named after the blessing יוצר אור - Yotzer Or. Similarly, אַהֲבָה - Ahabah piyyutim are inserted into the second benediction, and זוּלָת - Zulath or גְּאֻלָּה - Ge'ullah piyyutim follow the שְׁמַע - Shema'. Other names, such as אוֹפַן - Ofan and מְאוֹרָה - Me'orah, are derived from the specific passages where they are inserted. The קְרוֹבוֹת - Keroboth is a unique type of piyyut that is integrated into the תְּפִלָּה - *Tefillah* itself, the central prayer of the Jewish service. It is also sometimes referred to as שִׁבְעָתָא - Shib'atha, meaning "seven," because the Sabbath and holiday *Tefillot* consist of seven blessings (Deutsch, 1906).

In addition to these, there are also תּוֹכֵחָה - Tochechah piyyutim, which serve as stern rebukes or admonishments, and קִינוֹת - kinoth/qinoth, lamentations recited on the תִּשְׁעָה בְּאָב - Ninth of Ab, the day of mourning for the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem (Deutsch, 1906).

Hebrew poetry, Arabic poetry and piyyut are characterized by their unique structures, drawing upon parallelism, acrostics, rhyme, and meter. While they share many commonalities, differences can also reflect their distinct purposes and historical contexts.

The evolution of these poetic forms, from the concise and parallelistic structures of biblical poetry to the more elaborate and musical forms of piyyut, reflects the dynamic

nature of Hebrew literary tradition. This knowledge enhances our understanding of how these forms have adapted and evolved over time, while still retaining their core elements. By heightening our awareness of these structures, one can achieve greater appreciation for the ingenuity of each piyyut creation and find practical benefits of memory devices to expand our ability to learn and memorize piyyutim and the content they convey.

Understanding the structural forms of Hebrew poetry and piyyut allows us to appreciate the richness and complexity of these poetic traditions. By recognizing the interplay of parallelism, rhyme, and meter, we can delve deeper into the nuances of meaning and artistic expression.

Structures

This following list reflects some of the poetic structures employed in piyyut. These forms, with their intricate rhyme schemes and patterns of stanzas, provide a framework for expressing complex religious ideas and emotions with artistry and sophistication.

Acrostics: The acrostic is a hallmark of piyyutim, with the initial letters of the lines often following the order of the אָלֶף־בֵּית - Hebrew alphabet, sometimes reversed תָּשְׁרָ"ק - Taf, Shin, Resh, Kuf , or arranged in intricate patterns. From the 11th century onwards, poets began incorporating their names into the acrostic, often adding a blessing or invocation for themselves. These are poems where the first letter of each line or stanza spells out a word or phrase. This device can be used to create a sense of order and structure, or to emphasize a particular theme or message. (For example, Psalm 119, the longest psalm in *Tanakh,* is an acrostic poem where each stanza begins

with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This serves as the model for future *payetanim* to write their own poetry in acrostics.

Forms with Arabic or Hebrew Origins

Because of the efflorescence of Hebrew poetics inspired by Saadia Gaon and implanted in Medieval Spain (Sepharad), many piyyutim borrow and recast popular Arabic poetic forms well known to Jewish poets. The most popular are the *muwashshaḥ/zajal* and the *qasidah.*

Muwashshaḥ: A complex strophic form with Arabic origins, typically featuring five stanzas with a recurring refrain. Known for its intricate rhyme scheme and use of a kharja (final verse) sometimes in a different language. The muwashshah, a poetic form originating in Arabic, distinguishes itself through its unique strophic structure and rhyme scheme. Unlike the couplets of classical Arabic poetry, the muwashshah typically comprises five strophes, each with four, five, or six lines. This structure allows for a complex interplay of rhymes and themes, setting it apart from the traditional Arabic ode with its single meter and lack of stanzas.

A hallmark of the muwashshah is its rhyme scheme. A master rhyme, appearing at the poem's beginning and the end of each strophe, creates a sense of unity and coherence (Meisami & Starkey, 1998). Within each strophe, this master rhyme intertwines with subordinate rhymes, enhancing the poem's musicality and complexity.

Beyond its poetic form, the muwashshah also thrived as a musical genre in the eastern Arab world, where the melodies of instruments like the oud and qanun intermingled with the rhythmic beats of the darabukkah and daf.

Zajal: The *zajal* is a multilingual version of the muwashshaḥ, usually bilingual, and specifically of Andalusi/Sephardi origin.

Qasida: A monorhymed poem with a variable number of verses, often used for panegyric or elegiac purposes. It follows a specific structure with a nasib (opening amatory section), takhallus (transition), and madih (praise of the patron or subject).

Arguzah: A strophic poem where each stanza has a two-line rhyme scheme with the second line rhyming throughout the poem. Often used for didactic or narrative purposes.

Gersha: A poem with a four-line stanza structure, often employing alternating rhymes.

The service sectional themes types and structural forms of piyyutim stand as a testament to the creativity and devotion of Jewish *payetanim* throughout the ages by enriching Jewish experiences and Jewish knowledge, while providing a window to soulful connection with God.

Certain Hebrew names have emerged for poetic forms used in piyyutim. In some cases, these are simply replacing the Arabic term with a Hebrew version, in an attempt to more thoroughly Hebraicize the piyyut genre. (Torjman-Thomas, 2024)

שְׁנִיָה - Sh'niyah is characterized by two-line stanzas.

שְׁלִישִׁית - Shelishit has three lines.

מוּשְׁתַּגָּב - Mostegab incorporates a verse from tanach at the beginning of each stanza.

שַׁלְמוֹנִית - Shalmonith follows a meter introduced by **Shalmonith S**olomon ha-Babli consist of four-line strophes, without any Biblical verses (Zunz, 1889).

שִׁירָה - Shira: A general term for poetry or song lyrics. In the context of piyyut, it often refers to poems with biblical parallelism and a focus on religious themes.

Piyyut Functionality

Piyyutim serve as a communal anchor, binding generations of Jewish worshippers across time and space. The recitation of these ancient poems during religious services and ceremonies creates a sense of continuity, linking contemporary communities to their historical roots.

In the modern era, piyyutim continue to evolve, adapting to changing linguistic, musical, and cultural landscapes. Contemporary poets and musicians engage with piyyutim, infusing them with new music, meanings, and expressions. This dynamic interaction between tradition and innovation ensures the ongoing vitality of piyyutim in the context of contemporary Jewish worship (Hartman, 2005).

In a contemporary community with a rich tapestry of cultural, linguistic and *minhag*-tradition backgrounds, the use of piyyut can serve as a powerful tool for outreach and engagement for *Hazzanim* and Rabbis. These spiritual leaders can use piyyutim effectively as an entry point, a conduit for building relationships and offering blessings in their daily interactions within a community marked by frequent lifecycle events such as baby namings and *brit milah*. The versatile nature of piyyut allows clergy to tailor these poetic expressions to resonate with the diverse linguistic heritage of

community members, particularly those with direct lineage to Farsi- and Arabic-speakers. By incorporating piyyut into ceremonies and rituals, clergy can bridge cultural gaps, fostering a sense of inclusivity and connection among congregants from different backgrounds and *minhagim*. The emotive and spiritually rich qualities of piyyut offer a unique platform for clergy to engage individuals on a profound level, transcending linguistic and cultural differences, and creating a vibrant and unified communal experience.

The historical context of piyyut adds another layer of significance when considering communities with ancestral ties to Farsi and Arabic-speaking lands. In my experience serving diverse congregations, I've observed that individuals with Persian, Iraqi, and other Mizrahi backgrounds often have a rich tradition of incorporating piyyut into lifecycle events, holidays, and communal gatherings. This suggests a deep-rooted connection to these liturgical poems as a means of expressing cultural identity and enhancing spiritual experiences. Many Jews from Arabic-speaking countries faced significant upheavals and mass migrations in the mid-20th century, with statistics indicating that approximately one million Jews left or were driven from their homes. (Andrea Mifano, 2020) The incorporation of piyyut into the religious practices of these communities becomes a poignant means of preserving cultural and linguistic ties that might have been disrupted by these historical events. For the modern-day clergy person, understanding and utilizing piyyut not only provides a tool for spiritual expression but also serves as a poignant reminder of the resilience and endurance of a community that has faced significant challenges. By infusing piyyut with cultural sensitivity, clergy can acknowledge and address the historical narratives of

displacement and create a shared space that fosters healing, unity, and a sense of continuity among congregants.

4. Non-liturgical function - Secular and Cultural

The piyyut has long been associated with the chanting of liturgical poetry in Jewish liturgy and rituals. However, a recent resurgence of interest in piyyut, particularly in Israel, has seen these ancient musical forms transcend their liturgical origins and permeate secular culture.

This revitalization is closely linked to the broader revival of Judeo-Arabic music, reflecting the rich musical heritage of Mizrahi Jews from Muslim lands. While Mizrahi pop music achieved mainstream success in Israel during the late 20th century, it was largely secularized and performed in Hebrew. The traditional piyyut, often in Judeo-Arabic, remained confined to local communities.

In recent years, however, there has been a growing appreciation for these diverse musical traditions. Events like the annual Piyyut Festival in Jerusalem, organized by the Avi Chai Foundation, have played a crucial role in showcasing the beauty and cultural significance of piyyut to a wider audience. The festival serves as a platform for dialogue and exchange among different Jewish communities and generations.

Furthermore, numerous musical ensembles in Israel are actively engaged in performing and reimagining piyyut. Groups like the Piyyut Ensemble, the Hibba Orchestra, and the Israeli Andalusian Orchestra, and the New York Andalus Ensemble in the United States, among several others, are keeping these traditions alive and introducing them to new audiences.

Contemporary artists are also incorporating piyyut into their music, creating innovative fusions that bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. The Revivo Project, for instance, blends traditional Arabic pop, Mizrahi liturgical music, and secular Mizrahi influences to create a unique and popular sound. Similarly, renowned jazz musician Omer Avital has integrated elements of piyyut into his compositions, demonstrating the enduring appeal of these musical forms. An earlier setting with jazz influences can also be found in the work of ASEFA, especially on their album *Resonance* (2006).

The resurgence of piyyut signifies not only a renewed interest in Jewish musical heritage but also a growing recognition of the cultural diversity that enriches Israeli society. As piyyut continues to evolve and find new expressions, it serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring legacy of Jewish creativity and the unifying power of music (Sperling).

Chapter 3: Piyyutim in the Jewish Calendar and Lifecycle

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

The month of Elul, with the recitation of Selichot and the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, are marked by piyyutim that evoke themes of repentance, reflection, and renewal as seen in this fragment of *ḥata'nu seliḥa* by Yosé ben Yosé.

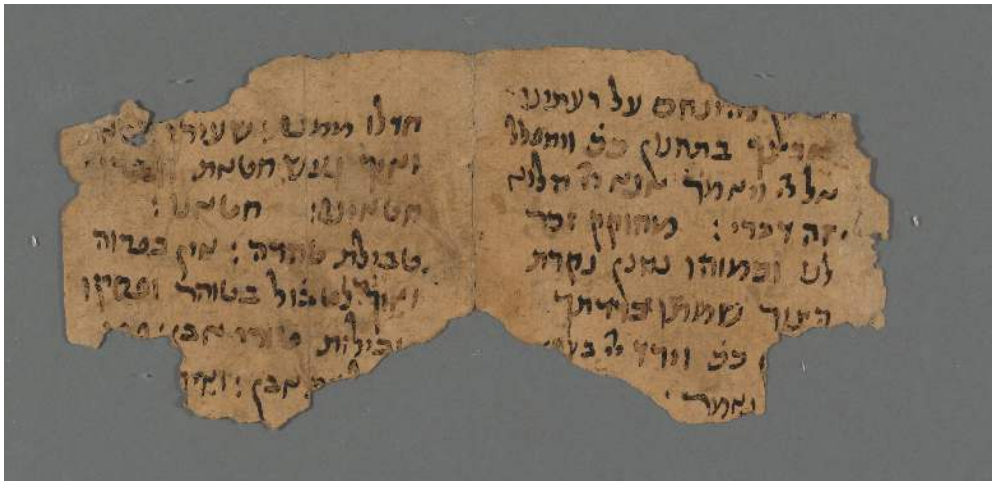


Figure 3.1 Cairo Geniza Fragment
Piyyuṭ (L-G Lit. 1.18)
Torn bifolium of piyyuṭim. F. 1r contains part of the ḥata'nu seliḥa by Yose b. Yose, אין לנו כהן גדול, and other seliḥot.
University of Cambridge Digital Library (n.d.)

The melodies associated with these days create a solemn and introspective atmosphere during these crucial moments on the Jewish calendar. The inclusion of piyyutim in the context of Jewish holidays further underscores their versatility and significance in shaping the religious and cultural expressions of the Jewish community throughout the entire year.

Festivals: Sukkot, Pesach, and Shavuot

The three Jewish pilgrimage festivals, Sukkot, Pesach, and Shavuot, are imbued with unique piyyutim that encapsulate the themes of pilgrimage, redemption, and the giving of the Torah. These compositions contribute to the festive atmosphere of each holiday, enhancing the worship experience for congregants.

Purim and Hannukah

Purim and Hanukkah, while not part of the biblical pilgrimage festivals, are celebrated with their own distinct piyyutim. These compositions add a layer of joy and reflection to the commemorations of Purim's salvation and Hannukah's miracles.

Lifecycle Events

The rich tapestry of piyyutim extends beyond the regular synagogue worship and encompasses various lifecycle events within the Jewish tradition. Births, circumcisions, פִּדְיוֹן הַבֵּן *pidyon ha ben* (the redemption of the firstborn son), זֶבֶד הַבַּת *zebed ha bat* (naming of a daughter), the first hair-cutting ceremony (on a boy's third birthday), *bar mitzvah* ceremonies, and funerals all boast their own specialized repertoire of piyyutim. These distinct sets of piyyutim play a crucial role in expressing the beliefs and customs associated with each life event. The compositions delve into the intricacies of these milestones, capturing not only the joyous celebrations but also the profound spiritual aspects intertwined with these significant moments (Chouraqui, 1998).

Funerals and Memorial Services

In times of mourning and loss, piyyutim associated with funerals provide solace and express the collective grief of the community. These compositions navigate the delicate balance between mourning the departed and finding hope in the eternal nature of the soul.

First Hair-Cutting חלאקה

On a boy's third birthday, the first hair-cutting ceremony is a distinctive event marked by piyyutim expressing gratitude for the child's growth and well-being. These compositions delve into the spiritual symbolism associated with this milestone, connecting the act of hair-cutting to deeper spiritual meanings.

B’nei Mitzvah Ceremonies

As a young boy *or* girl reaches the age of 13 and becomes a *bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah*, the piyyutim in this context celebrate the coming of age and the assumption of religious responsibilities. These compositions often highlight the significance of embracing one's role within the Jewish community and the broader covenant. Today, consideration for adapting piyyutim texts fo*r Bat Mitzvah* students or encouraging the composition of new piyyutim that can be employed for *Bat Mitzvah* celebrations is encouraged.

Births

The celebration of a new life entering the community is accompanied by piyyutim that convey a sense of gratitude and hope. These poetic expressions often emphasize the continuity of Jewish heritage and the covenant between the individual and the divine.

Zebed Ha Bat

The naming of a daughter is a joyous occasion marked by piyyutim that celebrate the blessing of new life and invoke divine protection for the newborn. These compositions often draw upon biblical references and reflect the significance of the daughter in the familial and communal context.

Circumcision / Brit Milah and Pidyon HaBen

The rituals of circumcision and the subsequent redemption of the firstborn son have unique piyyutim associated with them. These compositions reflect the sacred nature of these ceremonies, connecting them to the biblical narratives and emphasizing the individual's commitment to the covenant. *Y'hi Shalom B'cheileinu,* shared later in this paper is sung at the *brit milah*, (the circumcision of a Jewish boy) or *Pidyon HaBen* serves as a great example. This was the original "*Siman Tov* טוֹב סִימָן" song!!

Chapter 5: The Cairo Geniza: Ensuring Continuity

The Cairo Genizah is a collection of medieval Jewish manuscripts discovered in the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustat (Old Cairo). For centuries, the Jewish com

munity placed worn-out books and documents in this storeroom, creating an unparalleled collection of historical materials. In the late 19th century, scholar Solomon Schechter, with support from Charles Taylor, brought 193,000 manuscripts from the genizah to Cambridge, forming the Taylor-Schechter genizah Collection (Cambridge Digital Library, 2025).

Imagine stumbling upon a hidden archive, a treasure trove of Jewish life spanning centuries. This is a geniza, a repository of forgotten documents and texts, whispering stories of the past. Among the Cairo Geniza even amid layers of what to some may have appeared to be garbage, and piles of what we process today as recycling when dealing with paper, fragments and faded ink, we discover piyyutim manuscripts - Jewish liturgical poems - in various states of preservation. Some emerge as complete texts, offering a direct line to the devotional practices of past generations. Others are nearly whole, missing only minor pieces, yet still brimming with historical insights.

Then there are the fragments, tantalizing pieces of a literary religious puzzle. Like archaeologists of the written word, scholars meticulously connect these fragments to others found within the geniza, reconstructing lost poems and prayers. Sometimes, these fragments find their match in texts preserved outside the geniza, enriching our understanding of known works. Occasionally, a fragment illuminates a known practice or

oral tradition, providing a tangible link to the past. Yet, some fragments remain stubbornly enigmatic, their full meaning lost to the passage of time. Even these, however, offer glimpses into the vast devotional Jewish creativity, reminding us of the depth and diversity of this ancient literary tradition.

In our day, we also have *genizot* (plural of geniza), where we store sacred texts and writings that are no longer usable. However, unlike the Cairo Geniza, where items were preserved for centuries, our genizot tend to be temporary. Eventually, these items are respectfully buried, just as we bury people, returning them to the earth.

But Baruch Hashem, thank God, that the Cairo Geniza existed! It was a remarkable storehouse that preserved these treasures for us, allowing access to documents as old as 1,000 years. This incredible window into the past provides invaluable insights into Jewish life, history, and religious practice across generations.

The Cairo Geniza reminds us of the importance of preserving our heritage and transmitting it to future generations. While our practice of burying sacred texts demonstrates respect for the divine Name and the words of Torah, the Cairo Geniza highlights the value of preserving our history and learning from the past. Each fragment, each document, tells a story and contributes to our understanding of who we are as a people.

Jacob Mann's (1888-1940) exploration of ancient synagogue practices sheds light on the integration of biblical themes into piyyutim. His book, *The Bible as Preached in the Ancient Synagogue* provides insights from ancient synagogue practice, biblical interpretation, and midrashim through the integration of Piyyutim. The ancient synagogue served as a platform for the interpretation and expression of biblical

narratives, enriching the understanding with the expressive depth of piyyutim (Mann, 1927).

Now we transition to looking at some examples taking a closer look, doing analysis of two palimpsests from the Cairo Geniza with Piyyutim hoping to provide some inspiration for religiosity, and spiritual encounter with our Creator through texts.

A Closer Look: Two Palimpsests from the Cairo Geniza with Piyyutim

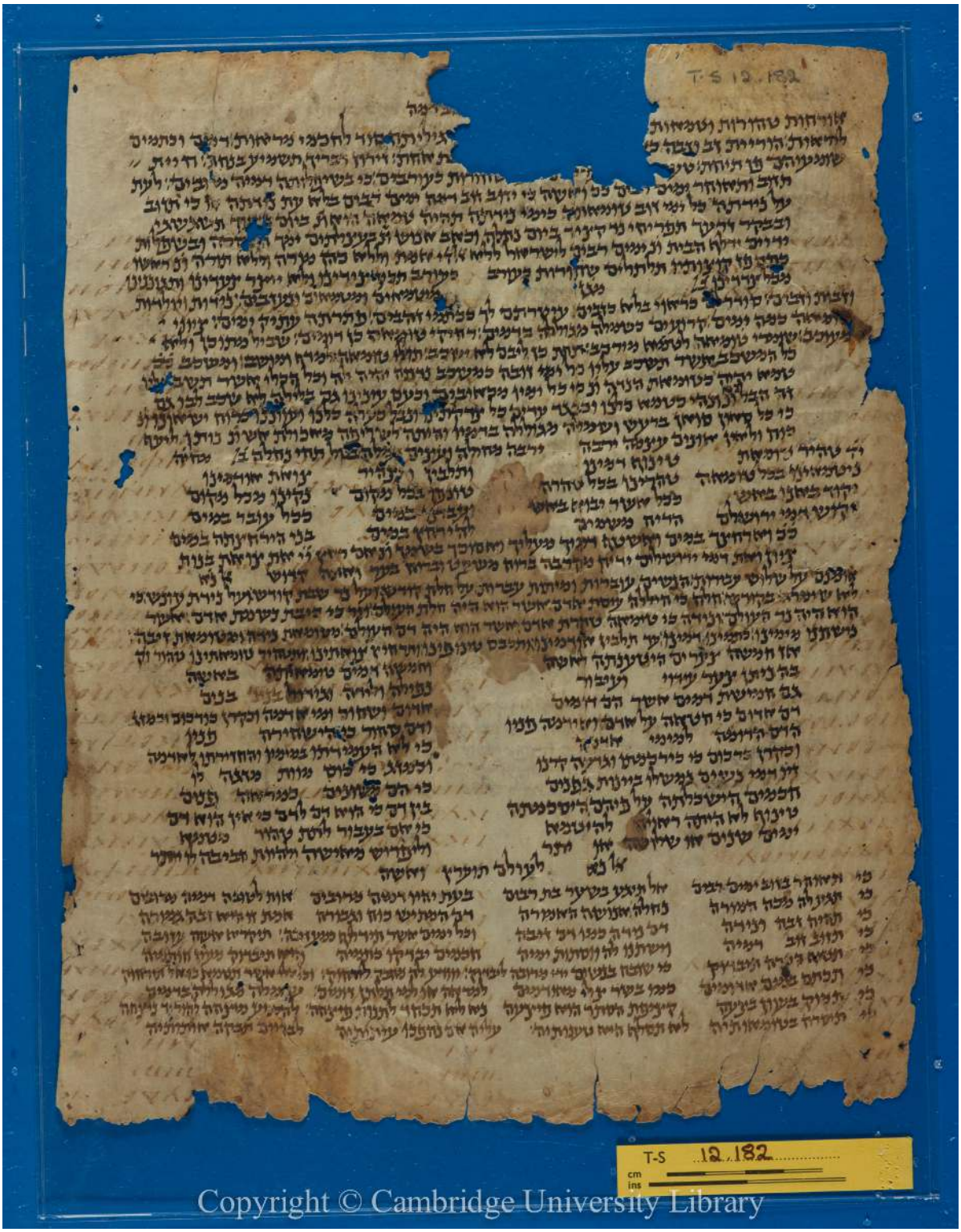


Figure 5.1 Yannai/Triennial Torah Palimpsest; piyyut; Bible (T-S 12.182)
(University of Cambridge Digital Library)

As a first example to bring us into the world of piyyut research available in the thousands, the Geniza fragment, cataloged as T-S 12.182 at the Cambridge University Library, offers a fascinating glimpse into the rich history of Jewish liturgical poetry and biblical translation. It is a palimpsest, meaning it was reused, with 10th-century piyyutim (religious poems) by Yannai inscribed over a 7th-century copy of Origen's *Hexapla*.

