

**בי"ג Piyut**

**From Tradition to Revival**

**Kobi Oz  
Psalms for the Perplexed**



**Educational Material**

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**Makom **בית**  
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Compiled and edited by Vavi Toran  
For The Israel Education Initiative and BASIS

This educational unit is a part of **Piyut – From Tradition to Revival**, the first in an intended series of units highlighting the piyut and its manifestation in contemporary Israeli culture.

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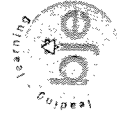
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## Accompanying Educational CD - Content

File Name	Type	Description	Duration/Length
Psalms for the Perplexed	pdf	Booklet for printing in color or blk/wht	40 pages
10 video clip with songs	MP4	YouTube video as MP4 files	3-4 min each
Traffic Jam of Miracles*		Prayer for the Secular*	
Elohai*		Friends (Yedidai)*	
Escalator*		Man with a Cardboard Sign*	
Zalman		Rabbi Joe Kappara*	
Longing for the Longing		Nikbat HaShiloach*	

\* with English subtitles

**פיוט**

**Piyut**

## From Tradition to Revival

פיוט פיוטיים

Piyut (pl. Piyutim) is a Jewish liturgical poem, usually designated to be sung, chanted, or recited during religious services.

פייטן פייטניים

Paytan (pl. Paytanim) refers both to the writer and/or composer of a piyut as well as the actual singing performer of a piyut.

# Introduction

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Dear Educator,

Something exciting is happening on the Israeli music scene — piyutim, mostly Mizrahi traditional liturgical songs, went mainstream with a bang!

Rock stars are composing new music to timeless medieval Hebrew poetry, pop stars are issuing CDs of new arrangements for traditional piyutim, young people are attending sold out concerts of rock stars teamed up with traditional paytanim, and the list goes on... Musicians include Eti Ankri, Berry Sakharov, Ehud Banai, Micha Shitrit, and many more. Kobi Oz is among those crossover musicians who together are forging a revival (with a twist) to piyutim.

We invite you to explore his new music CD “Psalms for the Perplexed”, the educational material in this booklet and accompanying CD containing clips and other resources.

This educational unit is a part of **Piyut – From Tradition to Revival**, the first in an intended series of units highlighting the piyut and its manifestation in contemporary Israeli culture.

The Israel Education Initiative and the BASIS team

# The Piyut

## *From Tradition to Revival*

The piyut began as sacred poetry adorning the prayers of the individual and the community, as well as religious rituals. The piyut is sung by the cantor and the congregation as part of the prayers. Over the years the piyut, a living creative work that is constantly renewed, widened its scope and reached out beyond the range of prayers. There are piyutim that follow the yearly cycle: Shabbat songs and piyutim for holidays and festive occasions; songs of supplication; and piyutim that follow the human life cycle: from birth (piyutim for a Brit and for the birth of a daughter), through Bar and Bat Mitzva, to marriage, and back to the beginning. The piyutim are usually sung in a communal framework. It is the community that has integrates the piyutim from their earliest development to this day. The community brings together the hearts of its members – whether within the family or the community at large participating in a celebration, whether praying with a congregation in synagogue, or whether singing the songs of supplication together.

The writing of piyutim began in the Land of Israel in the fourth or fifth century CE and developed there until the Crusaders disrupted Jewish life in the area in the eleventh century. Sephardic paytanim reinvigorated and changed the art form by writing innovative piyutim inspired by then-flourishing Arabic poetry. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain actually contributed to the further development of piyutim, with the refugees carrying them to Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean basin. While the tradition of writing and singing piyutim faded in some communities, it remained strong among others who brought it to Israel. Piyutim, however, were not widespread in the Young State of Israel outside synagogues.

After a lapse ranging from several hundred years for some ethnic communities to a few decades for others, piyutim — Hebrew liturgical poems — are back in style. In addition to paytanim chanting them at synagogues on the Sabbath and holidays, Israelis of all backgrounds are forming piyut “singing communities,” attending performances of paytanim paired with rock stars at piyut festivals, and also hitting the internet to read up on the genre and listen to rare recordings.

Naomi Cohn Zentner, from the Hebrew University’s Department of Musicology, connects the current interest in piyutim to several trends. “World music became popular in the late 1980s and early 1990s, opening people’s ears to different types of music and leading them to wonder about a Jewish aspect of world music. Older Israelis are attracted by nostalgia, while the younger generation is searching for something new and meaningful — indeed, crossovers of piyutim and pop-rock styles are popular. The music also makes the piyut easier for secular Jews to relate to other aspects of Judaism”

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## Kobi Oz

### *Psalms for the Perplexed*

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Kobi Oz was born in SDEROT\*, Israel, in 1969 and lives in Tel Aviv. The founder and artistic director of a highly successful band, Teapacks, Oz blends east and west in his music, and his songs are frequently broadcast on Israeli radio stations. Oz speaks regularly about creativity, education, culture, and society at schools, universities, and the army, and writes a weekly column in the mass circulation daily, Maariv. He published two novels *Moshe Chuwato and the Raven* 1997 and *Petty Hoodlum* 2002. His work is included in Israel Education Ministry syllabus.

*Psalms for the Perplexed* is the result of Oz's explorations of the depths of ancient Jewish text and modern Israeli life. Oz draws on Talmud and Torah, urban realities and secular sensibilities, witty midrash, and deep contemplation. Oz's music dances around the misty areas between belief and non-belief, past and present, certainty and doubt.

*Psalms for the Perplexed* has been performed in Israel and abroad to critical acclaim and sold-out venues, with multifaceted audiences ranging from the staunchly secular to Ultra-Orthodox.

Kobi Oz pays a special tribute to his late grandfather. In "My God," (Elohai) he performs a "duet" with a recording of his dead grandfather, Rabbi Nissim Messika, who was a paytan and well-beloved rabbi in his congregation in TUNISIA\*. Not long after his grandfather's death, Oz discovered old cassettes that Messika had recorded, and he integrates them sensitively and artfully.



\* We have included background information about the city of SDEROT and the Jews of TUNISIA on pages 34-39.

# The Piyut is Jewish Soul Music

Zeek, 2006

By Basmat Hazan Arnoff

*Reveal Yourself my Dearest, And spread over me Your canopy of peace. Let the earth shine with Your glory, Let us rejoice in You. Make haste, my Love, for the time has come; Show me Your favor as in the days of old.*

\* Excerpted from the traditional Shabbat liturgical prayer Yedid Nephesh by Eliezer Azikri, 16th-17th century

My father is a professor of piyut, Jewish liturgical poetry. For years my family and I joked with him that no more than maybe three and a half people had ever read any of his books. We liked to needle him that while all of his buddies in the academy got invited to all kinds of public events and lectures and were interviewed by the media, he had chosen such a bizarre field of study that no one would ask him to speak anywhere, except for, maybe, the ones that had absolutely no choice. Even us kids never made it very far past the dedications on the first page.

At an event three months ago celebrating the launch of the new website Invitation to Piyut I understood that something had dramatically changed in how the Jewish community, at least in Israel, relates to this complex, beautiful and little-understood art form. The reception hall was filled wall to wall with a wildly diverse crowd – and everyone there was interested in piyut. Women and men, Ashkenazi and Mizrahi, religious and secular, young and old, and all were there seeking out Israel's newest "retro" trend – piyut. Indeed, in the past five years the piyut has become more and more prevalent on the Israeli cultural scene. Well-known performers like Eti Ankri and Ehud Banai and Barry Sahkarov are recording and playing piyutim. There are "Piyut Shabbats" held by a variety of communities in hotels across the country for people to celebrate and sing for the entire weekend. People from all walks of life are meeting weekly in "Singing Communities" – Kehillot Sharot – to learn to sing piyutim together. And, in addition to the vast collection of piyutim accompanied by interpretation, academic research, and a wide variety of recorded renditions of traditional piyutim on the "Invitation to Piyut" website, the Israeli Department of Education has published a textbook for teaching piyut in middle schools across the country. It seems my father was a trendsetter.

*The piyut makes the stations of prayer beautiful in every place that the heart rises above the intellect in the Jewish lifecycle and calendar – where words without music are not enough, where ordered and regular prayer is open to be renewed.*

- Avigdor Shinan

What is the piyut? The term is derived from the Greek word "poietes" meaning "creator." Using this definition the classical midrashic collection Leviticus Rabba honored 3rd century sages Rabbi Eleazar and Rabbi Shimon by calling them "poietes" – "creators." During the period of Late Antiquity and onward, as the much of Jewish poetic writing became related in some way to synagogue worship, the term piyut came to mean a Jewish liturgical poem specifically. With the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language in the 19th century, the definition of piyut received a more general meaning, namely any type of written expression in high, classical language. Sometimes the word piyut even described any expression that was particularly moving or artistically profound. Contemporary proponents of piyut tend to define it as liturgical poetry that is actually sung. Thus the word "paytan" – or one who



“creates” a piyut – refers both to the writer and/or composer of a piyut as well as the actual singing performer of a piyut.

“Piyut is a chain of tradition of Jewish culture on every level. It is the melody of the heart and the longing for all of the good that lies within the Jewish world and its many communities,” says Ephraim Hazan. In the words of Dr. Edwin Seroussi, Professor of Musicology and Director of the Jewish Music Research Center of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, “performance of piyutim has lasted until today because it has always has a wide range of social purposes beyond the religious meanings of its texts. It symbolizes a direct connection between the past and the present, bridging between different geographical locations, embodying the historical continuity of the use of Hebrew language, and linking between past creators and transmitters of piyut traditions and our own time.”

The “Singing Communities” project, and its website, “Invitation to Piyut,” is at the center of the Israeli piyut revival, so I sat down with some of the key players in the project to learn more about what inspired them, and what relevance this ancient art form has for contemporary Israelis.

The “Singing Communities” project was founded by Yossi Ohana, who believed that piyutim offered a way for today’s generation of Mizrahi Jews to connect to glorious, ancestral traditions that incurred great traumas with the immigration of most Jews of Arab lands to Israel in the 1950s. Ohana, born in Morocco, immigrated to Israel at the age of six, and as an adult had moved far away from his heritage. As one of the founders of “Mizrachi Democratic Coalition,” an organization supporting causes of Mizrahi (sometimes called “Oriental” but with the meaning of Jews from Arab countries and Persia) Jews in Israel, Ohana perceived a gap between himself and traditional culture. “Focusing on educational, economic, and social issues without a connection of my heritage left me without a satisfying answer for the questions that were occupying me,” he says. In attempting to fill this void he and some of his friends began studying North African Responsa literature – texts recording correspondence on Jewish practice between sages and their communities. Eventually, with the assistance of a brother who had remained traditionally religious, they worked their way towards the world of piyut.

The seed for the idea of Singing Communities was planted when Ohana was living in Berkeley, California, of all places. In his loneliness for the traditional melodies of home he founded a Sephardic service at the Hillel of UC-Berkeley. He and his friends learned the traditional melodies for the High Holy Days from recordings that his brother sent them from Israel. He was also a founding member of the band Za’atar, a group of local musicians playing music that included a number of arrangements of simple piyutim. When he saw the excitement that these piyutim generated during performances, he understood that there was something deep about the piyut that needed to be explored.

Now supported by the Avi Chai Foundation, the Singing Communities project runs programs based on communal signing of piyutim from the full range of Jewish tradition. The Singing Communities themselves, which exist throughout Israel, meet once a week for two and a half hours per session. Each session is run by a permanent facilitator as well as a guest paytan who works with the group for four sessions. Participants represent all variety of relationships to Jewish tradition and observance, men and women of all ages and backgrounds and classes.

“The goals is that this will be a place for thinking, a place that raises questions for people about identity, not a place that will give answers,” say Ohana. In fact, people in the Singing Communities do not talk much. They focus on singing, allowing for a direct connection amongst participants without formal conversation – an emotional bond formed as a function of the melodies and the

ancient words and the souls in the room. There is no intellectual discussion about Jewish or Israeli identity, nor about Ashkenazi or Mizrahi identity, but there is something about the encounter within Singing Communities that allows for a very special fusion of personal and collective identities. Words such as "passion," "heart," and "soul" appear time and again in the responses of group members that are asked about their experience.

In the absence of an intellectual one, the melodic dialogue about identity takes place on a number of levels. Amongst the guest paytanim are men who come from the Ultra Orthodox community. When the Singing Communities first began, the issue of kol isha – literally a teaching about "the voice of a woman" which some Orthodox communities interpret to restrict singing by women – was a source of tension. The encounters between the paytanim and the groups have dissolved much of this tension. In meeting the group members guest paytanim have come to understand the importance of full participation of everyone. Even paytanim that once refused to allow women to sing "solo" teach sessions today without any distinction according to gender amongst the singers. They explain that their teaching of mixed groups is part of a unique path for bringing people closer to Jewish tradition. And on the other hand, secular people in the group learn that paytanim in traditional garb represent much more than just their preconceived notions of Ultra Orthodox Jews. When both sides let go of their assumptions about the other, a dynamic and meaningful encounter ensues.

*The piyut combines and refines all key elements of Jewish culture: language, music, mysticism, history, midrash, philosophy, prayer, and personal, family, and national emotions – all in one entity. The piyut allows the possibility of experiencing all of these elements at once.*

- "Invitation to Piyut" Website

A core project emerging from Singing Communities is the website "Invitation to Piyut," a venue for encounter between the general public and the world of piyut. There are texts and music for hundreds of piyutim on the website as well as academic articles exploring textual, musical, and cultural elements of the works from a wide variety of Jewish traditions. The director of the "Invitation to Piyut" website, Yair Harel, a musician in addition to being a facilitator of one of the Singing Communities in Jerusalem, was Yossi Ohana's partner in the establishment of the project almost from the beginning.

Harel comes from a very different background than Ohana, having grown up in Jerusalem with an American mother and Iraqi father. He was a member of the Bnei Akiva youth movement and his musical education consisted mostly of standard Israeli folk and pop. He was, however, exposed to the world of piyut on Shabbat during visits to his grandmother who lived in the Yemenite/Iraqi section of the Jerusalem Ultra Orthodox neighborhood Mea Sha'arim. When he started to learn darbukka drumming in private lessons with master Israeli musician Shlomo Bar during his army service, Harel discovered that connection between classical compositions, prayer, and soul music spoke to him. Having played and sung in a variety of bands, Harel found that his musical search returned him to piyutim again and again. He decided to study piyut formally because of lasting sense that Mizrahi music had at its core "universal aspects that linked emotion, time, and people" in a way that he understood them. "I remember teaching a class on piyut," Harel says, "and I started it with the piyut 'Yedid Nephesh' in five different versions from five different traditions – India, Persia and so on. And here was this piyut, composed in Safed hundreds of years ago at a particular time based on a particular circumstance and that had become truly universal while still maintaining the balance between universality and authenticity."