The *Hexapla* was a monumental effort to compare different versions of the Torah, including the Hebrew text and various Greek translations (Brock, 1987; Kantor, 2019). This fragment preserves portions of columns 2-5, showcasing the diversity of interpretations available to scholars at the time. The presence of the *Hexapla* in the Geniza suggests its continued relevance to Jewish communities even centuries after its creation (Kantor, 2019).

The upper text, consisting of Yannai's piyyutim, adds another layer of historical significance. Yannai was a prolific liturgical poet whose works were widely circulated in the Byzantine period. Here one views qedušta'ot for the reading of two sedarim from the triennial Torah cycle employed in Eretz Yisrael partnering with the reading of Leviticus 15:1 - 15:25.

These qedušta'ot, or hymns of praise, were likely part of a larger collection used during synagogue services, part of a maḥzor. Their presence on this palimpsest highlights the ongoing evolution of Jewish liturgy and the creative ways in which poets like Yannai adapted biblical themes for contemporary audiences (Schechter, 1897).

The fact that this fragment can be joined with others to reconstruct a complete quire speaks to the meticulous work of geniza scholars (Reif, 2002). By piecing together

these scattered fragments, they can recover lost works and gain a deeper understanding of Jewish intellectual and religious life in the medieval period.

Introduction to בָּרוּךְ הַגֶּבֶר *Barukh Haggever* and וְאֵדְעָה מָה *V'eid'a Mah Piyyutim*

Prepare to be amazed! Nestled within the treasures of the Cairo Genizah is this page written on both front and back featuring the piyyutim בָּרוּךְ הַגֶּבֶר *Barukh Haggever* and וְאֵדְעָה מָה V'eid'a Mah, now labeled as Fragment T-S K5.41. This gem housed in the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Collection contains musical notation for 12th-century Hebrew piyutim brimming with expansion towards faith in Judaism, written in the elegant script of Middle Eastern Jews, accompanied by Lombardic musical notation used in European Christian churches. While labeled as a fragment, and one can see some missing parts and holes in the document, it is a single leaf within a collection, measuring 16.4 cm in height and 12.5 cm in width. The stave is ruled with a hard point on one side and rubricated on the other, with each line marked with Hebrew letters from *Alef* to *Hei* (Cambridge Digital Library, 2025).

The mystery of its authorship is solved through the autobiography of Ovadiah the Norman Convert, a fascinating figure who bridged two worlds. Obadiah Hager-the Convert, the scribe of fragment T-S K5.41, was an Italian priest named Johannes of Oppido who converted to Judaism in 1102 CE (Cambridge Digital Library). His conversion occurred during a period of intense religious fervor and conflict, marked by the First Crusade. Obadiah's background as a Christian cleric likely exposed him to Gregorian chant and Lombardic notation (Institut Européen des Musiques Juives, 2025).

Obadiah's conversion to Judaism involved a formal process of appearing before a *Bet Din*, a Jewish court and declaring his commitment to the Jewish faith (Chabad.org, 2025) Maimonides/Rambam, a prominent Jewish philosopher and legal scholar, wrote several letters to Obadiah Hager, addressing his questions about Jewish law and identity (Peltz, 2020).

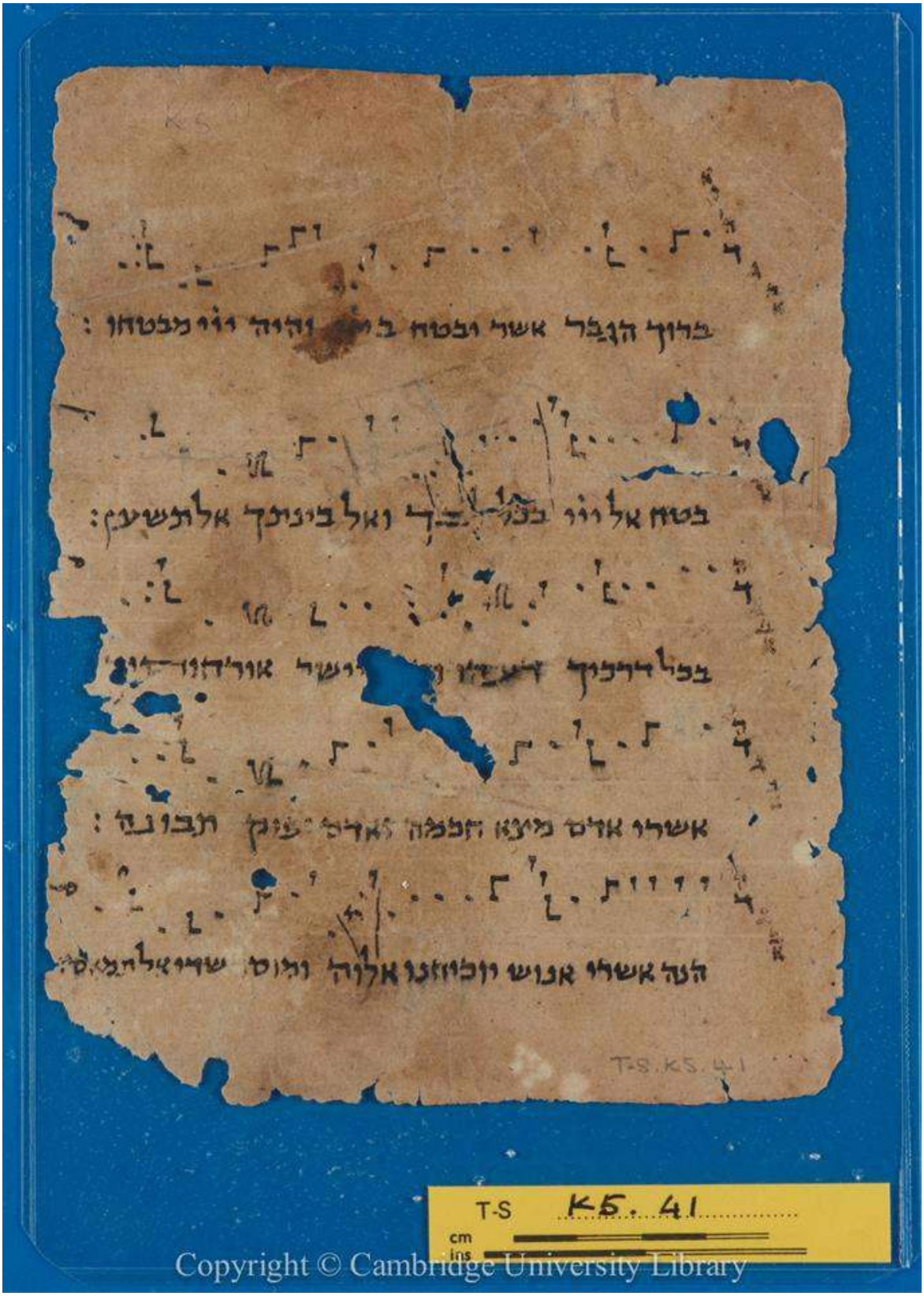


Figure 5.2 Musical notation of the piyyut ברוך הגבר in the hand of Ovadiah the Ger. Fragment T-S K5.41. - Front (Cambridge University Library)

From what I can see through an online search, these piyyutim have yet to be republished or sung. Neither piyyut is listed as a cohesive piyyut from what I can find. I needed to decipher each letter. In some cases I made errors in the first draft of the new text document. For the next step I searched *Tanakh* to find the corresponding phrases according to what was more easily readable. Next, I compared and contrasted similar p'sukim/verses which fit into the puzzle. Finally I made corrections to the text draft.

While the single line of Baruch Hagever is sung in different contexts, even as part of the very familiar grace after meals, *birkat hamazon*, the following verses are not as familiar.

Baruch Hagever בָּרוּךְ הַגֶּבֶר - Piyyut Fragment T-S K5.41 (Front) Translation and Sources

בָּרוּךְ הַגֶּבֶר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בַּיהוָה וְהָיָה יְהוָה מִבְטַחוֹ׃	Blessed is he who trusts in the LORD, Whose trust is the LORD alone. (Jeremiah.17.7)
בְּטַח אֶל־יְהוָה בְּכָל־לִבֶּךָ וְאֶל־בִּינָתְךָ אַל־תִּשָּׁעֵן׃	Trust in GOD with all your heart, And do not rely on your own understanding.
בְּכָל־דְּרָכֶיךָ דָּעֵהוּ וְהוּא יְיַשֵּׁר אֹרְחֹתֶיךָ׃	In all your ways acknowledge [God], And your paths will be made smooth. (Proverbs.3.5-6)
אַשְׁרֵי אָדָם מָצָא חָכְמָה וְאָדָם יָפִיק תְּבוּנָה׃	Happy is the one who finds wisdom, The one who attains understanding. (Proverbs.3.13)
הִנֵּה אַשְׁרֵי אֱנוֹשׁ יוֹכְחֶנּוּ אֱלוֹהַּ וּמוּסַר שַׁדַּי אַל־תִּמְאָס׃	See how happy is the person whom God reproves; Do not reject the discipline of the Almighty.(Job.5.17) (JPS Tanach, 2023)
Text transcribed then compiled and sourced by Brian Shamash	

This piyyut beautifully interweaves verses from Jeremiah, Proverbs, and Job to offer a powerful message about faith, humility, and divine guidance. It emphasizes that true happiness and success come from placing complete trust in God, seeking His

wisdom in all endeavors, and accepting His discipline with grace. The piyyut urges complete surrender to God's will and cautions against relying solely on our limited intellect. It highlights the importance of acknowledging God in every aspect of life, recognizing that seeking His guidance in all decisions leads us to the right path.

While Proverbs offers general wisdom and guidance, Job speaks from a place of deep suffering and wrestling with God. The piyyut emphasizes the value of wisdom and understanding, essential for navigating life's challenges, reminding us that true wisdom, sourced from God, leads to happiness and fulfillment. Furthermore, including the verse from Job emphasizes that even in the midst of trials and challenges, we should recognize God's hand and accept His discipline.

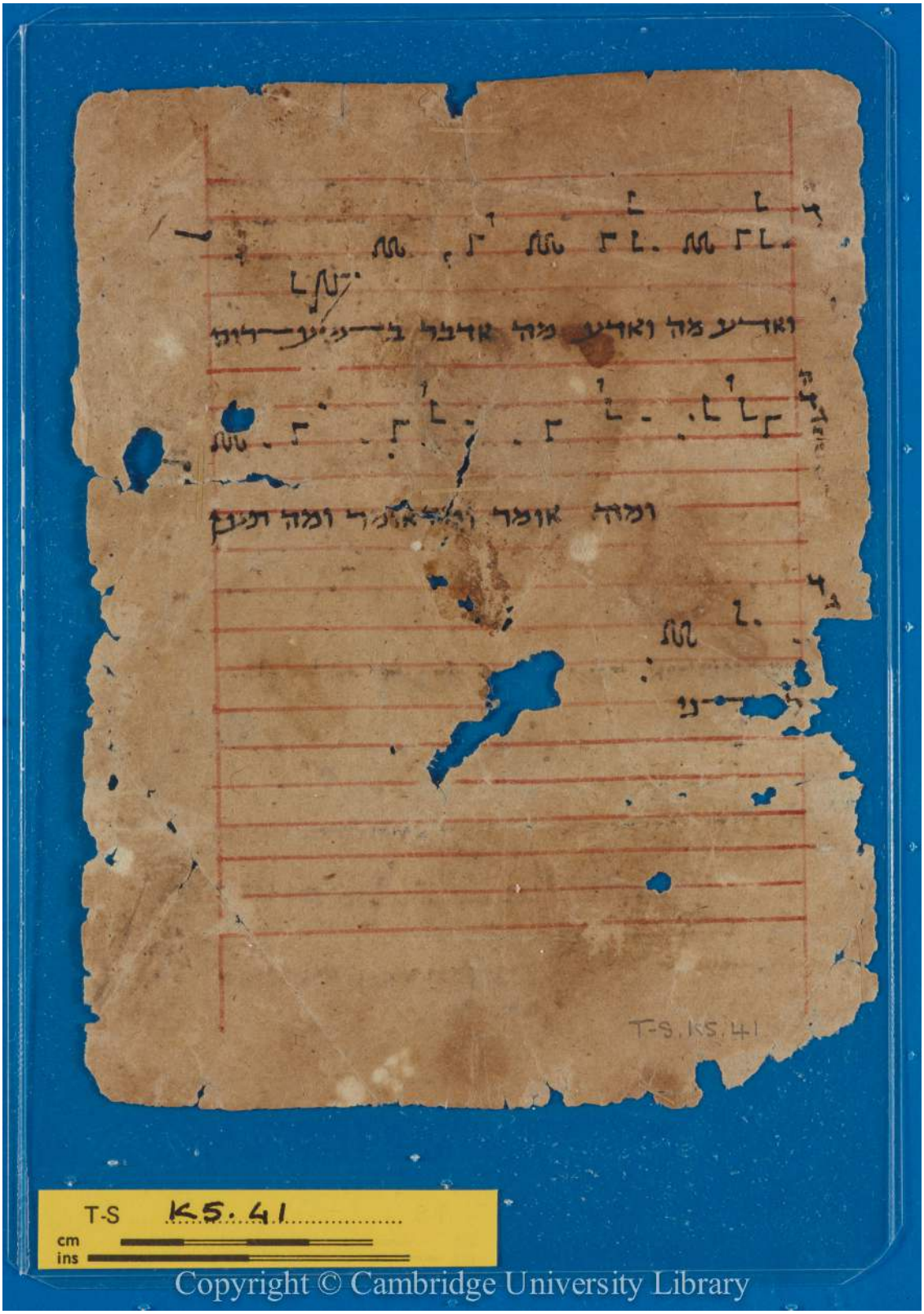


Figure 5.3 **Musical notation** of the piyyut **וְאֵדְעָה מָה** ***V'eid'a Mah*** in the hand of Ovadiah the Ger. Fragment T-S K5.41. - Back (Cambridge University Library)

וְאֵדְעָה מָה *V'eid'a Mah* - Piyyut Fragment T-S K5.41 (Back) Translation

וְאֵדְעָה מָה וְאֵדְעָה מָה אֲדַבֵּר בַּיְעָרִים	What can I know? (And I will know what,) What will I know to say in the wilderness? (And I will know what to say in the wilderness.)
וּמָה אוֹמַר וּמָה אוֹמַר וּמָה תַּעַן	And what shall I say, and what shall I say, and what will You answer?
Text transcribed by Brian Shamash	

The second piyyut I interpret as more of a philosophical message without direct quotes to tanach verses. Perhaps it is a composition by Ovadia Hager or captured sentiment and poetry of interactions from his learning with another. This passage resonates with several powerful themes and phrases from Tanach, suggesting a deep engagement with Jewish scripture and tradition on the part of the seeker.

וְאֵדְעָה מָה And I will know what / What can I know? This echoes the humility of Moshe before God, as he questions his ability to lead the Israelites: **מִי אָנֹכִי כִּי אֵלֵךְ אֶל פַּרְעֹה** Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? (Exodus 3:11). It also recalls the Psalmist's plea for understanding: **לַמְּדֵנִי חֻקֶּיךָ** Teach me your statutes (Psalm 119:12). This thirst for knowledge is a hallmark of Jewish tradition, emphasizing the constant pursuit of learning and spiritual growth.

מָה אֲדַבֵּר בַּיְעָרִים What will I know to say in the wilderness? This evokes the Israelites' journey through the wilderness, a time of uncertainty and testing. The phrase **בַּיְעָרִים** in the wilderness appears frequently in Tanach, often symbolizing a period of searching and spiritual refinement. For example, Hosea speaks of God alluring Israel into the wilderness **אֶל מִדְבָּר** to speak tenderly to them (Hosea 2:14). This seeker may be

anticipating similar challenges and seeking the words to navigate their own spiritual wilderness.

וּמָה אוֹמַר וּמָה תַּעַן And what shall I say, and what will You answer? This expresses a desire for dialogue with the divine, reminiscent of Abraham's conversations with God, where he questions and intercedes on behalf of others (Genesis 18:23-32). It also mirrors the Psalmist's cries for help and guidance: **שְׁמַע תְּפִלָּתִי יְהוָה וְשַׁוְעָתִי הַאֲזִינָה אֶל דִּמְעָתִי אַל תֶּחֱרַשׁ** Hear my prayer, GOD, and give ear to my cry; do hold Your peace at my tears (Psalm 39:12). This yearning for a responsive relationship with God is central to Jewish prayer and spirituality.

The seeker's journey from Christianity to Judaism or for any of us can be seen as a return to spiritual roots, a process of rediscovering heritage and finding a deeper connection to God. This resonates with the concept of *teshuvah*, which implies not just repentance but also a turning back towards God and a striving for a more meaningful life. The seeker's questions reflect a sincere desire to understand and embrace Jewish tradition, seeking knowledge, guidance, and ultimately a deeper relationship with the Divine.

By meditating on these biblical allusions, the piyyut gains further depth and meaning. We can connect the seeker's personal journey to the broader narrative of Jewish history and spirituality, suggesting that their quest for faith and understanding is part of a long and ongoing tradition of seeking truth and connection with God.

Observations of the Page Sides of T-S K5.41 from a Musical Perspective

This remarkable document offers valuable insights into the development of Jewish liturgical music and the cultural exchange and influence during this period. Adding to the intrigue, the Hebrew text flows from right to left, and the musical notation follows suit. This presents a delightful challenge for modern-day musicians accustomed to reading music from left to right. Or on the other hand an experienced hebrew reader will be pleased to be able to follow the text and the music flowing together without the necessity to set up hebrew syllables in the wrong direction. The author's artistry and organization extends beyond the notes themselves.

The Hebrew lines are generously spaced, providing a vast canvas for the music to soar and dip, capturing a full spectrum of notation. The ruled staff in red with a hard point on one side and rubricated on the other has each line marked with Hebrew letters from *Alef* to *Hei.* The creation of the staff seems to me to be an indication of a first step that Ovadia Hager took in preparing the document. I believe he laid out the staff paper and labeling the Alef - Hei (for illustration purposes for the modern student of music Alef-Hei is like lines 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 on a staff paper). We even find note heads adorned with flags, implying note durations and rhythmic intricacies.

While Jewish musical practices, which primarily relied on oral tradition and memorization for transmitting melodies, the use of Lombardic notation on fragment T-S K5.41 is particularly noteworthy as it provides the earliest known example of written musical settings for Jewish liturgical poetry. The Lombardic neumatic notation was system commonly used for Gregorian chant in medieval Europe. This notation employs neumes, symbols that indicate the melodic direction and relative duration of notes, but

not precise pitch or rhythm. Neumes were often written above the text, providing a visual guide for the melody. (Cambridge Digital Library, 2025)

In conclusion, Fragment T-S K5.41 is a remarkable artifact that provides invaluable insights into the history of Jewish liturgical music. Its unique features, including the use of Lombardic notation and the identity of its scribe, Obadiah HaGer, make it a significant piece of Jewish cultural heritage and a valuable resource for the study of medieval music. This fragment opens a window into a fascinating period of musical and religious interaction, inviting further research and exploration. I am thrilled to be an extension of the Cairo Geniza research bringing these texts back into circulation for an english reading audience. The next endeavor will be to practice using the neum system to approximate a version of what it perhaps sounded like for Ovadia haGer. Let’s sing it together soon!

Chapter 6: Two Modern Piyyut Anthologies

The following modern-day anthologies of piyyutim have been provided to me as gifts.

Figure 6.1 Sefer Shirim: Tehillah Yesharim HaShalem and Sheer Ushvachah Hallel Ve-Zimrah

These books serve as invaluable references for various occasions and events within Sephardi-Mizrahi communities. The green book *Sefer Shirim: Tehillah Yesharim HaShalem: Pizmonim, Bakashot veTeshbabhot laḤol, leShabbatot, leR"Ḥ* : ספר שירים תהלת ישרים השלם : פזמונים, בקשות ותשבחות לחול, לשבתות, לר"ח ...edited and published by Tzalach ben Rav Mantzur צאלח ב"ר יעקב מנצור in 1974 in Jerusalem, presents a wealth of useful piyyutim and is central in the Babylonian Jewish communities.

The red book *Sheer Ushvachah Hallel Ve-Zimrah*, by Sephardic Heritage Foundation Inc. (1997), provides a rich collection of piyyutim, reflecting the diverse musical and poetic traditions of Sephardic heritage. This book serves as the primary source for *pizmonim* (traditional Jewish songs and melodies sung with the intention of

praising God and learning certain aspects of traditional religious teachings) and piyyutim in Brooklyn's Syrian Jewish community. Thus, much of this book centers on the Aleppan tradition, and This collection, while focused on the Aleppan tradition, offers invaluable insights into the Babylonian piyyut tradition as well new compositions from Brooklyn itself in the 20th century. Both books provide a lens through which to appreciate the broader Sephardi-Mizrahi poetic landscape. Despite their association with specific communities, they feature pieces that circulated widely across the region, highlighting the interconnectedness of these poetic traditions.Thus, one has to see the repertoire here as something slightly different than piyyutim. Primarily, this centers around function, but also around many pieces being inspired by their musical setting outside of any liturgical impetus. The sources for online learning of piyyutim is steadily growing and an exhaustive paper and blog could outline the organizations and websites that are doing important research and documentation in this regard. I would like to highlight one site in particular that is a virtualization of the *Sheer Ushvachah Hallel Ve-Zimrah*, (Matouk, 2014) breathing musical life into the texts with audio recordings, sheet music, musical *maqamat* categories, handwritten manuscripts, background materials and more at https://www.pizmonim.com/ (Torjman-Thomas, 2024).