As the director of the website, Harel is engaged in what he believes is the holy work of gathering and preserving treasures of Jewish tradition that otherwise might be lost. He places great emphasis on

collecting piyutim from all Jewish traditions, from North Africa to Europe to Asia.. "This is a place that as a home for piyutim from all over the world represents a microcosm of partnership and even the beginning of a kind of redemption," he says

At the same time, he says, the website is not merely an antiquarian exercise. "In my opinion there is also a place for contemporary creators of piyut if they give real respect to the tradition," Harel says. "Ehud Banai, for example, is a rock star who creates a bridge between the texts and a wider audience" The piyutim on the website are maintained with great attention to detail, serious musical research, and an emphasis on high quality of presentation. One of Harel's dreams is to find funds to translate the entire website into English.

*Piyut is prayer that expresses the full range of emotions relating to the divine: praise, thanks, joy, despair, jealousy, anger, longing, and awe.*

- Haviva Pedita

Uri Kroyzer, a facilitator of Singing Communities, may seem like an unlikely candidate for a Mizrahi religious revival: his father's side is comprised of long-time Jerusalemites, and his mother's side are Bratslav Hasidim. But Kroyzer's father was an illui – a Torah prodigy – who knew many languages and translated the Meam Loez, a classic collection of midrashim and interpretations, from Ladino into Hebrew. So Mizrahi culture was familiar in his colorful home. But it is Kroyzer's grandfather on his mother's side who is the most famous member of his family: he was the Ba'al Ha-petek – the Master of the Note – who revealed the Bratslaver chant "Na-Nach-Nachma-Nachman Me-Uman!" which is today plastered on walls by believers around the world. He inducted his grandson Uri into a world of songs, stories, and learning that combined both Hasidic and pre-State Jerusalem worlds of prayer. Eventually, that drew Kroyzer to the world of piyut. "I heard something from a man who likes to sit outside of a little market on Bachar Street. He saw me looking at an announcement for signing at the Ades Synagogue," Kroyzer says. He called me and said, "You know what? Piyutim are the sweet part of the Torah."

In piyut Kroyzer sees an opportunity to think about prayer in new ways and to foster renewal in the religious world. "The piyutim come out of a dynamic oral tradition, often a part of the repetition of the Amidah, where the rules and structures were all fixed but the actual content of the words were left open for the chazzan [cantor] – the paytan," Kroyzer says. "Today's encounter with the various traditions of piyut and our ability to remerge them into the prayer service as a dynamic and even surprising force will create a much broader relationship to God. Because the language of piyut is in fact the religious person's mode for having a real dialogue with God." Kroyzer hopes to return the piyut to the heart of the synagogue service and to shake off the dust from traditions of standardized prayer, bringing them new life. For example, he envisions synagogues opening every Shabbat service with a piyut from a different tradition relating to the meaning of thanks or to the beauty of a new day. "The freshness that piyut brought into prayer in the past is exactly the place to search for piyut in prayer today – to bring back to prayer the element of the excitement of a new creation every time."

Roni Ish-Ran is a paytan, director of training sessions for facilitators and paytanim of Singing Communities, and founder of the Shoharim Ensemble. He has great hopes for piyut as well. In his eyes, it is logical for piyut to be considered the signature Israeli music. "People look for music that has roots and quality. They want something melodic. And there is this desire for a connection between Jewishness in music that is not traditionally observant but is still good music." He adds, "If children hear this music at home and learn it at school than it will be a part of their world." Roni

grew up in the heart of the world of traditional piyut in the Nachlaot neighborhood in Jerusalem, part of a very special and protected cultural bubble. His family hailed from Turkey. "Shirei bakashot," the collection of piyutim traditionally sung in the wee hours of Shabbat mornings in the winter, was the main social activity of Roni and his friends when they were growing up. During breaks from school the kids would sing shirei bakashot. Though Roni left this music behind as a teenager, he returned to it after his army service. He recalls spending free time preparing songs for Shabbat during the week. The paytan Moshe Habusha became a major influence and source of inspiration for him. Still, he did not think that this music had a place outside of the synagogue and his boldest goal was to accompany Habusha when he sang.

But when a track for studying Mizrahi music at The Rubin Academy at Hebrew University opened several years ago, Roni joined. He and one another student were the only Jews in their class and Roni was amazed to discover that he, who had learned classical Hebrew language music in the synagogue, knew traditional Arabic music better than his Arab friends who had come from the world of contemporary Arabic music. A profound change in Roni's life occurred when Yossi Ohana asked him to join him in the Singing Communities. "That was really a dream come true. Already in the old days in the Ades Synagogue I fantasized about making the connection between traditional music and a wider audience," Roni says. This year his Shaharit Ensemble released their first CD, including ten pieces, most of which are original compositions maintaining aspects of classical Mizrahi music. Roni hopes that "the CD won't go into the category of 'world music' or into 'East' combined with 'West.'" Roni hopes that his music moves piyut into the mainstream of Jewish-Israeli music while maintaining its own traditional identity.

Hannah Ftayah, the administrator of Signing Communities and a descendant of a long line of Iraqi kabbalists from echoes this sentiment. "There is no reason why we should not be composing music today for the words of Yehuda Halevi [11th-12th century Spanish-Jewish poet and philosopher], just like we compose music for [contemporary poets] Yona Wallach and Natan Zach. This is poetry that comes from a very high place and touches people's hearts and it is important to develop it and not to let it be neglected. I see the people that come to Signing Communities from all over the country and it is a rainbow of the Jewish people. I see their hunger and search for something just like this." Last year in Tel Aviv, an evening called "Yehuda Halevi on the Corner of Ibn Gabriol" – a play on two streets named after medieval Jewish poets in Tel Aviv – symbolized this search. Some of the biggest names in Israeli music were on the bill – Ehud and Evyatar Banai, Micah Sheerit, Barry Sakharov, Maor Cohen, Eti Ankri, Yonatan and Aharon Razel and others. New and traditional arrangements of compositions by a range of paytanim caused a huge buzz on the Israeli music scene.

*Piyut is a chain of tradition of Jewish culture on every level. It is the melody of the heart and the longing for all of the good that lies within the Jewish world and its many communities.*

- Ephraim Hazan

My father, Professor Ephraim Hazan, was born in Djerba, an island next to Tunis that maintained musical traditions for hundreds if not thousands of years. Some say from the time of the Destruction of the 2nd Temple in the year 70. Having immigrated to Israel at the age of nine, my father mainly remembers the "Bar Yohai" songs that accompanied almost every family event. After his family arrived in Israel, they lived in a temporary camp where there were no other people from Djerba, and his natural connection to the world of piyut in life cycle events and the synagogue was broken. As a boy my father studied in institutions where the musical and spiritual prayer focus was distinctly Ashkenazi. But in high school he made the decision to dedicate himself to studying Sephardic poetry

of the Middle Ages and at the university he began researching later North African poetry, his specialty until this day. "The melody is always ringing in the background where I work on a piyut. My draw to the words of the texts is always linked to a musical framework. That's the connection between the mind and the heart," he says.

In my father's opinion, Singing Communities are an expression of a wider return to Mizrahi roots in Israel that began 30 years ago. "This is a music that always called for connection. The paytanim and the piyutim were always a bridge between sacred and day-to-day life and between the Jewish and Arab worlds. They were always about tolerance and the possibility of dialogue and understanding and attention to meeting amongst different cultural worlds. Now they are doing that today too." My father adds that "the music really is succeeding in bringing together a wide range of people under one roof to sing together and to find both individually and collectively their unique connection to the Jewish tradition."

Throughout Jewish history the piyut has been a tool of both entertainment and meaning for people searching for their roots. Today it is telling a story of the connection between Jewishness and Israeli identity as elements that link traditional and contemporary worlds. As Hannah Frayah says, "Piyut touches the collective soul of the Jewish people. It traces a line from the individual to the collective and it contains within it great truths."

*Translated from the Hebrew by Stephen Hazan Arnoff*

**Basmat Hazan Arnoff** is a teacher of Jewish text and theater director living in Jerusalem. Her first novel – *Mayyim Hafuchim* – will be published by Kibbutz Hameuhad Press in Spring 2006. She is a member of a Singing Community in Jerusalem.

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# Israeli Rock Finds Religion

## *The New Wave Sweeping the Holy Land*

Published June 24, 2009, issue of July 03, 2009.

By Robbie Gringras

"I feel like a fish that spent its entire life in an aquarium and has suddenly discovered the sea," Kobi Oz enthused, prior to going onstage with his new set, "Psalms for the Perplexed," all of it written after several years of his "soaking in the rich marinade of Judaism."

The excitement of Oz, former singer-songwriter of the Israeli super-band Teapacks, is now shared by artists throughout the country. The riches of Jewish culture are being plundered and exalted, thrown into rap, rock, and reggae, to the delight of a hungry audience. "Israelis are realizing that Zionism is only one chapter of the Jewish story. Now we want to enjoy the whole book," Oz concluded gleefully.

It is not as if the language of the Bible or Talmud is foreign to secular Israelis. Notwithstanding the cruel characterization of the general populace as "Hebrew-speaking goyim," even the most secular students study Jewish history, Bible, and Jewish thought. Yet, few imagined that this rich culture might be shared by anyone other than the strictly Orthodox. In the past few years, all of this has changed. Throughout the Israeli pop world, from the Israeli version of "American Idol," to mainstream radio, to illegal downloads, the language, ideas and character of ancient Jewish texts are suddenly common currency. Funk rap band HaDag Nachash signed off its latest disc with an electronic adaptation of a psalm. Rock legend Meir Banai recently brought out "Hear My Voice," which is entirely made up of adaptations of ancient *piyutim* (hymns) and went platinum within a month. Even the annual Children's Song Festival features top star Shai Gabso singing, "Hey! You have a *kippah* on your head..." which is a bit like having Bono going to the Irish equivalent and singing about a crucifix on a T-shirt.

So what's happening? Has secular Israel gone *frum*?

The answer is far more complex, fascinating and hopeful. It would seem that unexpectedly, unpredictably and in often contradictory ways, Jewish learning and literacy has become a significant part of Israeli popular culture — regardless of belief or observance.

Oz sees this blending of the traditional and the modern, of the textual and the personal, as an inspiring liberation. "As the Zionist narrative plays a lesser role in our lives, it leaves room for us to create a new model: What it is to be a Jew in the Land of Israel." With typical mischievous Oz honesty, he sings to God, but admits "I'm not sure what to call you — *Elohim*, or *Elokim*?" His songs tell of his fears of being religiously transformed by immersing himself in a Jerusalem mikveh. "How much of this is megalomania?" he wonders, "How much is it anthropology? How much is it guilt? How much because my world is dirty?" In the end, he emerges, relieved to find himself unchanged, neither in his realism nor in his half-superstitious faith.

I get out and towel down

Where did I put my glasses?

Still feel like myself, thank God...

The story of Shuli Rand is far more dramatic. Rand left his Orthodox upbringing to become a leading stage and screen actor. After several years at the height of his career, he left acting and left the secular life for the ultra-Orthodox world. Eight years later, he returned to the screen in Haredi black garb, starring in "*Ushpizin*" alongside his wife (the only woman with whom he could allow himself to act).

Last year, we discovered that the man also could sing. Rand emerged with a brand new solo musical set, "A Good Point." A kind of Haredi Tom Waits, he strums soul-searching songs to the heavens, sings of theological debates with secular friends. His songs are not saved for the Haredi ghetto though: They are played on state radio, enjoyed by secular and religious alike. A common searching and a shared grappling with Israeliness, modernity and Judaism seems to be far more compelling and uniting than denominational definitions would have us believe.

Take a performance of Etti Ankri: Between her songs, she will tell a Hasidic story from Poland before launching into her famous midrash song about the Exodus from Egypt, full of the rhythms of her Mizrachic roots. As if this Ashkenazic-Mizrachic combination weren't enough, Ankri stands there, picking on her guitar, swaying in a long dress and the head-covering of a religious woman, singing to a mixed audience of men and women. Religious consistency is suspended here, all separations between "kinds" of Jews dance together in the music.

While Ankri once admitted she is happiest "just singing to God," Alma Zohar, voted Israel's best newcomer to the music scene last year, insists she is "far more free-style." Jewish texts are as much a part of her cultural heritage as folk and reggae. When she sings the story of her divorce in "A Second Babylonian Exile," she refers as much to the Babylon of Marley as to the Babylon of the Talmud. Yet she is now creating in a society that hears both cultural references, both of which resonate in different directions. No one was thrown by the way the chorus of her latest single, "Know," comes directly from Pirke Avot, Ethics of the Fathers: "My life itself makes the mix," she explained.

It may be this very "mix" that one of Zionism's early thinkers, Ahad Ha'am, had in mind for the nascent state. Not only did Jews need to adapt to the modern world of the Enlightenment, he suggested, but so, too, did Judaism. In mixing and smudging the secular and the religious, East and West, the Hebrew language and top artists, it could be that the Israeli music scene is finally beginning to play a new Jewish melody.

*Robbie Gringras is the artist-in-residence at Makom in the Education Dept of the Jewish Agency for Israel. He blogs at [www.makom.haaretz.com](http://www.makom.haaretz.com).*



# Traffic Jam of Miracles

By Kobi Oz

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הסוכנות היהודית לארץ ישראל  
Jewish Agency for Israel



The miracle is stuck in a traffic jam of miracles  
And we are just trying and running away

Let's pull over, one by one  
And be brothers for a moment

We're not alone. It's nice  
Together we keep moving

Lord, who is like unto you among the silent  
ones?

And we too have already forgotten how to  
pray

May there be abundant peace from heaven  
and relief and liberation

Let there be life and plenty and deliverance  
and forgiveness and atonement

2

The miracle is stuck in a traffic jam of miracles  
The pauper and the sick have pockets no  
more

Even if we are at the end of our strength  
Let's look at the destitute and give alms

Even if the sign is weak  
Let's not give up and let's give through our  
deeds

Lord, who is like unto you among the silent  
ones?