These resources, with their extensive content, serve as sources for the various types of piyyutim discussed in the subsequent chapter. The books also present a challenge to the non-Hebrew-speaking masses, as there are no translations in English or in other languages. This challenge provides the inspiration for this project paper and the production of new piyyut books and websites with piyyut provided in translation with source commentary.

Chapter 7: Analysis of Five Piyyutim in Contemporary Circulation

This section delves into the analysis of five distinct piyyutim, offering a valuable resource for congregations, Jewish music educators, hazzanim, and enthusiasts worldwide to learn and experience the beauty liturgical poetry related to the Babylonian Jewish experience. By providing musical notation and exploring the rhythmic nuances of these piyyutim, we aim to make these texts more accessible and engaging for a wider audience and this process can serve as a model for further expansion providing for the deep learning of other piyyutim. Prepare to delve into the historical and thematic richness of these liturgical poems, uncovering their deeper meanings and appreciating their musical expressions.

We begin with *Y'hi Shalom B'cheilienu*, a Brit Milah piyyut resonating with blessings for the newborn and hopes for redemption. Next, we encounter *Yom Hashabbat Ein Kamohu*, a Shabbat piyyut expressing the longing and joy associated with the Sabbath day.

Our journey continues with *El Eliyahu*, a piyyut for the conclusion of Shabbat, Brit Milah, and Pidyon Haben, invoking Elijah the Prophet and expressing the yearning for redemption. We then transition to *Mah Navu (Nau) 'Alei Heharim Raglei*, a 19th-century piece filled with biblical imagery and prophecies, capturing the anticipation for the return to Zion.

Finally, we uncover the melodic roots of *Am Ne'emanai*, a 20th-century piyyut set musically to a favorite Arabic song that masterfully narrates the Hanukkah story through poetic techniques and biblical allusions.

Through this exploration we will illuminate the interplay between history, faith, and musical artistic expression, offering a glimpse into the enduring power of piyyutim in shaping Jewish identity and spiritual connection. We hope to foster a deeper appreciation for the rich tradition of Babylonian Jewish piyyut and inspire its continued preservation, use for prayer and building and strengthening community.

Piyyut 1: יְהִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֵינוּ Y'hi Shalom B'cheileinu - Let there be peace in our cities

The ancient piyyut, *Y'hi Shalom B'cheilienu* יְהִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֵינוּ (Let there be peace in our cities), has echoed through generations during the sacred ceremony of Brit Milah (circumcision). While the author remains a mystery, hidden within the poem's structure lies an acrostic spelling of the name Yehoshua. First appearing in Venice in 1522, the piyyut quickly found a home in prayer books and collections across the Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewish communities.

This beautiful poem holds the honor of being the oldest known Brit Milah piyyut still sung today. This piyyut is a classic *muwashshah* form. Structured with six stanzas, each verse ends with a powerful refrain:

בְּסִימָן טוֹב בֵּן בָּא לָנוּ

בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל. אָמֵן

"With a good sign [of blessing], a son has come to us, in his days the redeemer will come."

Within each strophe: With the repetition of the first line, the rhyme scheme of each strophe becomes AAAB. The first two lines are identical, creating immediate emphasis. The third line rhymes with the first two, further solidifying the idea. The fourth line introduces a new rhyme (B), and the final line rhymes with the fourth (B), providing a sense of closure. The structure of יהי שלום בחילנו, with its recurring refrain and distinct strophes, strongly echoes the form of the muwashshah. The refrain functions much like the kharja in a muwashshah, providing a recurring thematic and musical anchor. The internal rhyme scheme adds a musical quality, and each stanza concludes with the calming sound, "...el אֵל."

The content of the piyyut overflows with blessings for the newborn. It expresses the fervent hope that the child will grow strong in his faith, basking in the richness of Torah study. A long and healthy life is also a central theme, reflecting the importance of family and lineage in Jewish tradition.

The usage of “Mazel Tov” is generally understood as a universal expression of good luck and blessings, applicable to people of any gender. However, when examining the chorus of *Y’hi Shalom B’cheilenu*, scholar Yitzhak Avishur proposes a nuanced distinction. In his article, לשונות הברכה "סימן טוב" ו"מזל טוב" בלשונות היהודים (Leshonot ha-berakha "siman tov" ve-"mazal tov" be-leshonot ha-Yehudim) (Avishur, 2003-2004), he suggests that "’Mazal Tov' is traditionally used for the birth of daughters, while 'Siman Tov' סִימָן טוב is reserved for the birth of sons within Sephardic and Mizrahi communities."

The piyyut's influence extends beyond the walls of synagogues. The opening line found its way into the song "Mizmorei Brit Milah" by the renowned Israeli poet Chaim Hefer.

"Y’hi Shalom B’cheilienu" stands as a testament to the enduring traditions of Brit Milah. Its lyrical beauty and heartfelt blessings continue to resonate with families as they welcome new life into the Jewish community.

Let there be peace in our cities יְהִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֵינוּ - Translation

(Texts phrases have been doubled here according to the practice)

יְהִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֵינוּ	Let there be peace in our cities,
יְהִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֵינוּ	Let there be peace in our cities,
וְשַׁלְוָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	and complete peace in all of Israel,
בְּסִימָן טוֹב בֵּן בָּא לָנוּ	With a sign [of blessing], a son has come to us,
בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל. אָמֵן	and in his days our redeemer will come. Amen
הַיֶּלֶד יְהִי רַעֲנָן	May the boy flourish,
הַיֶּלֶד יְהִי רַעֲנָן	May the boy flourish,
בְּצֵל שַׁדַּי יִתְלוֹנָן	may he dwell in the embrace of G-d.
וּבַתּוֹרָה (אָז) יִתְבּוֹנָן	Then he will meditate in Torah,
יְאַלֵּף דָּת לְכָל שׁוֹאֵל. **אָמֵן**	He will teach faith to all who ask. Amen
בְּסִימָן טוֹב בֵּן בָּא לָנוּ	With a sign [of blessing], a son has come to us,
בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל. אָמֵן	and in his days our redeemer will come. Amen
וּמְקוֹרוֹ יְהִי בָּרוּךְ	And his core will be blessed,
וּמְקוֹרוֹ יְהִי בָּרוּךְ	And his core will be blessed,
זְמַן חַיָּיו יְהִי אָרוּךְ	the time of his life will be long,
וְשֻׁלְחָנוֹ יְהִי עָרוּךְ	And his table will be set,
וְזִבְחוֹ לֹא יִתְגָּאֵל. **אָמֵן**	And its sacrifice shall not be redeemed. Amen
בְּסִימָן טוֹב בֵּן בָּא לָנוּ	With a sign [of blessing], a son has come to us,
בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל. אָמֵן	and in his days our redeemer will come. Amen
שְׁמוֹ יֵצֵא בְּכָל עֵבֶר	His name will be known across each passing place,
שְׁמוֹ יֵצֵא בְּכָל עֵבֶר	His name will be known across each passing place,
אֲשֶׁר יִגְדַּל יְהִי גֶּבֶר	as he grows he will become a man,
וּלְיִרְאֵי אֵל יְהִי חָבֵר	and to those who have awe for God, he will be a friend,
יְהִי בְּדוֹרוֹ כִּשְׁמוּאֵל. **אָמֵן**	he will be like Sh'muel in his generation. Amen
בְּסִימָן טוֹב בֵּן בָּא לָנוּ	With a sign [of blessing], a son has come to us,
בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל. אָמֵן	and in his days our redeemer will come. Amen
עַדִי זִקְנָה וְגַם שֵׂיבָה	Until old age and also when his hair turns gray,
עַדִי זִקְנָה וְגַם שֵׂיבָה	Until old age and also when his hair turns gray,
יְהִי דָּשֵׁן בְּכָל טוֹבָה	he will bear fruit from every kind act,
וְשָׁלוֹם לוֹ וְרֹב אַהֲבָה	And peace will be with him and much love,
אָמֵן כֵּן יֹאמַר הָאֵל. **אָמֵן**	Amen, may it be so says the Mighty One. Amen
בְּסִימָן טוֹב בֵּן בָּא לָנוּ	With a sign [of blessing], a son has come to us,
בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל. אָמֵן	and in his days our redeemer will come. Amen
הַנִּמּוֹל בְּתוֹךְ עַמּוֹ	The circumcised one within the nation,
הַנִּמּוֹל בְּתוֹךְ עַמּוֹ	The circumcised one within the nation,
יִחְיֶה לְאָבִיו וּלְאִמּוֹ	shall live for his father and mother,
וְיִהְיֶה אֱלֹהָיו עִמּוֹ	And his God shall be with him,
וְגַם כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל.**אָמֵן**	and also all the house of Israel. Amen

יְהִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֵינוּ Commentary and references to biblical texts
(Note that I have doubled texts according to the tradition of repeating some phrases)

Verse 1

יְהִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֵינוּ יְהִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֵינוּ וְשַׁלְוָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	Let there be peace in our cities, Let there be peace in our cities, and complete peace in all of Israel,

יְהִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֵינוּ Verse one bears close resemblance to Tehillim 122:7 יְהִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֵךְ שַׁלְוָה בְּאַרְמְנוֹתָיִךְ -- May there be well-being within your ramparts, peace in your citadels-(JPS 2023), in which חֵילֵךְ refers to the walls of Jerusalem (see B.San 62A). Here, in our piyyut, written much later, perhaps חֵילֵינוּ refers to contemporaneous city walls -- while the conclusion of verse one, בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל--and in his days our redeemer will come, the meaning will revert back to Tehillim 122:7 (as in Jerusalem will once again have city walls). The piyyut verse expresses the hope that peace will prevail within the city of Jerusalem - its residents safe and secure, and one can interpret that that peace will extend outwards from the holy city to all of the cities that we live in.

Chorus

בְּסִימָן טוֹב בֵּן בָּא לָנוּ **בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל. אָמֵן**	With a sign [of blessing], a son has come to us, and in his days our redeemer will come. Amen

בְּסִימָן טוֹב, translated here “a sign [of blessing]” certainly carries the additional prayer for divine assistance in protecting the baby during the circumcision.

בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל In his [the child’s] days, the redeemer will come. This is a prayer for the coming of the Messiah, who will usher in a time of peace and prosperity for all people.

Verse 2

הַיֶּלֶד יְהִי רַעֲנָן	May the boy flourish,
הַיֶּלֶד יְהִי רַעֲנָן	May the boy flourish,
בְּצֵל שַׁדַּי יִתְלוֹנָן	may he dwell in the embrace of G-d.
וּבַתּוֹרָה (אָז) יְהְגֶּה	Then he will meditate in Torah,
יְאַלֵּף דָּת לְכָל שׁוֹאֵל. **אָמֵן**	He will teach faith to all who ask. Amen

בְּצֵל שַׁדַּי יִתְלוֹנָן Tehillim 91:1 He will dwell in the shadow of the Almighty.

This phrase describes someone who is protected by God. It expresses the hope that the child will be safe and secure under God's care.

The word, **יְהְגֶּה meditate,** occurs only twice in Tanakh, both in the book of Job (26:14 and 11:11) - Thus, the conclusion of verse two “he will explain faith to all questioners,” plausibly relates to the superlative that the child will be capable of explaining even the book of Job’s moral questions.

יְאַלֵּף He will teach. Expresses the hope that he will grow up to be a wise, well educated and knowledgable man.

Chorus

בְּסִימָן טוֹב בֵּן בָּא לָנוּ	With a sign [of blessing], a son has come to us,
בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל. אָמֵן	and in his days our redeemer will come. Amen

Verse 3

וּמְקוֹרוֹ יְהִי בָּרוּךְ	And his core will be blessed,
וּמְקוֹרוֹ יְהִי בָּרוּךְ	And his core will be blessed,
זְמַן חַיָּיו יְהִי אָרוּךְ	the time of his life will be long,
וְשֻׁלְחָנוֹ יְהִי עָרוּךְ	And his table will be set,
וְזִבְחוֹ לֹא יִתָּגֵאל. **אָמֵן**	And its sacrifice shall not be redeemed. Amen

וּמְקוֹרוֹ - And his core, source, his root, his beginning. This refers to the child's family and heritage. It expresses the hope that he will be a proud and faithful member of his community.

יְהִי בָרוּךְ - Mishlei (Proverbs) 5:18 May he be blessed. This is a general blessing for the child. Followed by the and expression of hope that the child will have a long and happy life.

וְשֻׁלְחָנוֹ יְהִי עָרוּךְ - This could be a prayer that the child grows up with a family blessed with a fully set table with friends and guests surrounding him for Shabbat and Holy days. עָרוּךְ Literally “set” -- the expression, “table should be set,” is an allusion to the title of the code of Jewish law, the Shulchan Aruch (“Set table”).

וְזִבְחוֹ לֹא יִתְגָּאֵל - Vayikra 27:29 And its sacrifice shall not be redeemed - The verse refers to the law that certain types of sacrifices offered in the Temple could not be redeemed. If an animal was designated for sacrifice, it could not be bought back or used for other purposes. This could be referring to the brit milah and the removal of the foreskin. Some will take the foreskin which was cut, bury it in the soil, and plant a tree above it. Or the interpretation of וְזִבְחוֹ And his sacrifice – could be more global referring to the sacrificial temple practice with the future offerings that could occur after the coming of Mashiach.

לֹא יִתְגָּאֵל He will not be defiled. This refers to the child's future spiritual purity. It expresses the hope that he will avoid sin and temptation.

Chorus

בְּסִימָן טוֹב בֵּן בָּא לָנוּ **בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל. אָמֵן**	With a sign [of blessing], a son has come to us, and in his days our redeemer will come. Amen

Verse 4

שְׁמוֹ יֵצֵא בְּכָל עֵבֶר	**His name will be known across each passing place,**
שְׁמוֹ יֵצֵא בְּכָל עֵבֶר	His name will be known across each passing place,
אֲשֶׁר יִגְדַּל יְהִי גֶּבֶר	as he grows he will become a man,
וּלְיִרְאֵי אֵל יְהִי חָבֵר	and to those who have awe for God, he will be a friend,
יְהִי בְּדוֹרוֹ כִּשְׁמוּאֵל. **אָמֵן**	he will be like Sh′muel in his generation. Amen

שְׁמוֹ יִצֵּא בְּכָל עֵבֶר - Tehillim 72:17 – a description of the Messiah, who will be a great and powerful ruler. His name will be known and respected throughout the world.

שְׁמוֹ יִצֵּא בְּכָל עֵבֶר - “Name” and “border” are in Hebrew “shem” and “eber” which is likely a play on the Rabbinic yeshiva of Shem and Eber (the miraculous location wherein the forefathers were taught in the Midrash). On every side. בְּכָל עֵבֶר We interpret the child will be blessed and protected by God in all aspects of his life.

וּלְיִרְאֵי אֵל יְהִי חָבֵר - Tehillim 119:63 And may he be a friend to those who have awe of God. - This expresses the hope that the child will associate with friends who have a closeness to God and observance of mitzvoth.

יְהִי בְּדוֹרוֹ כִּשְׁמוּאֵל - May he be like Shmuel in his generation. Shmuel was a great prophet and leader who helped to save the Israelites from their enemies. This blessing expresses the hope that the child will grow up to be a great leader who will make a positive difference in the world. The most obvious rationale that the child’s attributes could be compared to Samuel in this piyyut is that the word Shmuel fits the rhyme sequence. For the deeper rationale of the payyetan’s choice of Shmuel a look at Midrash Aggadah on D’varim 17:9[5] a fabulous source of how to look at leaders within the context of their generation. Here is a portion of the Midrash for the textual reference:

שלשה קלי עולם כשלשה חמורי עולם, גדעון בדורו **כשמואל בדורו**,...

יפתח בדורו כמשה בדורו, שמשון בדורו...ו

While מדרש אגדה, דברים י״ז:ט׳:א׳ presents the words **כשמואל בדורו** the piyyut presents the two words in the opposite order **בְּדוֹרוֹ כִּשְׁמוּאֵל** to acheive a rhyme**.**

[5] Aggadah on D’varim 17:9 Sefaria
https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.17.9?lang=bi&with=Midrash%20Aggadah&lang2=en

In the ages of Moshe and Aharon, Moshe spoke to God and Aharon spoke to the people. Shmuel was called by God to be a prophet and he exemplified great strength in carrying out God's direction through his leadership. Babylonian Talmud Berachot 31b:17 has a wonderful learning debate, back and forth from the Rabbis providing various responses to: What is the meaning of "an offspring of men"? - referring to Shmuel. All positive responses: a man among men, a leader who will anoint two kings Saul and David, the equivalent of two, (Moshe and Aharon - referring to T'hillim 99:6) and exhibit humility. One can draw a kavanah from this to pray that the child will have an ability to communicate with the similar attributes of Shmuel who is able to hear the Divine voice and relate well with people.

Chorus

בְּסִימָן טוֹב בֵּן בָּא לָנוּ **בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל. אָמֵן**	With a sign [of blessing], a son has come to us, and in his days our redeemer will come. Amen

Verse 5

עֲדֵי זִקְנָה וְגַם שֵׂיבָה	Until old age and also when his hair turns gray,
עֲדֵי זִקְנָה וְגַם שֵׂיבָה	Until old age and also when his hair turns gray,
יְהִי דָּשֵׁן בְּכָל טוּבָה	he will bear fruit from every kind act,
וְשָׁלוֹם לוֹ וְרֹב אַהֲבָה	And peace will be with him and much love,
אָמֵן כֵּן יֹאמַר הָאֵל. **אָמֵן**	Amen, may it be so says the Mighty One. Amen

יְהִי דָּשֵׁן בְּכָל טוּבָה - T'hillim 92:15 contains a similar blessing using the same language "In old age (seivah) they still produce fruit; they are full of sap (d'shenim) and freshness" (JPS).

Chorus

בְּסִימָן טוֹב בֵּן בָּא לָנוּ **בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל. אָמֵן**	With a sign [of blessing], a son has come to us, and in his days our redeemer will come. Amen

Verse 6

הַנִּמּוֹל בְּתוֹךְ עַמּוֹ	The circumcised one within the nation,
הַנִּמּוֹל בְּתוֹךְ עַמּוֹ	The circumcised one within the nation,
יִחְיֶה לְאָבְיו וּלְאִמּוֹ	shall live for his father and mother,
וְיִהְיֶה אֱלֹהָיו עִמּוֹ	And his God shall be with him,
וְגַם כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל. **אָמֵן**	and also all the house of Israel. Amen

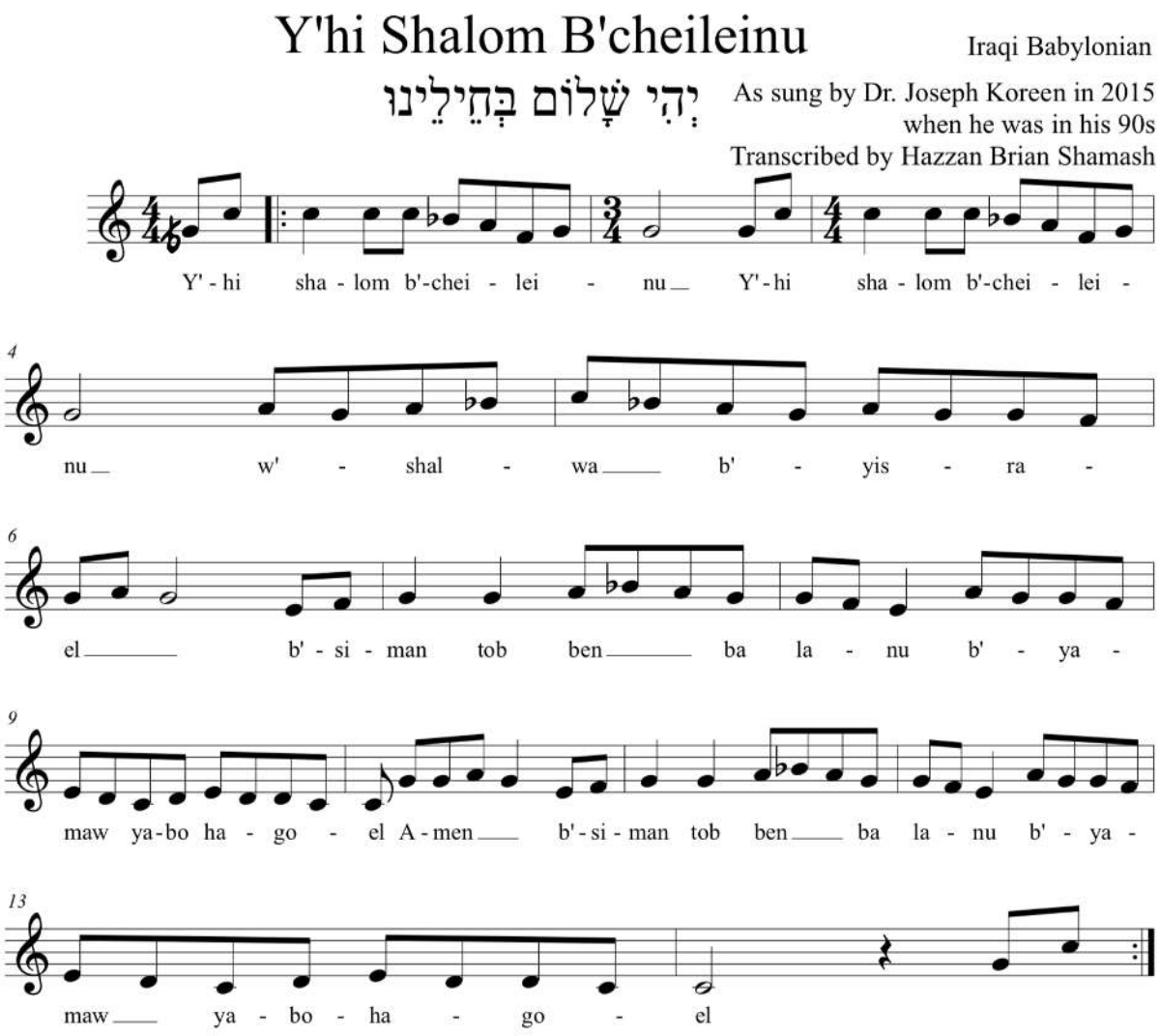
וְיִהְיֶה אֱלֹהָיו עִמּוֹ - Ezra 1:3 And may God be with him. This is a general blessing for the child. It expresses the hope that he will always have God's guidance and protection.