And we too have already forgotten how to  
pray

May there be abundant peace from heaven  
and relief and liberation

Let there be life and plenty and deliverance  
and forgiveness and atonement

3

The miracle is stuck in a traffic jam of miracles  
And even death has not stopped imposing  
taxes

All, all of us are here at Mount Nevo  
Watching from a distance

All all all of us will come, come, we'll come

הַמִּסְתָּהּ תִּקְרֹעַ בַּפֶּקֶק תִּנּוּעָה שֶׁל נִסִּים  
וְאַנְחָנוּ כִּי נִסִּים וּמִנִּסִּים  
בּוֹאוּ נֶעְצֵר בְּצַד אֶחָד אֶחָד  
נִהְיָה פְתָאִים אֲחֵים  
אַנְחָנוּ לֹא לְבַד זֶה נִחְמָד  
בִּיחָד מִמְשִׁיכִים  
אַלְהִים מִי פְמוֹת בְּאַלְמִים  
וְגַם אֲנַחְנוּ כְּבָר שְׂכַחְנוּ אֵיךְ מִתְפַּלְלִים

1

יְהִי שְׁלָמָא כַּבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָא וְרוּחַ וְהַעֲלֵה  
יְהִי חַיִּים וְשִׁבְעַ וְשִׁיזְבָּא וְיִסְלִיחָה  
וְכַפֶּרָה

הַמִּסְתָּהּ תִּקְרֹעַ בַּפֶּקֶק תִּנּוּעָה שֶׁל נִסִּים  
לְאַבְיוֹן וּלְחֹלְלָה כְּבָר אֵיךְ כִּי־נִסִּים  
גַּם אִם כָּחֲנוּ תֵּשׁ  
נְבִיט בְּרִשׁ וּנְדַבּוֹת נְשִׁים  
גַּם אִם הָאוֹת חֲלָשׁ  
לֹא נֹאמֵר נוֹאֵשׁ וְנָתַן בְּמַעֲשֵׂים  
אַלְהִים מִי פְמוֹת בְּאַלְמִים  
וְגַם אֲנַחְנוּ כְּבָר שְׂכַחְנוּ אֵיךְ מִתְפַּלְלִים

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קוֹ קוֹ פְּלָס כְּבָר פִּיה פֶּהר נָבוֹ  
חוֹזִים לְמַכְחוּק  
קוֹ קוֹ פְּלָנוּ נָבוֹא בּוֹא נָבוֹא

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קוֹ קוֹ פְּלָנוּ נָבוֹא בּוֹא נָבוֹא



<p>From courage will sweetness rise Lord, who is like unto you among the silent ones? And we too have already forgotten how to pray May there be abundant peace from heaven and relief and liberation Let there be life and plenty and deliverance and forgiveness and atonement</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">מַעַז נֶאֱמָא מְתוּק אֱלֹהִים מִי כְמוֹךָ בְּאֵלֵינוּ וְגַם אֲנַחְנוּ כְּכֹר שְׂכַחְנוּ אֵיךְ מִתְפַּלְלִים יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא כְּבָא מִן שְׁמַיָא וְכוּחַ וְהַצְלָחָה יְהֵא חַיִּים וְשָׂבַע וְשִׂיבָא וְדַפּוּאָה וְסַלְיָחָה וְנִכְפָּרָה וְיִשׁוּעָה וְנַחֲמָה וְגֵאֻלָּה.</p>
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1. Babylonian Talmud Culin 52b. This phrase is an ironic re-reading of the phrase “who is like you among the Gods?” When Titus defiled the Holy of Holies in the Temple without any assuming conscience from the heavens, the house of Rabbi Ishmael changed “elohim = gods” to “elohim = man”. Some interpret this as a critique of divine silence, and others see it as praise of divine restraint.
2. These lines come from the Kaddish recited over the death of a loved one. The Ashkenazi version of this prayer does not include the words forgiveness and atonement. Kofit uses “Achme” (achme = “achmed zerkhame” about prayer is the place from which Moses looked out over the Promised Land into which he was forbidden to enter).
- 3.
4. The phrase comes from Samson, Judges (chapter 1), when discovering a boy who had been hiding in the cave as of a lion.

There you'll see to be a two-way lack of communication in this except for the very beginning of the song.

- Is this a fair interpretation of the song?
- Is this divine non-communication a situation that you identify with?

**Possibly one of the most tragic images of the Bible is of Moses standing on Mount Nevo, looking at the Promised Land he has worked so hard to reach, knowing that he himself will never arrive. A poignant blend of achievement and failure.**

1. What do you think Kobi Oz is suggesting when he says that we are not standing at Mount Nevo?
2. What are we looking out at?
3. Where have we not yet reached?
4. If it were a triumph on the shore of Israel, how would you plan to go?

the song speaks of justice, of God's mercy, and of mercy, that is, that you are unable to reach, you are

to reach the land of the promise of which you have longed for, and you are disappointed.



# Elohai

by Kobi Oz



80

**1** אתה אל אלוהי אתה אל אלוהי  
אתה אל קבץ נדחי ישראל אלוהי  
קבץ נדחינו מארבע כנפות הארץ  
ושלח משיחנו מלכנו דוד בן פרוץ

I have so much to tell you, yet you know  
everything  
I have so many requests to ask of you, but you  
anyway want the best for me  
I give you a little smile for every thing of beauty I  
notice, impressive or delicate  
And I'm a bit embarrassed – dunno what to call  
you – Elohim or Elokim?

**2** I have so so so many thankyouous standing  
in line at your door, but my thankyouous always  
come out corny

I have so so so many requests to ask of  
you, though I'm basically fine.

Lord if you hear my prayer maybe you can send  
my love to my Grandfather

Tell him that the Sephardi moderation he  
maintained has been replaced by zealotry  
and extremism

But despite everything, tolerance is bubbling  
beneath the surface

Look how people are bit by bit leaving behind  
the tension and in the end just want to be united

**5** In this great synagogue called the Land of  
Israel Where everyone is welcome to look up at  
the heavens, pray for rain, and watch out for  
missiles

I have so so so many thankyouous standing  
in line at your door, but my thankyouous always  
come out corny

I have so so so many requests to ask of  
you, though I'm basically fine.

יש לי כל כך הרבה דברים לספר לך ואתה הרי הכל יודע  
יש לי הרבה בקשות לבקש ממך אבל אתה הרי הפץ  
בטובתי ממילא

אני נותן לך חיוך קטן על כל דבר יפה שבו אני מבחין.  
מרשים או עדיין.

ואני קצת נבוך אנלא יודע איך לקרוא לך, אלוהים או  
אלוקים.

יש לי המון תודות תודות תודות עומדות בתור מול  
דלתך אבל תודות יוצאות לי קיטש.

יש לי מלא בקשות בקשות בקשות לבקש  
ממך למרות שאצלי בסה"כ הכל בסדר.

אלוהי אם אתה שומע תפילתי אולי אפשר  
למסור ד"ש לסבא שלי.

תניד לו שהמתנות הספרדיות שבה הוא דגל  
התחלפה בקנאות, קיצוניות.

אבל למרות הכל הסובלנות רוחשת מתחת לפני השטח,  
תראה לאט לאט אנשים עוזבים את המתח ורוצים בכך  
הכל להיות ביחד.

בבית הכנסת הגדול הזה שנקרא ארץ ישראל פה  
כולם מוזמנים להביט אל השמיים להתפלל  
לגשמים לפחד מטילים.

יש לי המון תודות תודות תודות עומדות בתור  
מול דלתך אבל תודות יוצאות לי קיטש.

יש לי מלא בקשות בקשות בקשות לבקש  
ממך למרות שאצלי בסה"כ הכל בסדר.

אתה אל אלוהי אתה אל אלוהי  
אתה אל קבץ נדחי ישראל אלוהי  
קבץ נדחינו מארבע כנפות הארץ  
ושלח משיחנו מלכנו דוד בן פרוץ

1

"You are the Lord my G-d  
You are the Lord who gathers the scattered of Israel my G-d  
Gather our scattered from four corners of the earth  
And send the Messiah our King David son of Petetz"

2

In writing, we may also hesitate between G-d, or inserting the 'ó' ... Do you share the singer's discomfort with naming G-d? Do you find yourself searching for other words or concepts that fit your understanding better?

3

What does 'basically fine' mean? In what way do you see yourself as 'basically fine'? If you were to look at Israel, would you say that Israel is 'basically fine'?

מה זאת אומרת 'בסך הכל בסדר'? באיזה אופן אתם רואים את עצמכם בסך הכל בסדר? אם ביחס שלכם לישראל היתם אומרים ש"ישראל בסך הכל בסדר"?

4

Kobi Oz talks of the way in which his Grandfather – a Rabbi who made aliya from Tunisia – would not force his religiosity on his grandchildren, and always searched for the compromise rather than the conflict on religious issues. This is a familiar trope in mizrachi families – families whose roots are in Arab lands. To the ear of a secular Israeli listening to this song today, moderation and tolerance on religious matters would be a rare experience.

Have you experienced extremism or intolerance on your Jewish journey? What are your opinions? Have you heard of any examples of religious extremism or intolerance in Israel? Do you appreciate the degree to which this issue is pivotal in shaping Israeli society?

קובי אוז מרבה לדבר על הדרך שבה סבו – רב שעלה ארצה מטוניס – לא כפה את 'דתיותו' על נכדיו ונמזי חיפש פשרה במקום עימות בעיניו. דת זה סיפור מוכר במשפחות מזרחיות. לאוזנו של ישראלי חילוני שמקשיב לשיר הזה היום, מתינות וסובלנות דתית בגירה הציבורית אינן חוזות שכיחות... האם חזותם קיצונית או חוסר סובלנות במסגרת החיים היהודיים שלכם? כיצד זה השפיע על הזהות היהודית שלכם?  
האם שמועתם על זוגמות של קיצוניות דתית בישראל? האם אתם מבינים כיצד סוגיה זו משפיעה באופן מכריע על החברה הישראלית?

5

Kobi conjured up the idea of the Land of Israel as a 'great, or large, synagogue'. What does this image do for the way you relate to Israel? Would you choose an alternative image to sum up what Israel means for you? Is it significant that the phrase is 'Land' of Israel, and not 'State' of Israel?

קובי יצר כזו דמיון של ארץ ישראל כ "בית הכנסת הגדול". כיצד דמיון זה מסתדר עם הדמיונים האחרים שלכם ביחס לישראל? האם היתם בוחרים דמיון אחר כדי לסכם את משמעותה של ישראל עבורכם? האם זה משמעותי שקובי משתמש במושג 'ארץ' ישראל ולא 'מדינת' ישראל? מדוע?



# Escalator

by Kobi Oz

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Lying on some rock during a school trip  
My teacher forgot me with

my kova tembel hat

I was a little sleepy with  
an empty water bottle

Then I saw an escalator going  
down and up and down

Up to the heavens

And there were angels with shiny pretzels  
I counted two

בשוכבי על איזו אָבן בְּטוּיל שְׁנתי  
מורתי עִם כּוֹבֵעַ טֶמְבֵּל שְׂכֵחָה אוֹתי  
קֶצֶת הֵייתי כְּנִמְנִם עִם מֵיִמיה רִיקָה  
אַזְ רֵאיתי מִדְרָגוֹת נְעוֹת יוֹרְדוֹת עוֹלוֹת  
יוֹרְדוֹת עוֹלוֹת עַד הַשָּׁמַיִם

וְהיוּ שָׁם מַלְאָכִים עִם פְּרֵצִים מְאֻחָזִים  
אַני סְפַרְתי שְׁנַיִם

1

One enlightened,  
the other seeing the light

One with a rope around his neck

One seeing the light, the other  
enlightened

Seven-stick candelabra, the other a  
spotlight

The one seeing the light said "Follow me

To a world of noble magic

And if you don't come, whoah

We'll stick you on the grill

And I felt a kind of awe

that locked my knees

The angel left, head-butted the pretzel,  
kissed the bible,

drilled a mezuzah with his eyes

Thus they went up and down, up and  
down, the angels from heaven

One enlightened, the other seeing the  
light

One with a rope around his neck

One seeing the light, the other  
enlightened

Seven-stick candelabra,

the other a spotlight

One defined the other defines

One from village the other from city

One ancient, other progress

One promo, the other holiness

2

אַחד נְאוֹר שְׁנֵי מוֹאָר

אַחַד עִם חֶבֶל עַל צְנַאָר

אַחַד מוֹאָר שְׁנֵי נְאוֹר

שְׂבֻעָה קִנִּים שְׁנֵי זַרְקוֹר

הַמוֹאָר אָמַר לִי "בּוֹא אַחֲרַי

לְעוֹלָם שֶׁל קֶסֶם אֲצִיל"

וְאִם לֹא תָבוֹא וְאִהוּאוּר

נְשִׂים אוֹתָךְ עַל הַגְּרִיל

וְהִרְגָשְׁתִּי מִן הַרְאָה שְׁנֻעָלָה לִי תִבְרַכְתִּים

הַמְלַאָךְ הַזֶּה בְּכַעַז גָּרַח וְנִשְׁקַת תַּנִּיץ מְיוֹזָה

קָדַח עִם הַעֵינַיִם

כֵּן עָלוּ יָרְדוּ עָלוּ יָרְדוּ עָלוּ יָרְדוּ הַמְלַאָכִים

אֶל הַשָּׁמַיִם

אַחַד נְאוֹר שְׁנֵי מוֹאָר

אַחַד עִם חֶבֶל עַל צְנַאָר

אַחַד מוֹאָר שְׁנֵי נְאוֹר

שְׂבֻעָה קִנִּים שְׁנֵי זַרְקוֹר

אַחַד מְגִדָר שְׁנֵי מְגִדֵיר

אַחַד מְכַפֵּר שְׁנֵי מַעִיר

אַחַד קְדִמּוֹן שְׁנֵי קְדֻמָּה

אַחַד קְדִימוֹן שְׁנֵי קְדֻשָּׁה

The enlightened said "Friend,  
There's no magic in the world, only  
money

And the light of the one who saw the light  
is a black hole dressed up as a flash

He smiled a million dollar smile  
Like a gourmet of teeth

He said  
Everything is a dream buddy  
I'll clap my hands and you'll wake up

And hop!