Chorus

בְּסִימָן טוֹב בֵּן בָּא לָנוּ	With a sign [of blessing], a son has come to us,
בְּיָמָיו יָבוֹא הַגּוֹאֵל. אָמֵן	and in his days our redeemer will come. Amen

Y’hi Shalom B’cheileinu - Musical Notation Transcription

Figure 7.2 Y’hi Shalom



When I lived in Melville, New York, I was very blessed to establish a meaningful friendship with Dr. Joseph Koreen z”l, who had come from Baghdad, Iraq. He was a fabulous *ba’al koreh*, was knowledgeable in piyyutim, and had a good voice and sense of pitch. In 2015, when my wife, Emily, was pregnant with a boy, I asked Joseph what we could sing at the Brit Milah (circumcision ceremony). Joseph sang a melody from

memory and we videotaped and asked him to provide the Hebrew text. He didn't have the text in a book; instead, he hand-wrote the Hebrew text on the back of a page from his prescription pad. This interaction was an insightful window onto the old-fashioned way in which piyyut was transmitted orally and written on small notes, like the piyyutim found in the Cairo Geniza. Later, I discovered that the piyyut Joseph taught me was well known enough to be included in various books and is now available online.

Above in Figure 7.2 I have notated Dr. Koreen's chanting according to the Babylonian tradition. Notice that the western notation has a half flat as an indication that the pitch E is lowered by a quarter step with a slash through the flat symbol in the key signature providing the singer/musician the inclination towards *maqam* usage.

Maqam scales used in traditional Arabic music are usually made up of seven notes that repeat at the octave, but some can have more than eight notes. They are microtonal, meaning that they are not based on the twelve-tone equal-tempered system used in modern Western music (see more on *Maqam* above).

YouTube serves as an excellent resource for this piyyut and others. One of my favorite recordings[6] of *Y'hi Shalom B'cheilienu* יְהִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֵינוּ in *maqam rast* with a full traditional Mizrachi instrumental ensemble is performed by החזן והפייטן ר' משה חבושה אלסעדה פי אלטריק applies the melodic usage of quarter tones unique to the *maqamat*.

Here in figure 7.3 one can see an alternative notation style which employs a backwards flat symbol with a slash for a half-flat in the context of a rising and falling scale.

[6] Tifarat HaPiyut. (2012). החזן והפייטן ר' משה חבושה אלסעדה פי אלטריק [Video]. Available from: החזן והפייטן ר' משה חבושה אלסעדה פי אלטריק [Accessed 2024-01-02].

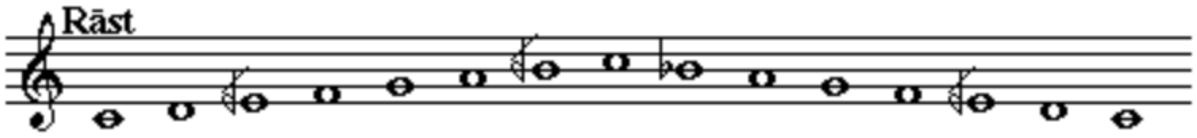


Figure 7.3 Maqam Rast

Y’hi Shalom B’cheilienu Summation

Y’hi Shalom B’cheilienu יְהִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֵינוּ stands as a powerful testament to the enduring nature of Jewish tradition and the beauty of piyyut. Passed down through generations, this ancient poem encapsulates the hopes and dreams parents have for their newborn sons. Its lyrical blessings for faith, learning, community, and a long life resonate deeply within the context of the Brit Milah ceremony.

Uniquely, this piyyut highlights the concept of "Siman Tov," perhaps signifying the distinctive blessings associated with welcoming a son into the covenant. Moreover, its incorporation of biblical verses and allusions connects this lifecycle event to the broader *narrative* of Jewish history and spirituality.

My initial encounter with this piyyut reflects the enduring power of oral transmission. Learning it directly from Dr. Joseph Koreen z"l, who himself carried the tradition from Baghdad, provided a tangible link to generations past. This experience highlighted the way piyyutim have been preserved and shared through personal connections, often handwritten on scraps of paper, much like the fragments found in the Cairo Geniza. As we continue to chant *Y’hi Shalom B’cheilienu* יְהִי שָׁלוֹם בְּחֵילֵינוּ, we participate in a chain of tradition that links us to countless generations who have celebrated new life and prayed for peace within our communities and the world.

Piyyut 2: יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת Yom Hashabbat - The Shabbat day

This Shabbat piyut, יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ is a cherished part of the Babylonian Jewish tradition This piyyut is attributed to a poet known only as Mantzur, highlighted by an acrostic spelling of his name at the beginning of each verse. A song[7] of longing and yearning for the arrival of Shabbat, it beautifully expresses the joy and holiness associated with the Sabbath day. Additionally, the piyyut focuses on highlighting the unique role that Shabbat plays in distinguishing the people of Israel from other nations.

The poetic form of Yom Hashabbat is a *muwashshach* with a refrain and five strophes, each comprised of four lines. The rhyme scheme is a recurring pattern which can help for the internalization of the text. For each strof the first three lines rhyme on their ending arrival syllable. All of the arrival syllables of each strophe end in “oo”.

[7] Recording of Yom HaShabbat En Kamohu https://youtu.be/VZRy7xkjzbo?si=qRqMrZk19ltrln32 (Babylonian Jewry - יהדות בבל)

יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ - Yom Hashabbat Ein Kamohu - Translation

יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ בֵּרְכוֹ אֱלֹהִים וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ	The Shabbat day, there is none like it, God blessed it and sanctified it.
מִיּוֹם רִאשׁוֹן עַד יוֹם שִׁשִּׁי לִקְרַאת שַׁבָּת נִכְסְפָה נַפְשִׁי כִּי בַשַּׁבָּת אֵצֵא חָפְשִׁי וְכִי יוֹם מְנוּחָה אֶקְרָאֵהוּ	From the first day until the sixth day, my soul yearns, looking forward to Shabbat, For on Shabbat I will be liberated/free, for I call it a day of rest.
נָגִיל וְנִשְׂמַח כִּי טוֹב לְהוֹדוֹת וּנְזַמֵּר עֶלְיוֹן עַל כָּל אוֹדוֹת כִּי הַשַּׁבָּת לָנוּ חֲמוּדוֹת אִישׁ בַּעַר לֹא יְדָעֵהוּ	We rejoice and are glad, for it is good to give thanks, and we sing to the Most High with all our might, For Shabbat is precious to us, the ignorant man does not know it.
צִוָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת שַׁבָּת כַּהֲלָכָה אָז מִסִּינַי מִצְוָה עֲרוּכָה גַּם הִיא לְשׁוֹמְרָהּ כֶּתֶר מְלוּכָה וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תְּעַטְּרֵהוּ	He commanded to observe Shabbat according to the law, then from Sinai the commandment was set, It is also a royal crown for those who keep it, and glory and splendor will adorn him (who observes Shabbat).
וּמְאַהֲבֶיהָ יָמִים יַאֲרִיכוּ וְגַם טוֹעֲמֶיהָ חַיִּים זָכוּ וּבִנְתִיב יֹשֶׁר הֵמָּה יֵלְכוּ עֵדוֹתָיו בְּכָל לֵב יִדְרְשֵׁהוּ	And those who love it will have their days lengthened, and those who savor it will have pure meritorious lives, And in the path of righteousness they will walk, His testimonies, they will seek with all their heart.
רָצָה ה' וּבָחַר בָּנוּ וּמִכָּל לָשׁוֹן הִבְדִּילָנוּ וּקְדֻשַּׁת הַשַּׁבָּת הִנְחִיל לָנוּ כָּל זֶרַע יַעֲקֹב כַּבְּדוּהוּ	Adonai desired and chose us, and from every tongue He separated us, And the holiness of Shabbat He bestowed as an inheritance to us, all the offspring of Jacob honor it!

יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ - References to Texts from Tanach and Commentary

יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ	**The Shabbat day, there is none like it.**

The piyyut opens by declaring the uniqueness of Shabbat, echoing the prophet Yirmiyahu's words (30:7):

הוֹי כִּי גָדוֹל הַ**יּוֹם** הַהוּא מֵאַ**יִן כָּמֹהוּ** וְעֵת־צָרָה הִיא לְיַעֲקֹב וּמִמֶּנָּה יִוָּשֵׁעַ׃

"Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it; it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it."

Yirmiyahu 30:7 calls for the return to Eretz Yisrael, not mentioning Shabbat. While Yirmiyahu speaks of a future day of redemption, the payyetan seems to suggest that by embracing Shabbat, by making it truly different from the rest of the week, we hasten that redemption. However, the payyetan is bringing forward the idea that if people return to being *Shomrei Shabbat* (Shabbat-observant), they will bring redemption.

בֵּרְכוֹ אֱלֹהִים וְיִקַּדְּשֵׁהוּ	**God blessed it and sanctified it.**

The second phrase of the piyyut takes us back to the beginning of the Torah to the Creation narrative of B'reishit 2:3.

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ

כִּי בוֹ שָׁבַת מִכָּל מְלַאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת

God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it,

for on it He rested from all His work which God had created to do.

God blessed the Shabbat day and sanctified it with a special holiness, according to the verse in B'reishit 2:3 describing the completion of the creation of the world, which

we also recite in the Shabbat evening Kiddush. God didn't just create Shabbat; He blessed it and made it holy. This blessing and holiness are what we tap into every Shabbat.

מִיוֹם רִאשׁוֹן עַד יוֹם שִׁשִּׁי לִקְרַאת שַׁבָּת **נִכְסְפָה נַפְשִׁי** כִּי בַשַּׁבָּת אֵצֵא חָפְשִׁי וְכִי יוֹם מְנוּחָה אֶקְרָאֵהוּ	From the first day until the sixth day, my soul yearns, looking forward to Shabbat, For on Shabbat I will be liberated/free, for I call it a day of rest.

This stanza beautifully captures the anticipation we feel as Shabbat approaches, longing for freedom. The soul *yearns* - **נִכְסְפָה נַפְשִׁי** - like the psalmist who cried,

נִכְסְפָה וְגַם כָּלְתָה **נַפְשִׁי** לְחַצְרוֹת ה

My soul yearns and even faints for the courts of Adonai (Tehillim 84:3).

What is it that we yearn for? Is it simply rest from work? Or is it something deeper, a longing for spiritual connection, for peace, for a taste of the world to come?

כִּי בַשַּׁבָּת **אֵצֵא חָפְשִׁי** וְכִי יוֹם מְנוּחָה אֶקְרָאֵהוּ	For on Shabbat I will be liberated/free, for I call it a day of rest.

The piyyut connects this yearning to freedom. **אֵצֵא חָפְשִׁי** I will be free from the world of action. The piyyut connects this yearning to freedom - אֵצֵא חָפְשִׁי - evoking the liberation of the Hebrew servant (Shemot 21:2).

כִּי תִקְנֶה עֶבֶד עִבְרִי שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים יַעֲבֹד וּבַשְּׁבִעִת **יֵצֵא לַחָפְשִׁי** חִנָּם

If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing (Shemot 21:2).

But Shabbat offers a freedom beyond the physical; it's a freedom from the tyranny of the ego, from the constant demands of the material world. On Shabbat, we can truly "go out free" into a realm of spiritual connection and inner peace. In the Torah, the servant goes free after six years, and by analogy, the payyetan here speaks of the person being free after the six days of work.

נָגִיל וְנִשְׂמַח כִּי **טוֹב לְהוֹדוֹת** **וּנְזַמֵּר עֶלְיוֹן** עַל כָּל אוֹדוֹת כִּי הַשַּׁבָּת לָנוּ חֲמוּדוֹת **אִישׁ בַּעַר לֹא יְדָעֵהוּ**	We rejoice and are glad, for **it is good to give thanks,** **and we sing to the Most High** with all our might, For Shabbat is precious to us, **the ignorant man does not know it.**

טוֹב לְהוֹדוֹת וּנְזַמֵּר עֶלְיוֹן - T'hillim 92:2, which is said in the Shabbat prayers: "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, Most High."

אִישׁ בַּעַר לֹא יְדָעֵהוּ - In the literal sense: an empty-minded person does not recognize the value and holiness of Shabbat.

אִישׁ בַּעַר לֹא יְדָעֵהוּ - אִישׁ בַּעַר לֹא יֵדָע וּכְסִיל לֹא יָבִין אֶת זֹאת

A brutish man does not know, and a fool does not understand this. (Tehillim 92:7)

צִוָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת שַׁבָּת כַּהֲלָכָה **אָז מִסִּינַי מְצָוָה עֲרוּכָה** **גַּם הִיא לְשׁוֹמְרָהּ כֶּתֶר מְלוּכָה** **וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תְּעַטְּרֵהוּ**	He commanded to observe Shabbat according to the law, **then from Sinai the commandment was set,** It is also a royal crown for those who keep it, and glory and splendor will adorn him (who observes Shabbat).

אָז מִסִּינַי מְצָוָה עֲרוּכָה - According to tradition, all the laws of Shabbat and their details were commanded to the people of Israel at Sinai, as we say in the Musaf prayer of *Tikanta Shabbat*: "Then from Sinai they were commanded about it, and You commanded us... to offer on it the additional offering of Shabbat as is fitting."

גַּם הִיא לְשׁוֹמְרָהּ כֶּתֶר מְלוּכָה - For the one who keeps it, Shabbat serves as a royal crown. This verse helps to create imagery of Megillat Esther 2:17 when the king had favour and grace in his eyes for Esther when he set the royal crown on her head choosing her over the other women. One can interpret this as metaphor for God finding favor and grace in his eyes for us, the Jewish people as we observe shabbat, also giving us a reminder that God chooses us.

וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תְּעַטְּרֵהוּ - The one who keeps Shabbat will merit honor and splendor. A quote from T'hillim 8:6: You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and honor.

וּמְאַהֲבֶיהָ יָמִים יַאֲרִיכוּ וְגַם **טוֹעֲמֶיהָ חַיִּים זָכוּ** **וּבְנְתִיב יֹשֶׁר** הֵמָּה יֵלֵכוּ עֵדוֹתָיו בְּכָל לֵב יִדְרְשֻׁהוּ	**And those who love it will have their days lengthened,** and **those who savor it will have pure meritorious lives,** **And in the path of righteousness** they will walk, His testimonies, they will seek with all their heart.

וּמְאַהֲבֶיהָ יָמִים יַאֲרִיכוּ Those who love Shabbat will be blessed with long life - The payyetan is likely referencing Ramban's teaching on loving God in Deuteronomy 6:5 as he relates the verse to the reward of a long life promised in Deuteronomy 4:40 which conveys the idea that the ideal religious attitude combines love for God with a healthy awe of His power and justice. This is encapsulated in Ramban saying עֲשֵׂה מֵאַהֲבָה וַעֲשֵׂה מִיִּרְאָה" Do [mitzvot] out of love and do [them] out of awe." Love ensures that mitzvot are performed with joy and enthusiasm, while fear/awe prevents complacency and transgression.

טוֹעֲמֶיהָ חַיִּים זָכוּ - The one who keeps Shabbat merits life. A quote from the Shabbat Musaf t'fillah, Tikanta Shabbat.

וּבְנְתִיב יֹשֶׁר - On the straight path.

עֵדוֹתָיו בְּכָל לֵב יִדְרְשֻׁהוּ - אַשְׁרֵי נצְרֵי עֵדֹתָיו בְּכָל לֵב יִדְרְשׁוּהוּ Happy are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart (Tehillim 119:2). Although the use here in the singular opens the interpretation that it is about the person seeking and requesting God, and on the other hand, God seeking a connection with the person leading to Happiness.

רָצָה ה' וּבָחַר בָּנוּ וּמִכָּל לָשׁוֹן הִבְדִּילָנוּ וְקִדֵּשַׁת הַשַּׁבָּת הִנְחִיל לָנוּ	Adonai desired and chose us, and from every tongue He separated us, And the holiness of Shabbat He bestowed as an inheritance to us,

כָּל זֶרַע יַעֲקֹב כַּבְּדוּהוּ	**all the offspring of Jacob honor it!**

כָּל זֶרַע יַעֲקֹב כַּבְּדוּהוּ- Functions in the piyyut to call to Israel to honor God and Shabbat.

כָּל זֶרַע יַעֲקֹב כַּבְּדוּהוּ - יִרְאֵי ה' הַלְלוּהוּ כָּל זֶרַע יַעֲקֹב כַּבְּדוּהוּ

You who fear the Adonai, praise Him! All the offspring of Jacob, glorify Him!

(Tehillim 22:24) (Hibbat Hapiyyut, יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ).

יום הַשַּׁבָּת אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ Yom Hashabbat Ein Kamohu - Musical Notation Transcription

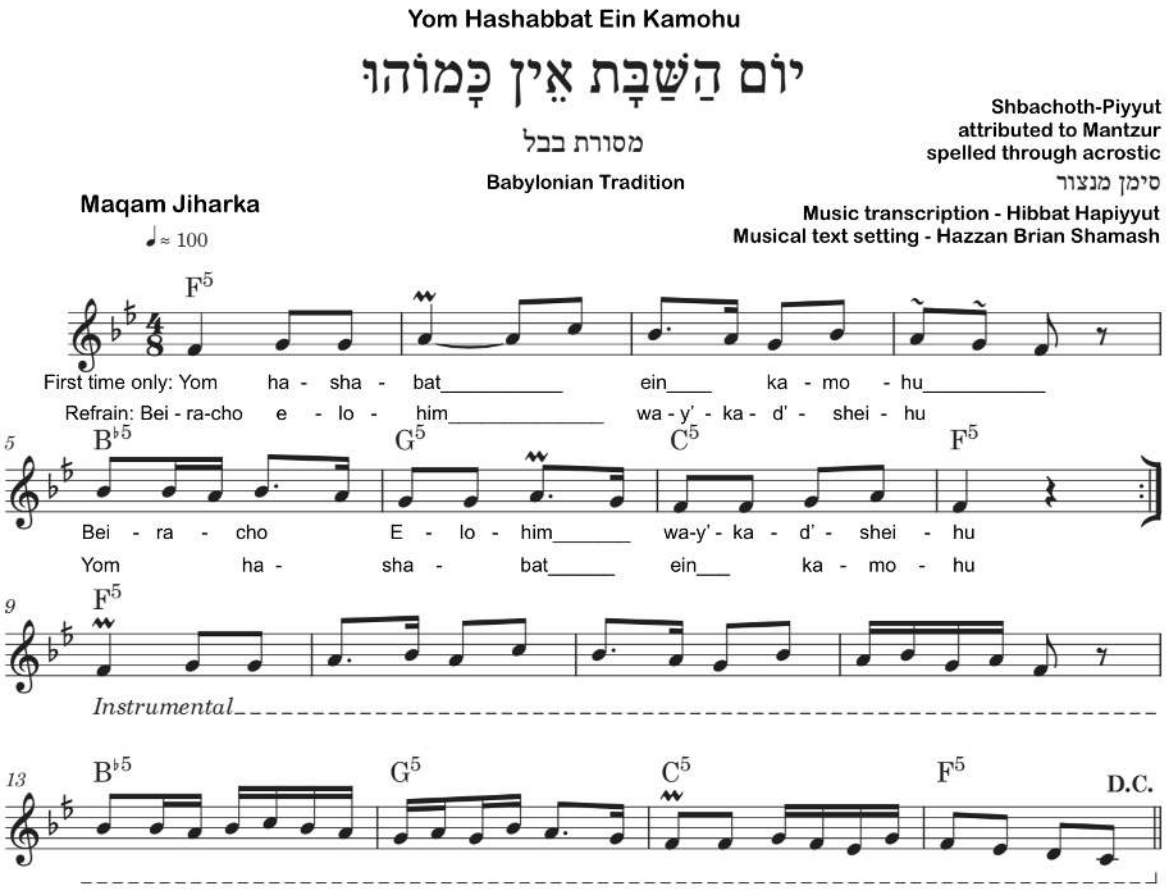


Figure 7.4 Yom Hashabbat (Hibbat HaPiyut, 2022)[8]

According to the Babylonian musical tradition of learning aurally, I learned this melody years ago from my uncle Eliyahu Shamash prior to being aware of any recordings. He is currently ninety six years old and is most engaged when we go to visit him and sing. Interestingly this piyyut uses the same eight bar phrase over and over again. The vocal range is also limited to only five notes. These aspects make this piyyut

[8] This transcription come from Hibbat HaPiyut. (2022). יום הַשַּׁבָּת אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ // Yom Hashabbat Ein Kamohu || חיבת הפיוט [Video]. For a great performance by ḥazzan Moshe Habusha see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrW2nN0F0WM

the easiest to learn from a musical perspective. This musical transcription of *Yom Hashabbat* is in a lesser know *maqam Jiharka,* with some similarities to the the western major key Fmajor.

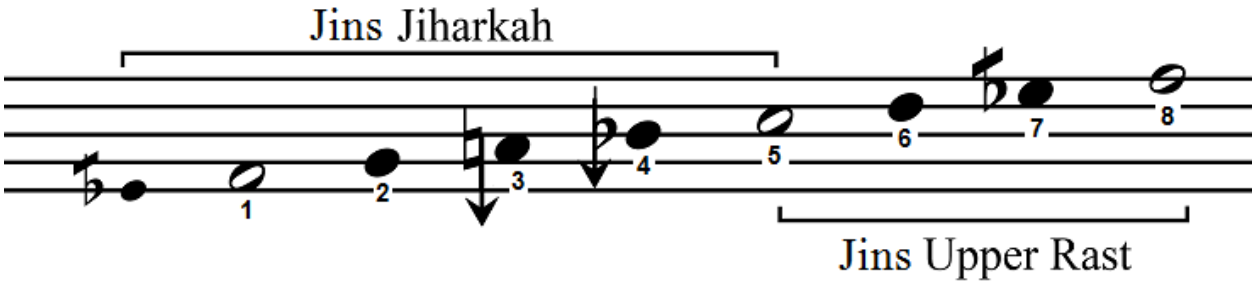


Figure 7.5 *Maqam Jiharkah* (Faraj, 2018)

In the musical transcription in figure 7.4 above notice the usage of the indication of quarter-tone usage in the key signature on the Eb which is played during the instrumental section. While traditional piyyut transcription and arrangement may not customarily include chord symbols as used in Jazz and pop music chart the Hibbat Hapiyyut arrangers engage in some musical fusion as they include a contemporary acoustic guitar and electric bass in some of their arrangements. In performance practice, the order of the phrases of the refrain are reversed. First we sing בֵּרְכוּ אֱלֹהִים וְיַקְדִּישֵׁהוּ, answered by יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ.

Piyyut 3: אֵל אֵלִיָּהוּ El Eliyahu - God (bring us to the time of) Elijah

El Eliyahu אֵל אֵלִיָּהוּ, a piyyut for the conclusion of Shabbat, Brit Milah and Pidyon Haben, was composed by Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra אַבְרָהָם אִבְּן עֶזְרָא, one of the greatest Spanish poets of the 11th-12th centuries. This well known piyyut, sung by most Sephardic and Mizrachi communities with various melodies, centers around the figure of Elijah the Prophet אֵלִיָּהוּ הַנָּבִיא, a harbinger of redemption מְבַשֵּׂר הַגְּאֻלָּה, a common theme in Havdalah הַבְדָּלָה and post-Shabbat and Brit Milah piyyutim.

Several explanations exist for the heightened anticipation of redemption גְּאֻלָּה at the end of Shabbat. One, found in the halachic work HaManhig הַמַּנְהִיג, suggests that Elijah אֵלִיָּהוּ doesn't appear on Shabbat or holidays due to the busyness of these days, leading people to specifically request his arrival after Shabbat. During Shabbat, we don't make requests. We refrain from asking for Mashiach to come so we wait until after Havdallah to sing this piyyut. Another, offered by Rabbi David Abudarham רַבִּי דָּוִד אַבּוּדַרְהַם, connects it to the Talmudic saying that if Israel properly observes two Shabbatot, they will be immediately redeemed.

Beyond these explanations, it's plausible that the end of Shabbat evokes a sense of anxiety about the week ahead, making it a fitting time to pray for salvation and mercy.

Uniquely, this piyyut offers a glimpse into the poet's personal feelings. The concluding lines, The redeeming angel מַלְאַךְ הַגּוֹאֵל before a poor person asking דַּל שׁוֹאֵל / Please, God אנא האל, God of Abraham אֵל אַבְרָהָם, shine forth הַקְרֵה נָא, express a personal plea for redemption, with the poet identifying himself as Abraham אברהם. This shift from a general plea to a personal one, modeled on the prayer of Abraham's servant

in Genesis 24, allows people throughout generations to connect with the poet's intimate request and find resonance with their own yearning for redemption. (National Library of Israel)

El Eliyahu אֵל אֵלִיָּהוּ - Translation

סימן: אברהם Signed (in acrostic) Avraham

אֵלִי (אֵל) אֵלִיָּהוּ בִּזְכוּת אֵלִיָּהוּ הַנָּבִיא הָבֵא נָא	God (bring us to the time of) Elijah by the merit of Elijah please bring the prophet,
בּוֹ יִרְתֹּם רִכְבּוֹ נָע בַּשְּׁבִי כִּי בּוֹ לֹא שָׁכַב לִבּוֹ גַּם לֹא רָאָה שֵׁנָה	In his chariot, he will harness his horses, he will move in captivity, for his heart did not lie down, nor did he see sleep
רַב מַחְלִי בְּרָאוֹת כַּחְשִׁי וּמְשַׂנְאוֹת יָפוֹת וּבְרִיאוֹת בָּשָׂר וַתִּרְעֶינָה:	My illness is great when I see my lies and those who hate me Beautiful and healthy in flesh, and they prosper.
הַשְׁקֵה צָר מֵי רֹאשׁ צָר עֵינָיו יִלְטוֹשׁ יוֹם עֵינַי לִקְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּשְׂעֶינָה	Give the enemy to drink the water of their leader, their eyes will be sharpened The day my eyes see the Holy One of Israel, they will be satisfied
מָתַי תֵּרָאֶה אוֹת יֻשַּׁע אֵל קוֹרְאוֹת לָךְ וּלְךָ נוֹשְׂאוֹת קוֹלָן וַתָּרֹנָּה	When will you see a sign of salvation, God is calling to you to you they raise their voices and sing
הַמַּלְאָךְ הַגּוֹאֵל לִפְנֵי דַל שׁוֹאֵל אָנָּא הָאֵל אֵל אַבְרָהָם הַקְרֵה נָא	The redeeming angel before a poor person asking Please, God, God of Abraham, shine forth Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra

This piyyut exhibits a fascinating blend of poetic structures, drawing on elements of both Hebrew and Arabic traditions. It can be classified as a shir ezor (girdle poem), which is akin to the Arabic muwashshah. This form is characterized by a cyclical structure with a recurring refrain.

"Eli Eliyahu" demonstrates a sophisticated fusion of Hebrew and Arabic poetic structures, classifiable as a shir ezor (girdle poem) with similarities to the Arabic muwashshah. This form employs a cyclical structure anchored by a recurring refrain. Each strophe comprises two verses, each divided into two short units, establishing a rhythmic pattern of four units per strophe. A distinctive rhyme scheme emerges: the first three units within each strophe rhyme, while the fourth unit rhymes with the final unit of all other strophes, ending with the syllable "na."

The first strophe functions as a refrain “Eli Eliyahu", repeated after each strophe to intensify the supplication to the prophet. Furthermore, the initial letters of each stanza create an acrostic of the author's name, "A-B-R-H-M" (Abraham), adding a subtle layer of meaning. The poem maintains a fixed meter: five syllables in the first three units and six in the final unit of each stanza (excluding shva and hataf vowels), enhancing the musicality.

Interestingly, adherence to this meter and rhyme scheme occasionally results in the unnatural fragmentation of sentences, demonstrating the prioritization of musicality and form over grammatical structure. The interplay of these elements—the recurring refrain, intricate rhyme scheme, fixed meter, acrostic, and sentence fragmentation—creates a powerful and emotionally resonant prayer. This fusion of form

and content in Eli Eliyahu results in a piyyut that is both aesthetically pleasing and spiritually moving, its structure amplifying the emotional plea for Elijah to get moving.

While the predominant way this piyyut is sung today begins with the word אֵל El - God. The ancient text and appears in the palimpsest below as אֵלִי Eli - my God in the Cairo Geniza manuscript (T-S 8H.15), beginning: '**Eli** Eliyahu hanabi habenah'. Deep gratitude was extended to Ms. Sarah Cohen of the *Ezra Fleischer Geniza Research Institute of Poetry* for the help in locating the text in its earliest source. Note the letter *yud* in the opening word, and the subsequent three smaller structural poetic indications for the reader/singer to return to the refrain אֵלִי Eli further insisting on the use of **אֵלִי Eli** in this copy from the Cairo geniza. The payyetan scribe also includes other indications which inform word stress and rhythmic and musical interpretation, similar to the way *trope/teamim* function withing the chanting of scriptural texts, eg. Torah, Haftarot, Megillot, etc.

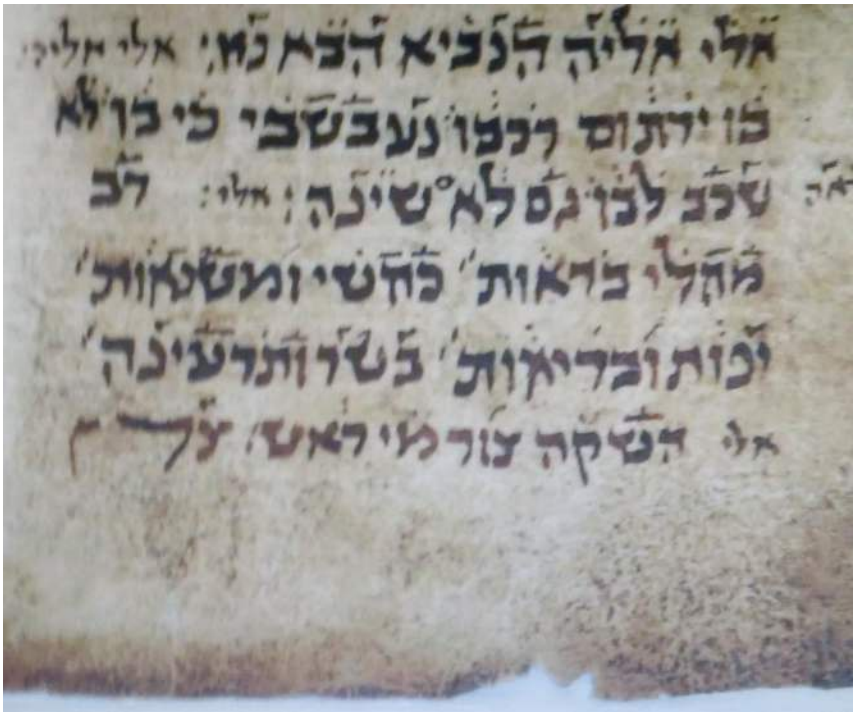


Figure 7.4 Eli Eliyahu אֵלִי אֵלִיָּהוּ Cairo Geniza manuscript of T-S 8H.15

(Ezra Fleischer Geniza Research Institute of Poetry)

El Eliyahu אֵלִי אֵלִיָּהוּ Commentary and references to biblical texts

Invocation and Messianic Expectation

The piyyut opens with an invocation of Elijah the Prophet, **El Eliyahu אֵלִי אֵלִיָּהוּ God (bring us to the time of) Elijah**, immediately establishing its connection to the Havdalah service and the anticipation of the Mashiach.

In Judaism, the מָשִׁיחַ (Mashiach - "anointed one") is a future Jewish king from the line of King David who will usher in a Messianic Age of peace and redemption. His arrival will bring about the ingathering of all Jews to Israel and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. This era will be marked by universal peace, an end to suffering, and knowledge of the one true God throughout the world. Some believe the righteous

will be resurrected at this time. Ultimately, Mashiach's coming will bring about a world filled with abundance, justice, and prosperity for all. While the specifics are debated within Jewish tradition, the core belief is that Mashiach will bring peace and redemption for all humanity.

This invocation echoes the biblical formula for addressing God, **אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם God of Abraham,** highlighting Elijah's status as a divine messenger. The subsequent verse, **בּוֹ יִרְתֹּם רִכְבּוֹ In his chariot, he will harness his horses,** introduces the *Mashiach*, metaphorically depicted as preparing his chariot. This imagery captures II Kings Chapter 2:11.

> וַיְהִי הֵמָּה הֹלְכִים הָלוֹךְ וְדַבֵּר וְהִנֵּה רֶכֶב־אֵשׁ וְסוּסֵי אֵשׁ
> וַיַּפְרִדוּ בֵּין שְׁנֵיהֶם וַיַּעַל אֵלִיָּהוּ בַּסְעָרָה הַשָּׁמָיִם׃

As they kept on walking and talking, a fiery chariot with fiery horses suddenly appeared and separated one from the other; and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. (JPS 2023)

The imagery also alludes to both Malachi 3:23, which prophesies Elijah's return before the great and awesome day of God's presence, and to rabbinic depictions of the Mashiach as a king riding forth to redeem his people.

The Mashiach is further characterized as restless and sleepless in captivity, **נָע בַּשִּׁבְי כִּי בוֹ לֹא שָׁכַב לִבּוֹ גַּם לֹא רָאָה שֵׁנָה He will move in captivity, for his heart did not lie down, nor did he see sleep.** This poignant image speaks to the yearning for redemption and the Mashiach's constant vigilance, echoing midrashic interpretations that portray the Mashiach suffering alongside the Jewish people.

Suffering and Hope

The piyyut contrasts the suffering of Israel, **רַב מַחְלִי my illness is great, כַּחְשִׁי my thinness, with the prosperity of their enemies, מְשַׂנְאוֹת those who hate, יָפוֹת וּבְרִיאוֹת beautiful and healthy.** This contrast, a recurring motif in Jewish literature, underscores the perceived injustice and fuels the hope for divine intervention. The allusion to Pharaoh's dream in Genesis 41 suggests that the enemies' current prosperity will ultimately be overturned, offering a glimmer of hope amidst suffering.

The plea for God to poison the enemies with **מֵי רֹאשׁ water of poison** in **the** phrase **הַשְׁקֵה צוּר מֵי רֹאשׁ צָר עֵינָיו יִלְטֹשׁ** Give the enemy to drink the water of their leader, their eyes will be sharpened, draws on Yirm'yahu 9:14, reflecting the pain and frustration of exile and oppression. However, this plea is immediately followed by a contrasting image: **יוֹם עֵינַי לְקְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּשְׁעֶינָה The day my eyes see the Holy One of Israel,** they will be satisfied. While the enemy focuses on Israel with hostile intent, Israel's eyes are turned towards God, seeking salvation. This juxtaposition emphasizes faith and trust in God's ultimate redemption.

The repeated questioning of Matai מָתַי when in **מָתַי תַּרְאֶה אוֹת יֶשַׁע אֵל קוֹרְאוֹת לָךְ וּלְךָ נוֹשְׂאוֹת קוֹלָן וַתִּבְכֶּנָה When will you see a sign of salvation, God is calling to you, to you they raise their voices and sing expresses the deep longing for redemption.** The image of the eyes crying out to God is emotionally charged and reinforces the theme of yearning. Interestingly, the sung tradition changes **וַתִּבְכֶּנָה and they wept to וַתָּרֹנָּה and they sang,** reflecting a hopeful outlook despite the present suffering.

Concluding Supplication

The final plea for the Redeeming Angel, **מַלְאַךְ הַגּוֹאֵל the angel of redemption**, to appear before the poor one who asks, **דַּל שׁוֹאֵל poor person asking,** is a powerful conclusion referencing **מַלְאַךְ הַגּוֹאֵל** in Genesis 48:16. The ambiguity of Dal, referring to both the individual and the Mashiach, adds depth. It is both a personal prayer for salvation and a collective yearning for the Messianic era.

The final invocation of God as **אֵל אַבְרָהָם God of Abraham and the plea for God** to **הַקְרֵה נָא shine forth the redeemer** is a fitting end. The wordplay on El as both a name for God and a preposition meaning before adds a layer of meaning. The connection to Abraham's servant's prayer in Genesis 24:12 is significant, invoking the theme of divine guidance and fulfillment of promises. The servant asks God to help him find a bride for Isaac.

El Eliyahu is rich with allusions from tanach, *midrashic* interpretations, and emotional expressions of yearning for redemption. It captures the essence of the Havdalah service, bridging the sacredness of Shabbat with the hopes and anxieties of the week ahead. Through its evocative imagery and theological depth, it invites both personal reflection and communal engagement with the enduring themes of suffering, hope, and redemption in Jewish tradition. El Eliyahu is one of the most documented piyyutim in terms of musicological research with melodies recorded and notated according to many regions in western notation. Here I will present three of them that are all labeled as Babylonian or Iraqi. One can notice the matching melodic intervals and directional melodic shape. Also important to notice, as oral traditions go, that an exact match is not likely among people of various traditions.

אֵלִי Eli Eliyahu Musical Notation Transcription

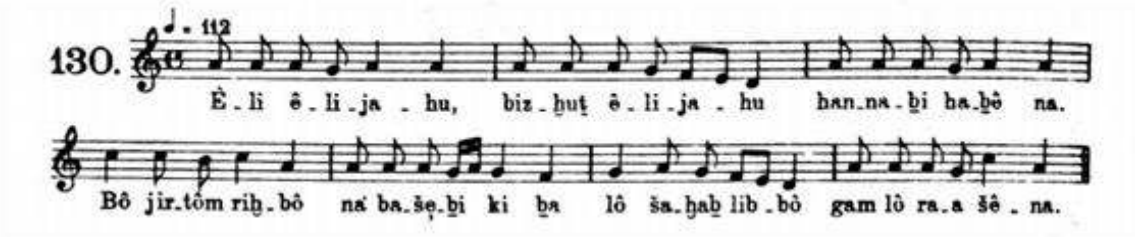


Figure 7.5 Eli Eliyahu, Babylonian Melody (Idelsohn, 1922)

In an Iraqi version from the National Sound Archives (Item number Y-00067-REL_A_01) follows with the refrain has a cadence on F in the second measure (instead of D, as in Idelsohn) as the phrases of the stanzas.

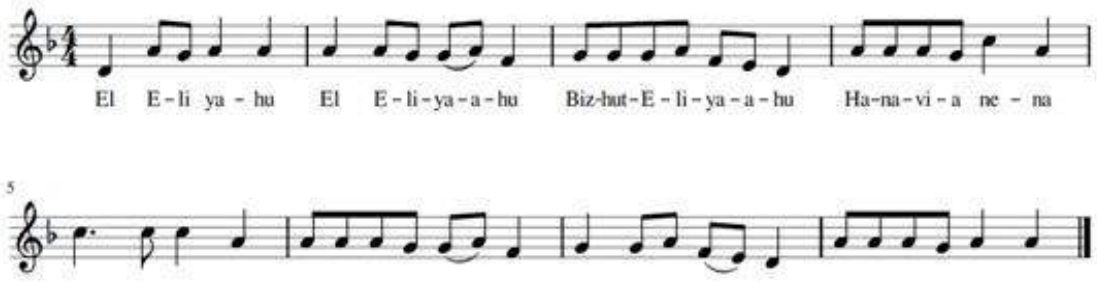


Figure. 7.6 אֵל El Eliyahu (Blue, 2017)

This third version of El Eliyahu below has melodic influences from Rahel Musleah and her teachings and publication of music from India/Calcutta. The Jews from Calcutta trace their ancestry back to Babylonia. The fusion came as I learned from her recordings and also learned from practicing with Iraq native Dr. Joseph Koreen, and I

ended up teaching others a version that utilizes some aspects from each of their renditions.

While melodic continuity is preserved from Iraq to Calcutta, the Calcutta community performs this piyyut in a way that belies the infusion of a localized music aesthetic. This is observed primarily in the ornamentation of the melody. In Iraq, there is little to no ornamentation, while in Calcutta there is a high degree of ornamentation chanting a melody with more notes, in a florid way.

This transcription in figure 7.7 below applies Musleah's use of the octave D for the start of the verses measure 5 and the third beat which includes eighth notes C moving to B natural followed in the next beat, C to Bflat then descending as a passing tone to the arrival of A in measure 6. One can see these moves and the motif as a decoration of what was the simpler move from C down to A in the previous two examples. My observations, coupled with firsthand experience, suggest that the melody underwent development and transformation in Calcutta, while still remaining coungruous with one version relating well to the other.

The Babylonian chants in figures 7.5 and 7.6 above exhibit greater simplicity. Interestingly, we find parallel examples of shared motifs in the Torah reading traditions (te'amim) of Babylonia and Calcutta, indicating that the Jews likely encountered and adopted various altered scale patterns and increased improvisation during their migration. When singing today in services, I may include some variation, including

musical aspects of any of these three versions.

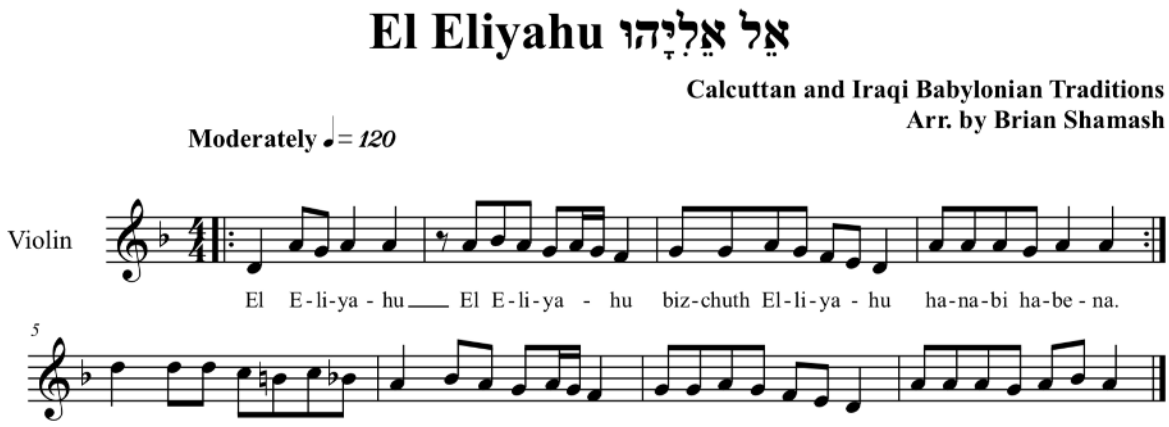


Figure 7.7 El Eliyahu Calcuttan and Iraqi Babylonian

Piyyut 4: Mah Navu ‘Alei Heharim Raglei מַה נָּאוּ עֲלֵי הֶהָרִים רַגְלֵי
How pleasant atop the mountains are the footsteps

Mah Navu expresses a powerful yearning for redemption and the return to Zion. and draws heavily on biblical imagery and prophecies, particularly from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Psalms, to paint a vivid picture of the future restoration of Israel.

The author of Mah Navu is Shimon Bar Nissim, a 20th-century Iraqi payyetan and educator. He was part of a group of poet-teachers in Baghdad who collaborated on several piyyutim. Bar Nissim served as a Hazzan (cantor) in various synagogues in Baghdad, including the Albert Sasson synagogue, demonstrating his deep connection to Jewish liturgical practice. His expertise in *maqamat*, the system of melodic modes in traditional Arabic and Jewish music, is evident in the musicality of his piyyutim. Furthermore, Bar Nissim's experience as an Iraqi émigré to Israel in the early 1950s adds another layer to understanding his background and the potential influences on his work. This emigration, a significant event in his life, likely shaped his perspective and found expression in his liturgical poetry.