All was gone

The escalator no longer went up and  
down up and down up to the heavens  
And the angels disappeared and I was left  
with an empty water bottle

הנאור אמר "חבר  
אין קסם בעולם כק פסוף יש  
והאור של המואר חור שחר שהתחפש  
לפלאש

הוא חיך חיוך מליון דולר

כמו גורמט מהשנים

הוא אמר הכל חלום חבר

אמתא כפי ותתעורר

והופ

הכל נגוז

המדרגות כבר לא עלו לרדו עלו לרדו עלו

לרדו עלו אל השמים

ונעלמו הפלאכים נאני נשארתני מיימיה

היסקה ממונים

One enlightened, the other seeing the  
light

One with a rope around his neck

One seeing the light , the other  
enlightened

Seven-stick candelabra, the other a  
spotlight

One defined the other defines

One from village the other from city

One ancient, other progress

One promo, the other holiness

אחד נאור שני מואר

אחד עם חבל על צנאר

אחד מואר שני נאור

שבעה קנים שני זרקור

אחד מגדל שני מגדיר

אחד מכפר שני מעיר

אחד קדמון שני קדמה

אחד קדימון שני קדושה

1. Kobi is shomer *l'kol* – the Rebbev named for Jacob. He is Yehi's plying with the biblical eve of Jacob's ladder. In Genesis 28:11-19 see and: "The angel Beshiba, and your sword Hatan. He came to the place and stayed there that night, because he did not find a place to sleep. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth and that the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it".
2. 'Enlightened' – Here the word is being used in its European historical context, not in the context of Eastern philosophy! Referring to the period of the Enlightenment, the 'enlightened' angel is wedded to the rational, the provably, the material.

**In his dream, Kobi would seem to be faced with a choice: Either commit to the world of the spiritual ("seen the light"), or commit to the world of the avowed materialist ("enlightened"). In the end no real choice is offered, as the layers and layers of unreality folds in on themselves leaving Kobi awake once more with his empty water bottle.**

The angel 'seeing the light', the angel of faith, is presented as slightly descending, a bit confused.

1. Is it your experience that the spiritual miracle-obscuring' side of religion is the reality or over-life?
2. Have you ever asked an Israeli the same question?
3. What do you imagine might be their answer?

In the dream Kobi is paralyzed by this angel. When you meet advocates of this approach to religion, are you paralyzed, or energized?

The angel of the 'Enlightenment' would seem to be the angel of better life, right?

Is it your experience that the more materialist one's approach to life, the less healthy physical role?

**Kobi teaches that the two opposing angels are, for him, also representative of two religious approaches in Israel. There are, on the one hand, the followers of R. Ovadia Yosef, who is famed for his rational, legalistic, practical approaches to halacha and religious interpretation. On the other hand are the followers of the traditions of R. Kaduri, which places far more of an emphasis on kabbalah, lucky charms, and grave-side miracles.**

Do you remember how we met you with an hour of Eshkol's somewhat 'enlightened' approach?

Are you, Eshkol, fit to lead in the way of being Israel about?



## Longing for Longing

Words and music by Kobi Oz

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הסוכנות היהודית לארץ ישראל  
Jewish Agency for Israel

**Makōm diq**  
Engaging Israel

Rather than chasing my tail  
It did me good to return  
Here I've reached the source again  
It's like light-years have passed  
And now a huge embrace  
And again hearts join as one  
Here the doubt crawls in

בְּלִי לְלֶכֶת סָחוּר וּסְחוּר  
זֶה עָשָׂה לִי טוֹב לְחֹזֵר  
הִנֵּה שׁוֹב הַגְּעוּתִי לְמִקְוֵה  
זֶה כְּמוֹ עִבְרוּ שָׁנוֹת דָּוָר  
וְעִבְשִׁיו חִיבוּק גְּדוֹל  
וְשׁוֹב הַלְּבָבוֹת בְּיַחַד  
הִנֵּה מְזַדְחָל לוֹ הַסֶּפֶק

My longing for longings  
Turn my days into a vision of the  
unreal  
And though I struggled - so much  
And made it – no doubt (1)  
These delightful diversions (2) left  
me vexed

גִּעְגּוּעֵי לְגִעְגּוּעִים  
הוֹפְכִים יָמַי לְחֲזִיוֹן תַּעֲתוּעִים  
גַּם אִם יִגְעַתִּי מִדִּי  
וּמַצְאֵתִי בְדַאי  
הַתַּעֲצָבֻתִי מֵרוֹן שְׁעוּשׂוּעִים.

From section to another section  
From mist to dark  
From the unhealable past  
Again I was honored to return  
And now a huge kiss  
I feel suddenly at home  
But here – here – here comes the  
suffocation

מִמְדוֹר לְעוֹד מְדוֹר  
וּמֵאֲפֶלֶה לְשַׁחוּר  
מֵעֶבֶר שָׂאִין בּוֹ שׁוֹם מִיּוֹר  
שׁוֹב זְכִיתִי לְחֹזֵר  
וְעִבְשִׁיו נִישׁוּק עֵינַי  
אֲנִי מְרֻגֵשׁ פּוֹתְאוֹם בְּבֵית  
אֲבָל הִנֵּה הֵנָּה בָּא לוֹ הַמְחַנֵּק

I missed you so much  
Miserable without you  
Without intimacy I'm laid low  
Lacking friend or neighbor  
And suddenly the silent encounter  
And stroke of your curls  
And my heart-heart beats  
backwards

חִסְרָה הֵייתָ כָּל כָּךְ  
בְּלִעְדֶיךָ מְדוּכָד  
בְּלִי קִרְבָּה אֲנִי מוֹנַח  
לֵלֵא רַע לֵלֵא אַח  
וּלְפֶתַע דּוֹם פְּגִישָׁה  
וּמִלְטֹף אֶת פִּלְתְּלִיד  
וְלִיבִי דוֹפֵק דוֹפֵק לוֹ לְאַחוֹר

1. This is a play on a well-known phrase - *pasam na' aviv* - 'believe that through struggle you will make it'
2. "Diversions" is a particular translation, playing on the more straightforward understanding of *aviv* - entertainment - and the underlying suggestion of illusion.

Kobi Oz introduces this song by suggesting that the Jewish People spent two thousand years longing for Zion, but now we have a State here, all Israelis do is long for a trip abroad! Incidentally, he lays this critique at both the observant and the non-observant: He refers to the Rabbis' complaint at how many men leave their families on Rosh Hashana to pray at Rabbi Nachman's grave in Uman ...

Do you ever feel this dynamic of longing from afar but discomfort on arrival with *regaros* Israel?

Can you see this circular image of longing - *aviv* - *aviv* - *aviv* - wishing to leave once more - as referring to more than just a relation to the Land of Israel?

" Do you ever experience a similar cycle when thinking about your relationship to your Judaism?

The music for this song has been likened to the 'gypsy' *tinge*. What (course) there is anything significant about this song being a 'gypsy' *tinge* to it?

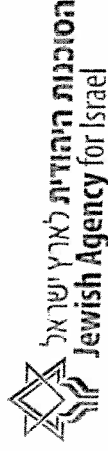
Why do you think this song - describing an almost tragic lack of satisfaction - is so popular?