Interestingly, the Babylonian repertoire traditionally lacked very joyous poems. This piyyut, with its exuberant language and melody, filled that void and quickly gained popularity, becoming a staple at weddings and other celebrations. This popularity also reflects its accessibility and ability to resonate with a wide audience, transcending its Babylonian origins to become embraced by both Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews.

The poetic themes resonate with the broader historical experiences of the Jewish people and their yearning for peace and redemption. The opening lines, "How pleasant

atop the mountains are the footsteps of the messenger bearing tidings of peace in your city," evoke the imagery of Isaiah 52:7, which describes the messenger announcing the return to Zion. This theme of return and rebuilding is central to Jewish religious thought, particularly in the context of exile and the hope for the restoration of Jerusalem. For Bar Nissim, as an Iraqi Jew who personally experienced exile and return, this theme would have held particular resonance [1]. His piyyut can be seen as a reflection of both the collective yearning of the Jewish people and his own personal journey of return.

Mah Navu ‘Alei Heharim Raglei מַה נָּאוּ עֲלֵי הֶהָרִים רַגְלֵי - English Translation

מַה נָּאוּ עֲלֵי הֶהָרִים רַגְלֵי **מְבַשֵּׂר שָׁלוֹם בְּבִנְיַן עִירֵךְ**	How pleasant atop the mountains are the footsteps of the messenger bearing peace in the building of your city
קוֹל צוֹפַיִךְ יִשְׂאוּ קוֹל רִנָּה הִתְנַעֲרִי מִתּוֹךְ מְגִנָּה עַיִן בְּעַיִן תִּרְאִי שְׁכִינָה וְשָׁבוּ בָנַיִךְ לִגְבוּלֵךְ	The voices of your watchmen will rise up in joy shake off your sorrow Your eyes shall behold the Shekhinah and your children shall return to your borders
לְשָׁבוּיִים דְּרוֹר בְּשִׁיר וּמְזִמּוֹר **אֶל בֵּית הַר הַמּוֹר יְהִי שָׁבִילֵךְ** סְלוּ סְלוּ אֶת הַמְּסִלָּה פִּצְחוּ רְנָנָה וּתְהִלָּה יָבֹא מְבַשֵּׂר בִּלְשׁוֹנוֹ מִלָּה קוּמִי עוּרִי כִּי בָא אוֹרֵךְ	**Freedom to the captives in song and melody** **to the Temple may your path lead** Pave pave the pathway break forth in delight and glory A messenger will come with a word on his tongue Arise and shine for your light has come
צְאִי מִבָּבֶל קִרְיַת עוֹבְדֵי בֵל **כִּנּוֹר וָנֵבֶל אָז יְהִי שִׁירֵךְ** שׂוֹשׂ יָשִׂישׂוּ כָּל אֲבֵלֵי צִיּוֹן לָבֹא לַחֲסוֹת בְּצֵל הָעֶלְיוֹן בָּנוֹה אֶבְנֶה לָךְ נָוֶה אַפִּרְיוֹן אָכִין כִּסֵּא לְדָוִד מַלְכֵּךְ	**Leave Babylon where they worship Bel** **the harp and lyre will accompany your song** Greatly rejoice all mourners in Zion, come take refuge in the shadow of the Most High I shall built for you a magnificent palace I shall set a throne for your king, David
שְׂאִי עֵינַיִךְ וּרְאִי בָנַיִךְ **בָּאוּ אֵלַיִךְ לָאוֹר בְּאוֹרֵךְ** תַּחַת חֹשֶׁךְ אָשִׁים לָךְ אוֹרָה אָז מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא הַתּוֹרָה הִנֵּה גָדוֹל הוּא אָיֹם וְנוֹרָא בְּיוֹם שִׂימִי כֶתֶר לְרֹאשֵׁךְ	Lift your eyes and see your children they have come to you, to the light in your light In place of darkness I will give you light then from Tsiyon Torah shall come forth For it will be great and awful on the day you shall place a crown upon your head
עַד מָתַי כַּלָּה יָפָה וּמְעֻלָּה **לְזָר בְּעוּלָה כְּדַל וְהֵלֶךְ** עוּרִי עוּרִי עֲדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל אָחִישׁ אֶשְׁלַח יְנוֹן וְגוֹאֵל וְגַם אָקִים לָךְ חוֹמַת אֲרִיאֵל זָכֹר אֶזְכֹּר חֶסֶד נְעוּרֵךְ	**Till when beautiful and wonderful bride** **will you espouse a stranger like a vagabond** Awake awake people of Israel I will hasten and send Yinon and a redeemer And I will raise for you the walls of Ariel I will remember the devotion of your youth

מַה נָּאוּ עֲלֵי Mah Navu Alei - Textual Analysis

Notice how this modern piyyut borrows from the muwashshah style, but carries a different structure. This Hebrew poem, imbued with themes of longing and hope for redemption, exhibits a clear and consistent poetic structure characteristic of Hebrew liturgical poetry. A distinctive feature is the A B B B A rhyme scheme, also known as "enclosed rhyme," present throughout all stanzas. This pattern creates a sense of musicality and flow, enhancing the poem's memorability and recitation quality, while also adding a sense of contained energy within each stanza. The first and last lines, by rhyming together, create a frame for the inner three lines, unifying the thought or image presented. Examples of this rhyme scheme include:

שְׁכִינָה - מְגִנָּה, עִירֵךְ - אוֹרֵךְ, and שְׁבִילֵךְ - מְזִמּוֹר.

While a strict metrical pattern isn't evident, the poem maintains a rhythmic feel in each line. This is achieved through a combination of factors. Though not fixed, there is a general similarity in the number of syllables per line within each stanza. Additionally, the natural stress patterns of Hebrew words contribute to the rhythmic flow. Further enhancing the rhythm is the use of parallelism, a hallmark of Hebrew poetry where lines are structured with similar grammatical structures or corresponding ideas,

as seen in הִתְנַעֲרִי מִתּוֹךְ מְגִנָּה / קוֹל צוֹפַיִךְ יִשְׂאוּ קוֹל רִנָּה. This parallelism not only contributes to the rhythm but also reinforces meaning and creates a sense of balance.

מַה נָּאוּ עֲלֵי הֶהָרִים רַגְלֵי How pleasant atop the mountains are the footsteps: This opening line, taken from Isaiah 52:7, sets the tone of joyous anticipation for the arrival of the herald announcing redemption. It emphasizes the beauty and welcome sight of the messenger who brings good tidings.

קוֹל צוֹפַיִךְ יִשְׂאוּ קוֹל יַחְדָּו יְרַנֵּנוּ The voice of your watchmen shall lift up the voice with singing: This phrase, echoing Isaiah 52:8, highlights the collective joy and celebration that accompanies the news of redemption. The watchmen, traditionally positioned on high places to observe and announce arrivals, become the heralds of this joyous message.

הִתְנַעֲרִי מֵעָפָר קוּמִי Shake yourself from the midst of your shield: This call to action, inspired by Isaiah 52:2, urges the people to cast off the burdens of exile and suffering, symbolized by the "shield" of protection that has become a symbol of confinement.**עַיִן בְּעַיִן תִּרְאֶינָה Eye to eye you shall see the Divine Presence:** This powerful image, rooted in Isaiah 52:8, promises a direct and intimate encounter with the Divine Presence upon the return to Zion. It suggests a restoration of closeness and communion with God.

וְשָׁבוּ בָנַיִךְ לִגְבוּלֵךְ And your children shall return to your borders: This promise of return, based on Jeremiah 31:16, speaks to the deep longing for the ingathering of the exiles and the reunification of the Jewish people in their homeland.

לִשְׁבוּיִים דְּרוֹר בְּשִׁיר וּמִזְמוֹר To the captives, freedom with song and psalm: This phrase, drawing from Isaiah 61:1, emphasizes the joyous liberation of the captives and the restoration of their ability to express praise and gratitude through music and prayer.

אֶל בֵּית הַר הַמּוֹר יִהְי שְׁבִילֵךְ To the Temple Mount shall be your path: This line directs the focus towards the ultimate destination of the return – the Temple Mount, the spiritual center of Jewish life and the site of the Holy Temple.
Based on Song of Songs 4:6.

סלו סלו אֶת הַמְּסִלָּה Clear, clear the path: This call to prepare the way for redemption, based on Isaiah 62:10, emphasizes the active role the people must play in facilitating their return and rebuilding their homeland.

יָבֹא מְבַשֵּׂר בִּלְשׁוֹנוֹ מִלָּה The messenger shall come with a word on his tongue: This phrase, alluding to Psalms 139:4, highlights the power of the messenger's words to announce and effect redemption. The "word" carries the divine promise and initiates the process of restoration.

קוּמִי עוּרִי כִּי בָא אוֹרֵךְ Arise, awake, for your light has come: This call to action, inspired by Isaiah 60:1, urges the people to awaken from the slumber of exile and embrace the dawn of redemption.

צְאִי מִבָּבֶל Go forth from Babylon: This command, rooted in Isaiah 48:20, signifies the definitive break from exile and the beginning of the journey back to the homeland.
קִרְיַת עוֹבְדֵי בֵל City of the worshippers of Bel: This phrase identifies Babylon with idolatry and contrasts it with the true spiritual center in Jerusalem.

נְוֵה אַפִּרְיוֹן Dwelling place of the palanquin: This refers to the Temple, the dwelling place of God's presence, emphasizing the spiritual significance of the return.
שְׂאִי עֵינַיִךְ וּרְאִי בָנַיִךְ Lift up your eyes and see your children: This plea, based on

Isaiah 49:18, calls on the motherland to witness the return of her children from exile, a scene of joyous reunion and restoration.

אָז מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא הַתּוֹרָה Then from Zion shall go forth the Torah: This line affirms the central role of Torah in the redeemed future, emanating from Jerusalem and guiding the world. כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה Isaiah 2:3.

הִנֵּה גָדוֹל הוּא אָיֹם וְנוֹרָא Behold, great and awesome is the day: This phrase, echoing prophetic pronouncements like Joel 2:11 and Malachi 3:23, acknowledges the awe-inspiring nature of the day of redemption.

עַד מָתַי כַּלָּה יָפָה וּמְעֻלָּה לְזָר בְּעוּלָה כְּדַל וְהֵלֶךְ How long, O beautiful and excellent bride, shall a stranger be with you in your bridal chamber like a poor and wandering man? This metaphor depicts Israel as a bride awaiting her true groom (God), while suffering under the domination of foreign powers.

עוּרִי עוּרִי עֲדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל Awake, awake, O congregation of Israel: This urgent call, inspired by Isaiah 52:1, summons the Jewish people to rise up and embrace their destiny of redemption. הִתְעוֹרְרִי הִתְעוֹרְרִי verse 6 of לְכָה דוֹדִי - the our most well known piyyut from kabbalat shabbat services - also references this awakening as **עוּרִי עוּרִי.**

יִנּוֹן וְגוֹאֵל He who brings forth offspring and redeems: This refers to the Mashiach, the one who will bring about both physical and spiritual restoration.

אֲרִיאֵל Ariel: This poetic name for Jerusalem emphasizes its strength and centrality.

זָכַר אֶזְכֹּר חֶסֶד נְעוּרֵךְ I will remember, I will remember the kindness of your youth:

This divine promise, based on Jeremiah 2:2, assures Israel that God has not forgotten His love and covenant despite their exile and suffering. (National Library of Israel, Ma Navu)

Ma Navu Alei - Musical Notation Transcription Settings מַה נָּאוּ עָלַי

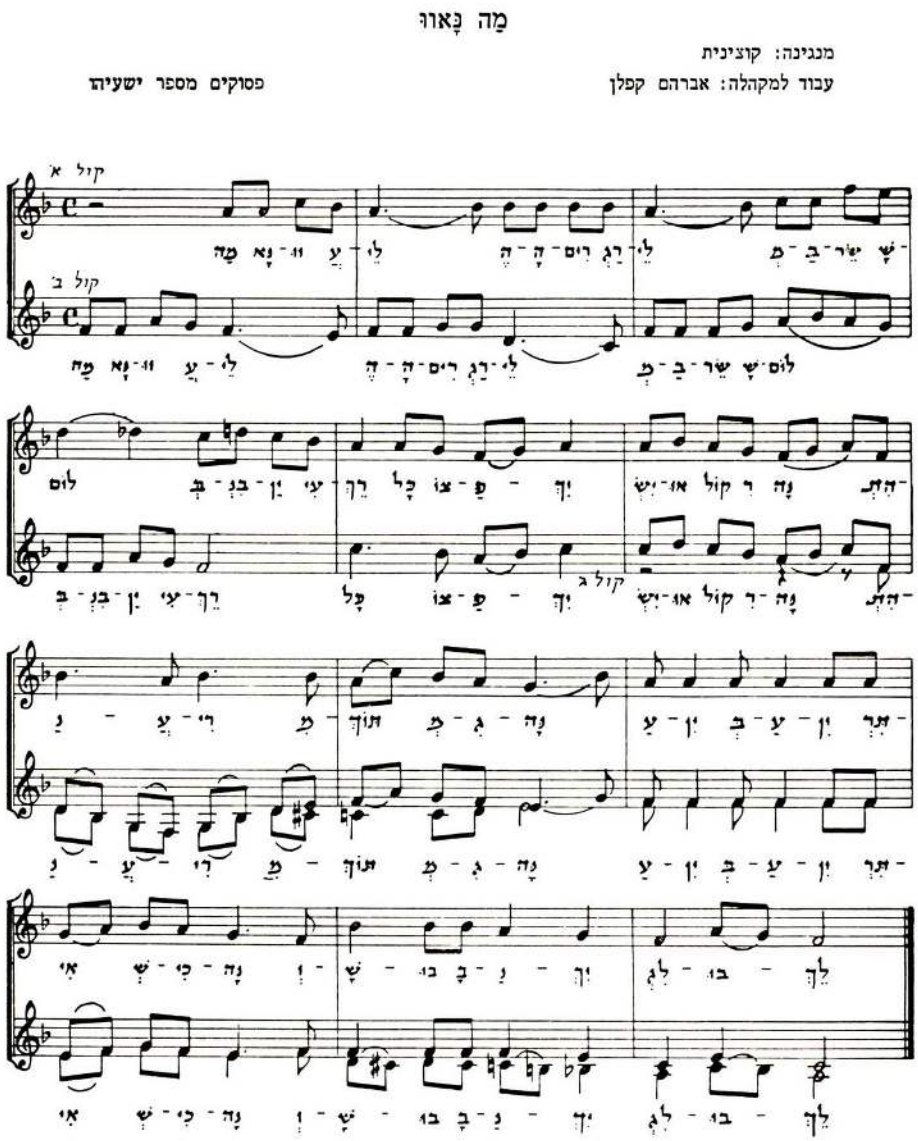


Figure 7.8 Ma Navu with vocal counterpoint and harmony

(Lachanim: Shirim L'makhela, 1960)

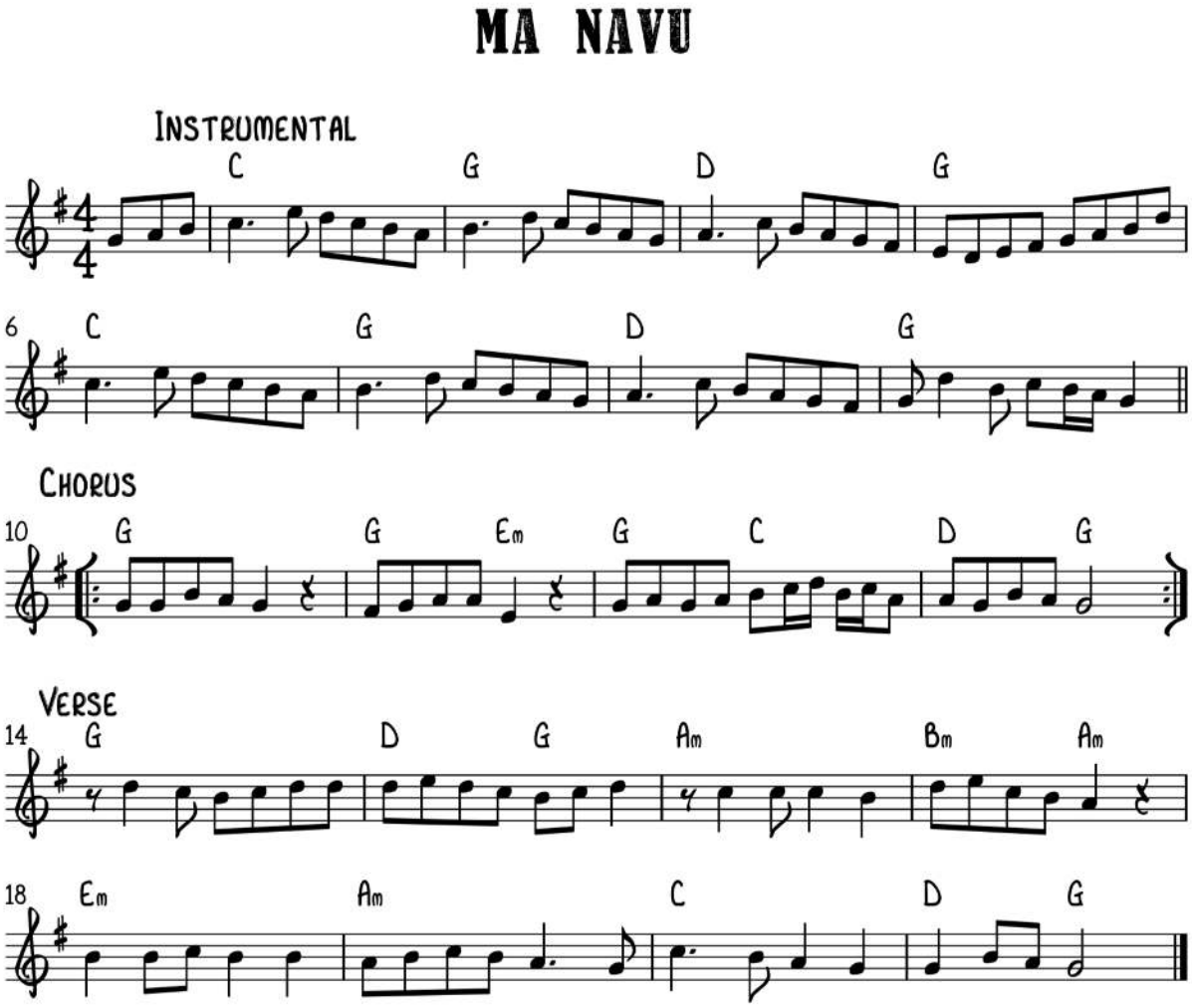


Figure 7.9 Ma Navu with Instrumental Introduction/Interlude (Elmakias, 2024)

Ma Navu Alei is one of our modern-day piyyutim that is musically heard as a table song[9] after enjoying a meal and popular for weddings as it is in the major mode sounds of *maqam ajam*. The musical notation setting of 7.8 indicates that this melody is associated with the Cochin community of Indian Jews. The arrangement there includes vocal counterpoint and harmony for a three part choir or small ensemble that could be

[9] קוצ'ין - מה נאוו עלי

wonderful for middle school level ensembles. It's a particular challenge for Hebrew-speakers to be engaged with the Hebrew language, which is read from right to left, whereas musical notation is read from left to right. The musical transcriber could have chosen to set the arrangement in Roman characters (e.g. Ma na-vu); however, the emphasis at that time was to inculcate the use and mastery of Hebrew in all aspects of Israeli life. This musical setting employs a system of writing out each Hebrew syllable from right to left, but each subsequent syllable matches the musical notation, moving along from left to right. Israeli music educators of the 1960s elevated this simple melody in the form of a piyyut to three-part harmony – an educational pursuit not only in a musical sense, but the piyyut itself contains many biblical verses strung together.

There are also many wonderful audio recordings of Ma Navu Alei (and other piyyutim and songs) available at the Zemereshet Israeli Music Database.[10]

One of the greatest recordings of the piyyut includes the female artist and paytanit, Hazzan Yahalah Lachmish, with her sister, Shani. She recently produced a popular recording of Ma Navu (2022) as part of Tandu, a Mizrachi fusion band that infuses piyyutim with jazz harmonies. This fusion creates a unique and captivating musical experience that appeals to a wide range of listeners.

The remarkable popularity of a recent recording of Ma Navu by Israeli payyetan, Hazzan Yahalah Lachmish highlights the growing prominence of women in a field that was traditionally dominated by men.

Lachmish's involvement in Tandu allows her to showcase her expertise in piyyutim within a dynamic and innovative musical context . Her collaborations with other

[10] Zemershet, Israeli Music Database. https://www.zemereshet.co.il/m/song.asp?id=732

ensembles, such as Tahrir and Voca Shabbat, further demonstrate her versatility and her dedication to expanding the boundaries of Jewish music.

> “Their music is a mix of styles, with arrangements of falafel jazz, liturgical music courtesy of their cantor father, soul and world music. The sisters talk about the inspiration for their music, including their father and grandmothers, the musical worlds in Israel and what it took for them to finally appreciate their father’s age-old piyyutim, or liturgical poems set to song.” (Kahn, 2022)

Yahala Lachmish, with her expertise in piyyutim and her passion for bridging tradition and contemporary expression, plays a vital role in shaping Tandu's musical identity. Her diverse musical activities, including collaborations, teaching, and leading prayer services, further solidify her position as a significant figure in the world of Piyyut. (Lachmish, 2022)

Ma Navu Summation

Mah Navu 'Alei Heharim Raglei is a captivating 20th-century Hebrew piyyut by Shimon Bar Nissim. It beautifully expresses a yearning for redemption and return to Zion, drawing on vivid biblical imagery. Bar Nissim, an Iraqi émigré to Israel poured his personal experiences of exile and return into this poignant work, offering a fresh perspective on themes of peace and homecoming. The piyyut's evocative language, clear structure, and inherent musicality make it a compelling piece of modern Jewish music that still feels rooted in antiquity with its simple structure and rich tapestry of biblical quotes.

As a hazzan well-versed in maqamat, Bar Nissim's background undoubtedly influenced his approach to composing this piyyut. The poem's joyous anticipation of redemption, its powerful call to action, and its comforting promise of return are palpable. Musically, Mah Navu has become popular as a table song and a staple at weddings. It has been arranged in various ways, including a three-part harmony setting and a recent recording by the female artist Yahala Lachmish, which blends traditional piyyut with jazz harmonies.

The enduring appeal of Mah Navu lies in its ability to resonate with diverse audiences. Its musical accessibility and emotional depth make it a meaningful addition to contemporary Jewish liturgical practice, particularly in communities with connections to Iraqi Jewish traditions. Furthermore, the popularity of Lachmish's recording highlights the growing prominence of women in the traditionally male-dominated field of piyyut performance.

Piyyut 5: עַם נֶאֱמָנַי זֶרַע אֱמוּנַי Am Ne’emanai - My faithful people

This piyyut tells the story of the Hanukkah miracle, the war of the few Hasmoneans against the many Greeks. The recurring refrain echoes the words of the repeated verse sung in Hallel (Psalms of praise). In this way, 20th-century payyetan, Rabbi David Buzaglo, created a link between his poem, which is a song of praise and thanksgiving to God, and Hallel, which is also recited all eight days of Hanukkah. Indeed, part of the poem is performed in choral singing and part of it in solo and congregational singing,[11] which is also reminiscent of Hallel. Rabbi David Buzaglo also incorporated words from the "Al Hanisim" prayer, which is recited on Hanukkah in the עֲמִידָה Amidah prayer and in the Grace after Meals.

Rabbi Buzaglo, who passed away in 1975, was the greatest Moroccan payyetan (liturgical poet) of the last century. Interestingly, Rabbi Buzaglo had a practice of drawing inspiration from popular music. He would ask his assistant to play popular songs, and then he would compose Hebrew piyyutim set to those tunes. This way, he connected the youth to their tradition through familiar melodies. Am Ne'emanai is an example of this practice, as it is set to the tune of an Arabic song called " يم العباية Yamul Abayah - Woman in the Abaya[12]. This piyyut beautifully tells the story of Hanukkah in five stanzas, moving from darkness to light. It serves as a concise and poetic way to remember this important event, keeping the story and Jewish culture alive.

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[11] National Library of Israel עם נאמני Audio Recording
https://www.nli.org.il/he/piyut/Piyut1song_010016700000005171/NLI

[12] سهام رفقي - يا ام العبايه https://youtu.be/Cqw_KpOp4S8?si=3dBMgbo74EQI4VhQ

يم العباية Yamul Abayah - Woman in the Abaya

يم العباية	Ya um al abaya,	Oh woman in the abaya,
حلوة عباتك	hilwa abatish	how lovely is your abaya
يا سمرة هو	Ya samra hwaya,	Oh dark-complexioned one,
اية زينة بصفاتك	zeiha tsifatish	how beautiful are your qualities
هلا وميت هلا	Halla wumeit halla,	Welcome, and a hundred welcomes,
يا ريم الفلا	ya rime al falla	oh gazelle of the countryside
وقلبي امتلا من	Wikalbi amtalla,	And my heart is filled
نور وجناتك	min nur wijnatik	with the light of your cheeks
يا حياة الروح	Ya hayat al ruhe,	Oh life of my soul,
القلب مجروح	al kalab majruh	my heart is wounded
والجسم مطروح	Wal jasim matruh,	And my body is thrown down
من نار غمزاتك	min nar hazatik	by the fire of your glances

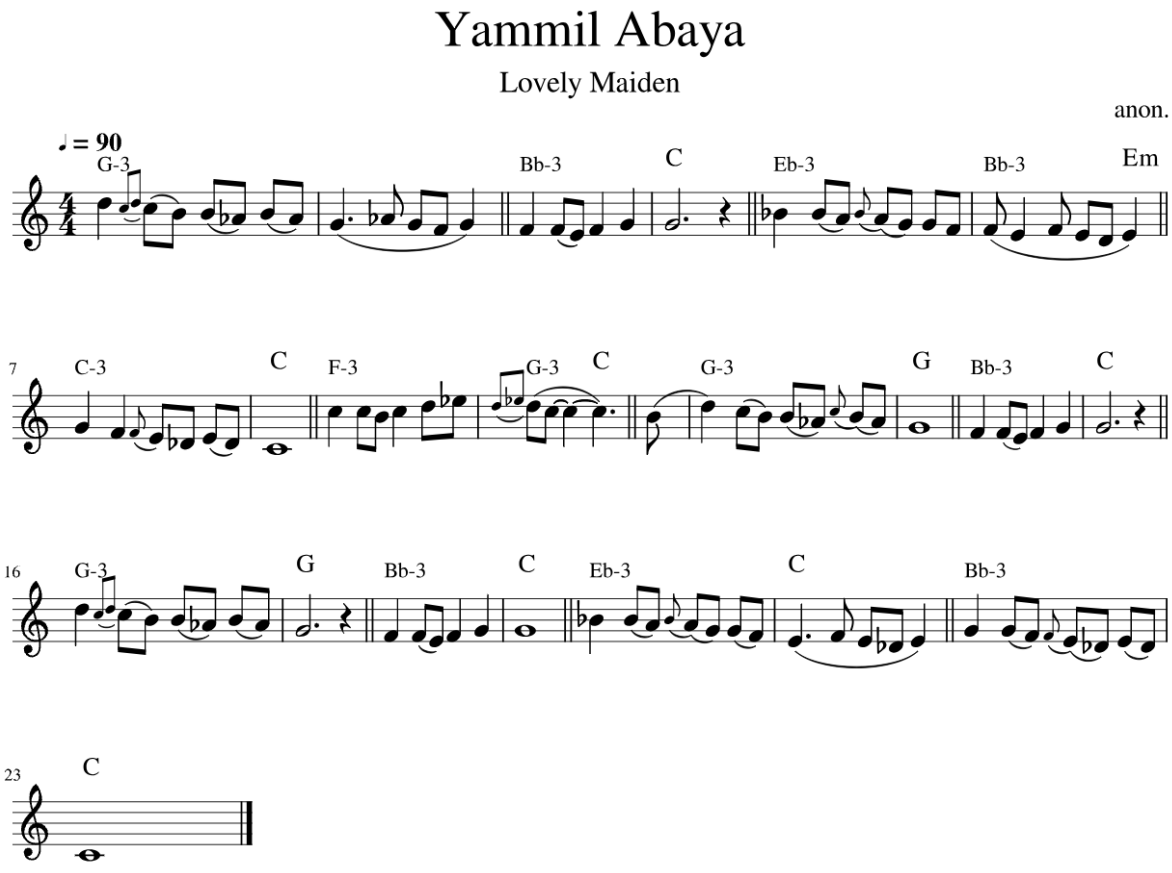

Figure 7.10 (Campin, 2022)

עַם נֶאֱמָנַי זֶרַע אֱמוּנַי Am Ne'emanai - Translation

עַם נֶאֱמָנַי זֶרַע אֱמוּנַי הוֹדוּ לַה' כִּי גָבַר חַסְדּוֹ	My faithful people, seed of my faith, give thanks to God, for His kindness has prevailed.
בִּימֵי מַתִּתְיָה זָקֵן יְדִיד יָהּ רַב עֲלִילִיָּה פָּקַד צֹאן יָדוֹ בָּנָיו חֲנִיכָיו יוֹצְאֵי יְרֵכָיו הָלְכוּ בִדְרָכָיו לָבְשׁוּ אֶת מַדּוֹ	In the days of Mattathias, old, friend of God Master of deeds, he commanded the flock of his hand His sons, his disciples, those who came from his loins They walked in his ways, they wore his garment
עַם נֶאֱמָנַי זֶרַע אֱמוּנַי הוֹדוּ לַה' כִּי גָבַר חַסְדּוֹ	My faithful people, seed of my faith, give thanks to God, for His kindness has prevailed.
עַם יָוָן תַּקִּיף אֶת צִיּוֹן הִתְקִיף וַה' הִשְׁקִיף מִשְּׁמֵי קָדְשׁוֹ גִּבּוֹרִים נָפְלוּ וּטְמֵאִים חָדְלוּ וְגֵאִים שָׁפְלוּ הָרַב עִם עַבְדּוֹ	The people of Greece, forcefully, Zion they attacked And God looked down from the heavens of His holiness Mighty ones fell, and the impure ceased And the proud were humbled, the master with his servant
עַם נֶאֱמָנַי זֶרַע אֱמוּנַי הוֹדוּ לַה' כִּי גָבַר חַסְדּוֹ	My faithful people, seed of my faith, give thanks to God, for His kindness has prevailed.
חַלָּשִׁים נָצְחוּ צַדִּיקִים צָלְחוּ וּטְהוֹרִים שָׂמְחוּ אִישׁ וּמַחֲמַדּוֹ בָּאוּ לַמִּקְדָּשׁ שָׁרוּ שִׁיר חָדָשׁ לָאֵל הַנִּקְדָּשׁ גָּדוֹל כְּבוֹדוֹ	The weak prevailed, the righteous succeeded And the pure rejoiced, each man with his beloved/desire They came to the Temple, they sang a new song To the holy God, great is His glory
עַם נֶאֱמָנַי זֶרַע אֱמוּנַי הוֹדוּ לַה' כִּי גָבַר חַסְדּוֹ	My faithful people, seed of my faith, give thanks to God, for His kindness has prevailed.
וּטְהוֹר שְׁמָנִים טִמְּאוּ יְוָנִים וּקְהַל כֹּהֲנִים חָשׁ לְהִפָּקְדוֹ וּבְחִפּוּשׂ יַחַד מָצְאוּ פַּךְ נִכְחַד רַק לַיְלָה אֶחָד סְפֵק לְבַדּוֹ	And pure oils the Greeks defiled And the assembly of priests hastened to be counted/to inspect And in searching together they found a small/hidden flask Only for one night it supplied by itself
עַם נֶאֱמָנַי זֶרַע אֱמוּנַי הוֹדוּ לַה' כִּי גָבַר חַסְדּוֹ	My faithful people, seed of my faith, give thanks to God, for His kindness has prevailed.
עוֹד שִׁבְעָה מָשְׁכָה מִדָּתוֹ אָרְכָה כִּי הַבְּרָכָה שָׁרְתָה עַל יָדוֹ יָמִים שְׁמוֹנָה גָּמְרוּ רְנָנָה לְאֵל אֱמוּנָה אֵין מִבַּלְעָדוֹ	Another seven it continued, its measure was extended For the blessing rested upon it/him Eight days they completed with rejoicing To the God of faith, there is none besides Him
עַם נֶאֱמָנַי זֶרַע אֱמוּנַי הוֹדוּ לַה' כִּי גָבַר חַסְדּוֹ	My faithful people, seed of my faith, give thanks to God, for His kindness has prevailed.

This piyyut, recited during Hanukkah, beautifully narrates the Maccabees' victory over the Greeks and encapsulates the spiritual significance of the holiday. It achieves this through a combination of skillful poetic techniques, compelling storytelling, and deep biblical allusions.

Poetic Structure - The piyyut starts with a refrain which can be repeated between each of the five verses. Each verse is four lines and well balanced with alliteration, assonance and consonance.

Rhyme: עַם נֶאֱמָנַי, זֶרַע אֱמוּנַי - My faithful people, seed of my faith - The piyyut employs a consistent "OH" rhyme in every other line, creating a pleasing rhythm and emphasizing key ideas within each stanza. While this is not a muwashshah, there is internal rhyme and a poetic musicality enhances the emotional impact and memorability of the piyyut.

Repetition: עַם נֶאֱמָנַי, זֶרַע אֱמוּנַי, הוֹדוּ לַה' כִּי גָבַר חַסְדּוֹ - My faithful people, seed of my faith, give thanks to God, for His kindness has prevailed - The recurring refrain acts as a powerful chorus. This repetition reinforces the theme of gratitude and divine intervention, giving the piyyut a liturgical feel suitable for communal singing and celebration.

Narrative and Themes

Historical Context: בִּימֵי מַתִּתְיָהוּ זָקֵן יְדִיד יָהּ - In the days of Mattathias, old, friend of God - The piyyut vividly recounts the Hanukkah story, from Mattathias's defiance to the miracle of the oil. It draws on a broader tradition, alluding to details like Mattathias's age

and the desecration of the Temple, enriching the narrative and connecting it to a wider historical understanding.

Divine Providence: וַה' הִשְׁקִיף מִשְּׁמֵי קָדְשׁוֹ - And God looked down from the heavens of His holiness - The phrase emphasizes God's intervention in human affairs, echoing biblical themes of divine assistance in moments of crisis.

Power of the Few: גִּבּוֹרִים נָפְלוּ וּטְמֵאִים חָדְלוּ וְגֵאִים שָׁפְלוּ - Mighty ones fell, and the impure ceased, and the proud were humbled - The Maccabees' victory over a mighty empire resonates with biblical stories like David and Goliath, highlighting the power of faith and divine assistance in overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds.

Miracle of the Oil: וּטְהוֹר שְׁמָנִים טִמְּאוּ יְוָנִים... פַּךְ נִכְחַד... עוֹד שִׁבְעָה מָשְׁכָה מִדָּתוֹ אָרְכָה - And pure oils the Greeks defiled... a flask [was] hidden... another seven it continued, its measure was extended - The piyyut celebrates the miracle of the oil, a symbol of divine favor and protection, reminding us of God's ability to provide even in dire circumstances.

Sanctity of the Temple: בָּאוּ לַמִּקְדָּשׁ... לָאֵל הַנִּקְדָּשׁ - They came to the Temple... to the holy God - The restoration of the Temple is a recurring motif, emphasizing its importance as a place of worship and a symbol of Jewish identity.

Biblical Connections

I Maccabees: הָלְכוּ בִדְרָכָיו לָבְשׁוּ אֶת מַדּוֹ - They walked in his ways, they wore his garment - This book provides a detailed historical account of the Maccabean Revolt, including the purification of the Temple and the rededication of the menorah, mirroring the events described in the piyyut.

Psalms: פָּקַד צֹאן יָדוֹ - He commanded the flock of his hand - Many Psalms, such as Psalm 23 and Psalm 121, express themes of divine protection and guidance, which resonate with the piyyut's emphasis on God's role in the Maccabees' victory.

Daniel: יָמִים שְׁמוֹנָה גָּמְרוּ רְנָנָה לְאֵל אֱמוּנָה אֵין מִבַּלְעָדוֹ - Eight days they completed with rejoicing to the God of faith, there is none besides Him - The story of Hanukkah parallels the story of Daniel, where the Maccabees are seen as spiritual successors to the righteous heroes who resisted oppression and remained faithful to God. (National Library of Israel, *Am Neemanai*)

עַם נֶאֱמָנַי זֶרַע אֱמוּנַי Am Ne'emanei - Musical Notation Transcription

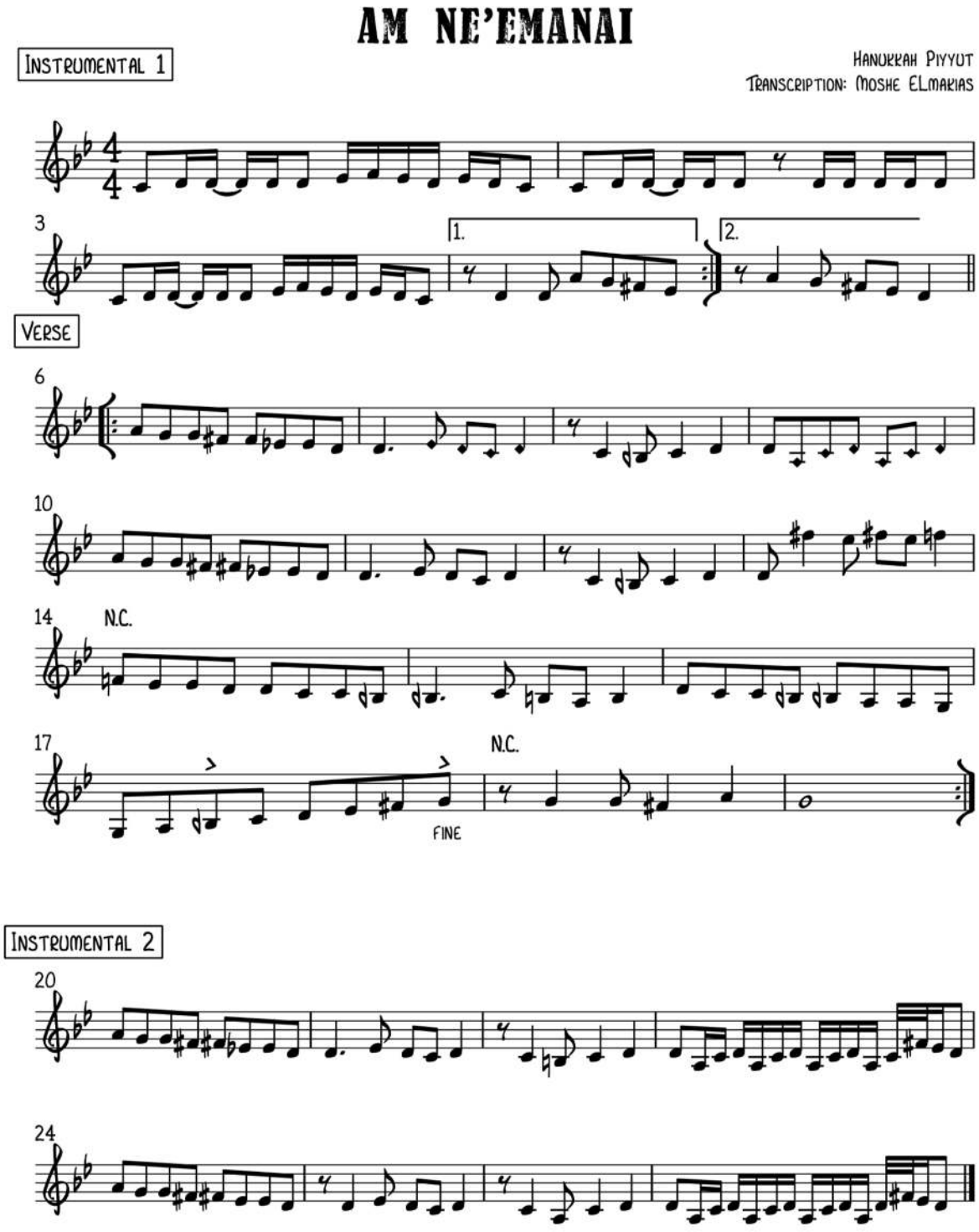

Figure 7.8 Am Ne’emanai (Elmakias, 2022)

Am Ne’emanai Musical Analysis

The musical notation above is based on a recording[13] produced by the "שִׁירִים וְשׁוֹרָשִׁים" שֶׁל מִשְׂרַד הַחִנּוּךְ "Songs and Roots" program of the Ministry of Education of Israel and sung by Yochai Cohen. The piyyut has been reimagined in recent years as part of the educational program which aims to connect younger generations with the diverse cultural heritage of Jewish communities. This music of this piyyut is in *maqam Hijaz* with quarter tone usage on the 6th scale degree. While the notation above has a tonal center/arrival of F. Here is an illustration of Hijaz starting on the pitch D:

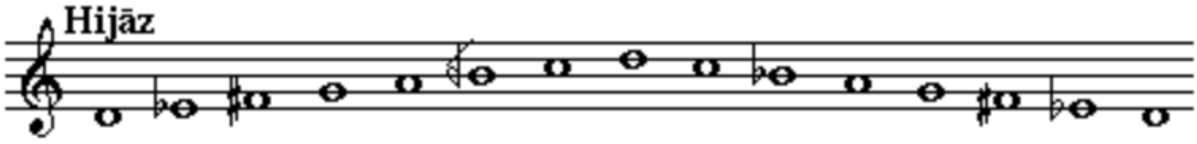

Figure 7.9 ("Maqam." *dubsahara)*

The practice of taking an existing melody and setting new lyrics to the melody is not new; many preceded Rabbi David, and foremost among them was the great poet Rabbi Israel Nag'ara, who in the mid-16th century collected songs and melodies from across the Ottoman Empire and adapted Hebrew lyrics to them, noting the original song and musical scale. (National Library of Israel מבט מעמיק – "עם נאמני) For further information on the hybridized song Am Ne’emanai, see Chapter 10 of this paper, “Taking Piyyut Forward: A Musical, Collaborative Educational Approach”

[13] https://youtu.be/r12G7bv1dL4?si=jVflZVmWCpps1WbZ

Am Ne’emanai Summation

Am Ne’emanai is a masterpiece of religious poetry that masterfully combines form and content to create a powerful and moving celebration of Hanukkah. Its skillful use of rhyme, repetition, and vivid imagery, along with its deep biblical allusions and theological themes, makes it a source of inspiration and spiritual reflection. This piyyut tells the story of the Hanukkah miracle, the war of the few Hasmoneans against the many Greeks. The recurring refrain echoes the words of the repeated verse sung in Hallel. In this way, 20th-century payyetan, Rabbi David Buzaglo, created a link between his poem, which is a song of praise and thanksgiving to God, and with the responsive nature of Hallel, which is also recited all eight days of Hanukkah. Rabbi David Buzaglo also incorporated words from the "Al Hanisim" prayer, which is recited on Hanukkah in the עֲמִידָה Amidah prayer and in the Grace after Meals.

Rabbi Buzaglo, who passed away in 1975, was the greatest Moroccan payyetan (liturgical poet) of the last century. Interestingly, Rabbi Buzaglo had a practice of drawing inspiration from popular music. He would ask his assistant to play popular songs, and then he would compose Hebrew piyyutim set to those tunes. This way, he connected the youth to their tradition through familiar melodies. Am Ne'emanai is an example of this practice, as it is set to the tune of an Arabic song called " يم العباية Yamul Abayah - Woman in the Abaya - the most favorite songs for Iraqi Jews from my family. This piyyut beautifully tells the story of Hanukkah in five stanzas, moving from darkness to light. It serves as a concise and poetic way to remember this important event, keeping the story and Jewish culture alive.

Chapter 8: Exploration of Piyyut Conclusion

This project has explored the rich and multifaceted world of piyyut, focusing on its historical development, diverse expressions, and enduring relevance within Jewish tradition. Through the examination of five unique piyyutim from the Babylonian Jewish experience, we have delved into their historical context, uncovered deeper meanings within the texts, and analyzed their distinctive musical characteristics.

Piyyutim have served as a dynamic and evolving form of poetry, adapting to changing cultural and linguistic landscapes throughout history. From their origins in Eretz Yisrael to their integration into various Jewish communities, piyyutim have enriched prayer services, lifecycle events, and communal celebrations. They offer a profound connection to the past while embracing the creative possibilities of the present and future, standing as a testament to the rich tapestry of Jewish cultural and spiritual expression.

The Cairo Geniza has provided invaluable insights into the historical continuity of piyyutim, preserving ancient manuscripts and shedding light on their integration into synagogue practice. The examination of specific piyyutim, *Y'hi Shalom B'cheilienu,*" *Yom Hashabbat Ein Kamohu*, *El Eliyahu*, *Mah Navu 'Alei Heharim Raglei*, and *Am Ne'emanai,* has demonstrated the diversity of themes, poetic forms, and musical expressions within this genre. This exploration, combined with insights from research, enhances our understanding of the intricate interplay between tradition, creativity, and communal identity within the broader context of Jewish religious life.

Piyyutim continue to resonate in contemporary Jewish life, serving as a bridge between tradition and innovation. They offer a means of connecting with the Divine

through creative linguistic expression, fostering a sense of community, and preserving cultural heritage. As we continue to engage with piyyutim, we participate in a chain of tradition that links us to countless generations who have sought to enhance their spiritual experiences and deepen their connection to Jewish identity.

We have a unique opportunity in our day to research and bring more piyyutim to life through study, performance, and during piyyut song sessions which encourage communal participation. By making these piyyutim accessible and engaging, we can ensure that they continue to inspire and uplift Jewish communities for generations to come. This project has aimed to contribute to that effort by modeling a process of producing translations, commentary, and practical applications, illuminating the beauty and depth of piyyutim and inspiring further exploration and appreciation of this rich and enduring legacy.

From their origins in Eretz Yisrael to the flourishing periods in history in various regions throughout the world, piyyutim continue to resonate, capturing a spirituality and ethos that expounds upon tanach source texts' intention, providing a deep connection to Torah learning and Jewish heritage.

Chapter 9: Coda

My Background and Way Into Piyyut

ברוך השם I continue to feel the thrill and gratitude of serving our world Jewish learning community and Temple Israel of Great Neck, Long Island as Hazzan. I hope these expressions help you to get to know me better and to amplify the unique position I am in as Hazzan, researcher, artist, and educator.

My background and experience make me uniquely qualified to undertake this project. As a Hazzan serving a community deeply rooted in Mizrachi and Sephardi traditions, I possess an intimate understanding of the rich heritage at stake. This personal connection is further strengthened by my family history; my father's upbringing in Baghdad, Iraq, instilled in me a profound appreciation for the nuances of this specific tradition. Furthermore, my Master of Music thesis, which involved rigorous textual and musical analysis, has equipped me with the necessary scholarly tools to approach this work with both sensitivity and academic precision. Finally, living in Great Neck, New York provides access to a vibrant and diverse Jewish community, including a significant population of Iraqi and Babylonian descent. This offers an invaluable opportunity to engage in first hand interviews, recordings, and research, ensuring the expanded future project's authenticity, depth and potential to engage in meaningful relationships.

I feel extremely blessed to have this opportunity to share some highlights of my personal history that have helped to shape me into the person I am today. I grew up as part of a very loving family, and continue to enjoy the blessing of a close relationship with my parents, Ann and Maurice Shamash - may they continue to live lives of meaning - and my sister, Elizabeth. From my earliest memories, I can see myself sitting

in the back of my father's bright blue Chevy Malibu, my father singing prayers while driving me to school if I happened to miss the bus or if he wanted to accompany me to the classroom to make a connection with a teacher. He took great pride in chanting and singing his t'filot -- what seemed at the time, for me as a young boy, to be an unbelievable number of prayers from memory, followed by some improvised blessings and requests to God in English.

I grew up in a unique Jewish home in Baltimore, Maryland with roots in the Polish-Russian Ashkenazi traditions of my mother's family and the Babylonian-Mizrachi traditions of my father, an Iraqi-Jewish immigrant, and the multi-denominational Jewish experiences of '70s- and '80s-era America. I have been and continue to be grateful to serve the Jewish community as Hazzan and educator, while engaging in deep learning with teachers and colleagues, and sharing meaningful experiences and partnerships with community members of all backgrounds and affiliations.

Friday nights at my home were unique compared to the experience of any of my Jewish friends, as the prayers and chanting leading up to the meal were much longer than I had experienced at any other Shabbat table. There was a unique accent and a melody that was very difficult to follow, ancient-sounding and distinctive of my father's Babylonian-Iraqi Jewish heritage. His expressions of thanks to God were so impactful, including all of the things that had gone well that week. He would continue in English so that we would know what he was asking of God. He would make requests for each of us to be blessed, for God's help with what each of us might have been challenged with that week, or what milestones we were approaching, or to aid in the successful completion of what we were hoping to achieve in the coming months. My mother would always

loudly chime in (in a voice my friends love to imitate), sometimes with some slight correction, to be sure that we all would know that we were loved and cared for equally. Her Jewish creativity was always overflowing and ever-present in our lives, as on every wall and table in our home we could find her artwork: colorful paintings; and ceramic dreidels, mezuzot, b'nai-mitzvah boys and girls holding the Torah with hair made from clay pushed through a spaghetti press.

My path as an engaged Jewish learner in a school and shul setting began in Baltimore, Maryland, where I grew up as a member of Chizuk Amuno Congregation. From an early age, I loved listening to and singing along with our Hazzan, Farid Dardashti, a native of Iran who would mix beautiful, powerful, penetrating Middle Eastern melismatic turns and inflection with the Ashkenazi melodies in our davening. That made an important impact in my conscious understanding that this feeling of prayer was infused with a sound similar to my father's rich heritage in Baghdad, Iraq.

As I was studying for my Bar Mitzvah, I was struggling and frustrated a bit. I challenged Hazzan Dardashti with the question, "Why do I need to learn the pronunciation of the Hebrew so perfectly and know how to use the trope?" He answered: "One day, you are going to be a Hazzan!!"

On the day of my Bar Mitzvah, the synagogue choir director asked me to join the adult choir. This was another motivational push, exposing me to the rich and artistically beautiful realm of elevating *t'fillah* through exquisite music, and the underpinning of congregational participation.

While enjoying an enriching social life through involvement in Jewish youth groups during my teen years, I was also invited to sing professionally with the choir at

Beth T'filoh Congregation, a modern Orthodox synagogue outside Baltimore. My involvement at Beth T'filoh continued during holidays and select Shabbatot through college.

I feel extremely blessed to have obtained Bachelor and Masters Degrees in music from the University of Maryland and the University of Miami, respectively, where I was awarded full scholarships and directed several student musical productions and groups. While at the University of Miami, I enjoyed being active in Hillel and working as a religious school music educator at Temple Judea across the street from campus, and I was cast in a production of the Israeli opera, *Dan HaShomer*, at Temple Israel of Greater Miami. During that time, I also began leading Friday-night services at Beth Sholom in Miami and served as the Cantor for High Holiday services at the Jewish Fellowship at Hemlock Farms in Pennsylvania.

I experienced an "aha" moment while on a Jewish student delegation trip to Germany with a German government-sponsored program, Bridge of Understanding: The Jewish Experience of Modern Germany. Everywhere we would go, I was called upon as the only singer in the group to tap into my Jewish repertoire for an emotional connection. So we would come to an empty sanctuary or a hidden synagogue that hadn't been destroyed or a synagogue that was still being fixed up and people would say, "Brian, sing," and I would sing a prayer or a Jewish song. I realized, while singing into that emptiness but also noticing the incredible Soviet Jewish population that was dynamic and growing in Germany, that there was a need for clergy-people in Europe. I could see that there was a need for leadership and inspiration in the Jewish community

in general, so I felt that it was important in my life to be part of the re-growing of the Jewish people with a joyful and energetic and rhythmic component.

After earning a Master of Music in 1999, I left the fulltime opera and voice performance path for the pursuit of congregational teaching and the mastery of hazzanut. I returned to Temple Israel of Greater Miami, where I served as fulltime cantor for three years and gradually became more observant. I spent the next two years as Hazzan Sheini at the Conservative B'nai Torah Congregation in Boca Raton, Fla. before joining the clergy of South Huntington Jewish Center, a Conservative congregation on Long Island, where I further developed the religious-school curriculum and served as a teacher and administrator for a large B'nai-Mitzvah program for 12 years.

While studying towards and receiving a certificate of Hazzan-Minister with the Cantors Assembly, I was able to engage in my passion to preserve and refresh *t'fillah*, creating Jewish music and learning resources. This period of productivity led to composition, arrangement, and collaboration on more than 1,000 pieces, recordings, and scores. With an extensive musical background and constant desire to share these gifts with the greater community, I have made efforts to excel as an energetic leader and conductor of vocal and instrumental ensembles. I also enjoyed both composing and arranging music for schools, concerts, and services. As an accomplished recording artist, I can be heard on the well-received album, *Shalom Aleichem*. I was also recently featured on *The Spirit of Jewish World Music*, *The Spirit of Shalom*, and *The Spirit of Celebration*, each with CD distributions of over 75,000 copies. Prior to moving back to Long Island, New York, I enjoyed three years of service as Hazzan, Bar/Bat Mitzvah Coordinator, and Education Director of Congregation Beth El in Fairfield, Connecticut. I

am also constantly engaged in the proliferation and performance of piyyutim and melodies from my father's homeland of Baghdad, Iraq.

I feel blessed to have the opportunity to engage in the multigenerational and multicultural community that is so unique in Great Neck. I hope to continue to learn more about, expand awareness of, and reawaken the roots of the many people I have met and still hope to meet. The Temple Israel community represents an extraordinary rainbow of backgrounds: Ashkenazi -- Polish, Russian, South African… Edot Hamizrach -- Sepharadi & Mizrahi, Persian, Iraqi, Israeli, Uzbeki, Egyptian… and flavors from matza-ball soup to Persian tahdig to Israeli shakshuka.

My vision is to embrace and enhance the recognition, learning, and perpetuation of beautiful ancient traditions from peoples who in many cases were driven out along with the Jewish communities from lands where Jews had lived for thousands of years. I love to daven "nusach America," infused with Israeli folk and popular melodies and harmonies; our continued relationship and development provides a unique opportunity to create a fusion of our many traditions, reconstituting and keeping alive the inclusive and multicultural nusach and music of Klal Yisrael from all lands.

Temple Israel Great Neck is the ideal environment for me to share in spiritual growth as I strive to fulfill my greatest intellectual potential as an educator, teacher, and leader of our people, serving an amazingly dynamic congregation and the greater Jewish community.

My vision as Hazzan is to continue apply passion, deep *kavanah*, and experience to my various roles within synagogue life. I intend to serve as a joyful and thoughtful leader and *dugma* as a lifelong learner. Applying my skills as an educator and *shaliach*

tzibur, I hope to teach, inspire, and empower others to find their most impactful pathways of engagement while recognizing the weaknesses they wish to diminish into strengths to draw themselves closer to God and Jewish community. I am dedicated to our congregation's needs of community-building, pastoral care, and education by continually communicating with other clergy, staff, leaders, and congregants while offering and asking how I can help. I am part of a loving, caring, and supportive team of clergy, lay leaders, staff, and teachers and always make myself available to guide the community towards *Torah, Mitzvot, Avodah, G'milut Chasadim,* and *Tikun Olam* within the shared vision of our organization. I will strive to be present for any individual in need.

I feel so incredibly blessed to be married to Emily Shamash, who is also a very gifted singer and educator. She is a specialist in early intervention, served as a Special Services Coordinator for religious school, has taught religious school, led junior congregation and High Holiday young family services. Emily holds a doctorate of education, and is an associate professor of Special Education and the current Chair of the Department of Educational Studies and Teacher Preparation at Fairfield University (Fairfield, Conn.). She has supported and enhanced my study and service to our community as an incredible partner and asset along with our three children, Ella, Maya, and Ethan. Our love for Torah learning, Judaism and Jewish music, scholarship, and education will continue to be B"H a source of grounding and expansion for my role as Hazzan and teacher.

We are so excited to be part of services, an active religious school, our Waxman Youth House teen programming, and the energetic early-childhood program at Beth

HaGan and feel blessed with the deep friendships we share.

We are all supported by the qualities of those leaders who came before us, all the way back to Moshe Rabbeinu -- their scholarship and wisdom, love of klal Yisrael, and dedication to Jewish peoplehood and community. I am grateful and indebted to those teachers, rabbis, and hazzanim who have paved the way, allowing me the great honor and responsibility to fulfill our tradition of *l'dor vador*, continuing the chain of teaching and learning.

I feel so blessed every day to collaborate with Rabbi Howard Stecker, Rabbi Daniel Schweber, Connie Reichman, Yve Fouladi, Morel Tomer, Jamey Kohn, and the TIGN teachers, lay leadership, staff, and congregants. I hope to always be a strong Shamash -- a helper to shine light to the community -- deepening our faith through joyful music, learning, Torah, prayer and piyyut.

Chapter 10: Epilogue
Taking Piyyut Forward: A Musical, Collaborative Educational Approach

Bringing the Babylonian Piyyut Research
into Collaborative Educational Concert Programming

Figure 10.1 Songs of Babylon - Online Posting (SHINDC, 2024)

The project, “Songs of Babylon:[14] A Musical Journey to the Iraqi Jewish Experience,” shared on the *Baltimore Sun* events listings, also included the creation of the collaborative between Adas Israel Congregation in Washington, D.C. and SHINDC concert, curated by Hazzan Ari with Hazzan Brian Shamash, joined by Moshe Elmakias on keyboard, Mohcine Saqi on percussion, LAiTH ALATTAR on the oud, and

[14] Adas Israel Congregation. (2024). "Songs of Babylon: A Musical Journey to the Iraqi Jewish Experience" with Hazzan Brian Shamash [Event Page]. Available from: https://www.adasisrael.org/event/-songs-of-babylon-a-musical-journey-to-the-iraqi-jewish-experience-with-hazzan-brian-shamash.html [Accessed December 16, 2024].
Sephardic Heritage International: https://shindc.org/

Abderrahim Amthqal on the ney, Tuesday, December 17, 2024 • 16 Kislev 5785 7:15 PM - 8:30 PM. The event listing read:

> Embark on a captivating musical odyssey through the heart of the Middle Eastern Jewish experience as we explore the rich tapestry of Mizrachi melodies, rhythms, and sounds that have shaped this unique cultural tradition that began thousands of years ago.
>
> We hope you are enchanted by the exquisite poetry and profound messages of hope embedded within the piyyutim (liturgical poems) that continue to inspire and uplift today. Experience the artistry of Hazzan Brian Baruch Shamash who carries the torch of this vibrant musical legacy, bridging the past with the present.
>
> Delve into the history of the Iraqi Jewish community, discovering the vital role that Jewish singers and musicians played in forging creative connections and relationships with the surrounding Arabic culture. Find intrigue, hearing the personal stories from Hazzan Shamash's father's life in Baghdad, Iraq. Uncover the deep roots of Jewish tradition in the ancient centers of learning that produced the Babylonian Talmud, the cornerstone of Jewish scholarship and practice.

It wasn't until I met Laith Allatar, the Iraq-born Arab-American composer, vocalist, and oud player, that I understood the lasting impact of Jewish musicians on Iraqi culture, even since the revolution. He introduced me to the influence of the Jewish Iraqi pioneering musicians, the Al-Kuwaiti Brothers, see below. According to Laith, Muslim musicians are still trying to emulate the style of Jewish musicians, brothers Dāʾūd and Ṣalāḥ al-Kuweiti. When he performs, Laith wears a *sidara*, the traditional black Iraqi hat portrayed in this photo, brought to him by a friend who visited Iraq.

The Pioneering Al-Kuwaiti Brothers: Shaping Modern Iraqi Music

Figure 10.2 (Seroussi, 2023)

Jewish musicians played a vital role in Iraqi society during the early 20th century, so much so that it was said that no wedding orchestra in Baghdad was complete without them. Among these musicians, the Kuwaiti brothers, Dā'ūd and Ṣalāḥ, stand out as true pioneers who shaped the landscape of modern Iraqi music. Their influence continues to resonate across the Middle East today.

Born in Kuwait City's Jewish quarter to an Iraqi-Jewish family, Dā'ūd (1910–1976) and Ṣalāḥ (1908–1986) were musical prodigies. Gifted a violin and an oud by their uncle, they quickly mastered their instruments. Ṣalāḥ began composing popular

instrumental pieces in the Persian Gulf style, while Dā’ūd became a sought-after performer for Kuwait's elite. Their first collaboration, a rendition of the traditional Kuwaiti song "Wallāh, ʻajbanī jamalak" ("Oh My God, I Loved Your Beauty"), remains a beloved classic on Gulf radio stations, though few listeners may be aware of its Jewish origins.

Seeking a more vibrant music scene, the brothers relocated to Baghdad in the early 1930s. There, Ṣalāḥ established Iraq's first modern school of Arabic music, incorporating European instruments like the cello into traditional melodies, drawing inspiration from Egyptian musical trends. The brothers' reputation soared, leading them to collaborate with some of the biggest names in Arab music. In 1933, they were commissioned by the legendary Umm Kulthum to compose "Qalbak ṣakhar jalmūd" ("Your Heart Is a Rock"), a song that became a staple in her performances. They also formed a lasting partnership with the renowned Egyptian musician Muḥammed ʿAbd al-Wahhāb.

Dā’ūd and Ṣalāḥ's music transcended social boundaries. They performed for King Fayṣal I of Iraq, his son and successor Ghāzī, and even at the wedding of the Kuwaiti emir, Mubārak al-Ṣabāḥ. Their legacy serves as a testament to the rich cultural contributions of Jewish musicians in shaping the soundscape of the Arab world (Seroussi, 2023).

In my discussions with Israeli musicians engaged in playing Arabic music, they shared that over the past 15 years, there has been a transition away from popular Jewish-Muslim musical collaborations in Israel. Now, Jewish musicians try to play more exclusively with Jewish musicians; the same is true in the Arab musical community. *Nargila* and music-sharing have become more segregated.

While the program was primarily composed of piyyut texts in Hebrew, the opening piece was a “flight to Iraq,” with Laith Allatar singing a song in Arabic. Later on, Laith and I created a fusion of يم العباية Yamul Abayah - Woman in the Abaya and עַם נֶאֱמָנַי זֶרַע אֱמוּנַי Am Neemanai, presented above.

During the concert, I sang publicly in Arabic for the first time and Laith sang in Hebrew for the first time. There was a moment when Laith and I were supporting each other in the languages that we each respectively know better, with Laith guiding me in Arabic and I in Hebrew. When the song was over, Laith smiled with such a sense of accomplishment, he exclaimed that this was the first time he had sung in Hebrew. I responded by bringing the moment into a b’racha, with the whole community saying *Shehecheyanu* together. We each shared with one another that, because of this positive experience, we plan to learn more music in the other’s language.

The concert also included Moroccan-Israeli musician Moshe Elmakias and Moroccan musician Abderrahim Amthqal. This coming together, of shared cultural liniage was felt as though it was the harbinger of a Hanukkah miracle in a way further enhancing the soulful re-sprouting cultural roots of piyyut author Rabbi David Buzaglo of Morroco.

Figures 10.3 and 10.4

(Life performance video screenshot and photo from “Songs of Babylon”, 2024)

The preparation and performance, and interactive learning in “Songs of Babylon” was attempting in many ways to emulate and actualize the interactive nature of piyyut, and other Judeo-Arabic performances which included a multicultural mix that was common in the Iraqi Jewish musical scene.

Figure 10.5 (Dangoor, N., 2007)

Taken in 1933, this photograph depicts a gathering at the home of Yousef Za'arur Senior, with Iraqi-Jewish musicians and members of the visiting Egyptian orchestra. Sitting from the right: Yousef Horesh; Mohammed al-Qebbantchi; Hoogi Patao; Nahome Yona; tambourine-player and Egyptian musician, Naveed Anjum.

So essential were Jewish musicians like these to live Iraqi radio broadcasts that the stations would shut down on some Jewish holy days due to a lack of available performers. Yeheskel Kojaman writes, "In 1932, for example, all the instrumentalists who attended the first Arabic music congress in Cairo were Jews... At that Conference the Iraqi ensemble received the first prize from King Fuad."

Jewish musicians were so integral to Iraq's music scene that Iraq National Radio refrained from broadcasting live music on Yom Kippur and Tish'a B'Av out of respect for their observance of these solemn fast days. Jewish musicians were absolutely essential to the Iraqi music scene in the early 20th century.

It's fascinating to know that in 1932, when Iraq sent musicians to the first Arabic music congress in Cairo, every single instrumentalist was Jewish!

> “When Iraq Radio was first established in Iraq in 1936, the entire instrumental ensemble, apart from the percussion player, was Jewish.Almost all instrumentalists in the night-clubs of Baghdad were Jews. For this reason, on Yom Kippur and Tish'a 'be-Ab, the two most solemn days in the Jewish calendar when Jews did not play music, no live music was broadcast on Iraq Radio; only records were played.”

These talented individuals weren't just playing in the background either. They were pioneers in developing two distinct traditions of Iraqi art music. There was "Modern Music", which was similar to what was being played in other Arab countries, especially Egypt. Jewish musicians like the Kuwaiti brothers, Salih and Dawud, and the renowned singer Salima Murad, were stars in this style, composing and performing popular new songs.

But there was also the uniquely Iraqi tradition of "Iraqi Maqam", a collection of around 60 *mapamat*, sometimes performed solo, and sometimes with a special ensemble called the Chalghi Baghdad. Until the 1950s, the musicians in these Chalghi ensembles were exclusively Jewish! It was a real "family business", passed down through generations with parents teaching and passing the musical skill set to their children.

Sadly, when most Iraqi Jews emigrated to Israel in the 1950s, it left a void in the Iraqi music scene. They had to scramble to train new musicians and even bring in people from other Arab countries. And for the musicians who moved to Israel, it wasn't

easy either. They went from playing for millions in Iraq to a much smaller audience of Iraqi Jews in Israel, many of whom were more interested in the new sounds of Israeli music.

Despite these challenges, the influence of Jewish musicians on Iraqi music is undeniable. They shaped the sounds of a nation and left behind a legacy that continues to resonate today. (Kojaman, n.d.)

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