# Prayer of the Secular

Words and music by Kobi Oz



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Father, oh merciful Father  
 Be to me a trusted soul-mate  
 Cushion my heart in your faith  
 Lend to me awe at the sound of your name

אָבאָ הוּי אָב הַרְחֵמֵנוּ  
 הִיִּיה לִי יָדִיד נֶפֶשׁ נֶאֱמָנוּ  
 כִּפֹּד לִבִּי בְּאַמּוּנָתְךָ  
 תֵּן בִּי יִרְאָה לְמִשְׁמַע שְׁמֵךָ

I never found myself a teacher  
 and my laws are improvised  
 When I am in distress I take a pill  
 I made great progress  
 (descendant of monkeys)  
 And for all my weaknesses  
 my parents are to blame  
 And there's no well-ploughed furrow,  
 it's a multi-lane highway  
 That leads to the general mall  
 And if a miracle happens  
 it's really no big deal  
 Doesn't happen because of me

לֹא עָשִׂיתִי לִי רֵב וְחוֹקוֹתַי הֵן  
 אֶלְתֹּרוֹ  
 כִּשְׁאֲנִי בְּמִצְוָה אָנִי לוקֵחַ כֹּדוֹר  
 מֵאֵד הַתְּקַנְתִּמְתִּי (מוֹצֵאֵי מִקּוֹפִים)  
 וּבְכָל חוֹלְשוֹתַי אֲשַׁמֵּם הַהוֹרִים  
 נֶאֱוֵן אֵיזָה תֵּלֵם  
 יֵשׁ כְּבִישׁ מִהִיר רֵב מִסְּלוּלֵי  
 הַמּוֹבִיל אֶל הַסֵּנִיּוֹן הַכָּלְלִי  
 וְאִם מִתְרַחֵשׁ נֵס זֶה לְנִמְכָּרֵי לְנִמְכָּרֵי  
 סִתְמִי

Father, oh merciful Father  
 Be to me a trusted soul-mate  
 Cushion my heart in your faith  
 Lend to me awe at the sound of your name

לֹא קוֹרָה בְּגִלְלִי  
 אָבאָ הוּי אָב הַרְחֵמֵנוּ  
 הִיִּיה לִי יָדִיד נֶפֶשׁ נֶאֱמָנוּ  
 כִּפֹּד לִבִּי בְּאַמּוּנָתְךָ  
 תֵּן בִּי יִרְאָה לְמִשְׁמַע שְׁמֵךָ

That's how I prayed at a Jewish minyan  
 Next to me a Haredi trembled  
 For the sake of G-d he is a systematic robot  
 Hugely sweaty,  
 blessed with (many) children  
 Next to us a National Orthodox  
 who worships dust  
 And for all his invasion of the past  
 He praises battle-dress as if the battle's won  
 And we all live by his sword  
 An immigrant and caretaker  
 decorated in a hunched back  
 A reform Jew with a brand new cover,  
 or a different book.  
 A traditional and his lad  
 Bar Mitzvah boy  
 Kuzaris without candies

כִּן הִתְפַּלַּלְתִּי בְּמִנְיַן יְהוּדִים  
 לְצִדֵי חֲרָדִי כַּעַד נֶעַשׂ פְּחָדִים  
 כִּי לְמַעַן ה' שָׁם הוּא רִוְבוֹט שִׁיקְתִּי  
 מֵיָגַע פְּמוֹתַי, מְכוֹנֶת יְלָדִים  
 לְיָדֵנוּ דְתֵי לְאִמִּי שְׁשׁוּד לְעֶפֶר  
 וְמִרַב הַתְּפִלָּשׁוֹת בְּעֶבֶר  
 מִתְהַלֵּל הַחוֹגֵר פְּמִשָּׁל חוֹגְרוֹ  
 וְכָלְנוּ חַיִּים עַל חֲרָב  
 עוֹלָה וְשֹׁמֵשׁ מְעֵטֵר חֲטוּרְתֵךְ  
 כְּפוֹרְמֵי בִשְׁנוֹי גְּבֻרַת  
 אוֹ בִשְׁנוֹי הָאֲדָרֶת  
 מְסֻרְתֵי וְנִעְרוֹ  
 חֲתָן גֵּיל הַמִּצְוֹת  
 כוֹזָרִים חֲשׁוּכֵי מְמֻתְקִים

And from behind there is  
 a wild rustling and whispering  
 Headscarves and wigs and hair-do's  
 For on the other side of the divide  
 lifts the sensuous sound  
 The feminine voice  
 Of the non-counted

6

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai wept from on  
 high out of sadness, or maybe happiness  
 And the rain fell or he shed a tear  
 A sigh escaped my heart  
 All are thy students, Powerful Hammer,  
 Candle of Israel, Right-hand Pillar.  
 Bless thy children of all kinds,  
 both religious and also secular

מֵאַחֲרָיו יֵשׁ כַּחַשׁ וְלַחֵשׁ חֲפָזִי  
 מִטְפָּחוֹת וּפְאוֹת וְעֻצוּב מִסְפָּרוֹת  
 כִּי מַעְבֵּר פְּרוּגוֹד כִּם הַקּוֹל הַחוּשִׁי  
 קוֹם הַקּוֹל הַנְּשִׂי  
 שֶׁל הַלֵּל וְסִפְרוֹת.

7

רַבֵּן יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכַּי מְלַמְעֵלָר  
 מִצַּעַר, אוֹלֵי מִשְׁמַחָה  
 וְהַנְּשִׂים לָרַד אוֹ דְמָעָה הִיא מְחָה.  
 מִלְבֵּי נִפְלְטָה אֲנָחָה,  
 כָּלֶם תְּלַמִּידֶיךָ פְּטִישׁ הַחֹקֵק, גֵּר  
 יִשְׂרָאֵל, עַמּוּד הַיָּמִינִי  
 בְּרַךְ אֶת בְּנֵיךְ מִכָּל הַגּוֹוִיִּם גַּם דְּתִי  
 גַּם חֲלוּנֵי.

Father, oh merciful Father  
 Be to me a trusted soul-mate  
 Cushion my heart in your faith  
 Lend to me awe at the sound of your name

אָבָא הוּי אָב הַרְחֵמֵן  
 חִייה לִי יָדִיד נֶפֶשׁ נֶאֱמָן  
 כִּפֹּד לִבִּי בְּאַמּוּנָתְךָ  
 תֵּן בִּי יִרְאָה לְמִשְׁמַע שְׁמֵךָ

1. Haredi = Ultra-Orthodox. The literal translation of 'haredi' could be 'quaver', or 'tremble'.
2. The phrase "blessed with children" is new, among other things, a political phrase. It recalls the fact that large families are eligible for significant government subsidies, far more per child than small families.
3. Here, the reference is to the religious settlers who value the land of the Bible. The continued settlement of Biblical lands on the West Bank is, in this song, blamed for Israel's continuing wars with her neighbours.
4. Here, Kobi Oz raises a question as to whether Reform Judaism has referred Judaism, or created an entirely different religion.
5. The Kuzari nation, that Bayard has converted to, is said to be the descendants of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, was a Mongol nation. Sephardi legends have it that the Ashkenazim are descended from the Kuzars, the children of divorcing couples in a bar mitzvah is a Sephardi tradition. Hence if you are a descendant of the Kuzari, you will be without candles...
6. A Jewish prayer quorum requires 10 people to pray together. In an orthodox way, there are no chachuzim; this number refers only to men; women are not counted.
7. The story of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was told in the Mishnah in Sanhedrin 10a. Rabi Oz draws on it from the Babylonian Talmud (Gittin 55b-57a).

Others, the Reformans were traditionally the sons of converts who were not of the progeny of the Holy City, but they do mean the majority of the ones below, and called them blood of the blood, sons of Jerusalem.

It was at this point that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai decided to break out of the city. The Roman commander Vespasian came upon him, and Yochanan ben Zakkai cried out: "Greetings, Emperor of Rome!" Before Vespasian could explain to ben Zakkai that he was not the Emperor, a messenger from Rome arrived with the decree naming Vespasian Emperor. Vespasian was so impressed with ben Zakkai's prophetic powers, he offered to grant the Rabbi's any request. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai did not ask for Jerusalem to be saved, or for the Holy Temple to be spared destruction. Instead, he asked for "Yavneh and her sages" – the permission to establish a Jewish scholars' academy in the city of Yavneh.

In Yavneh, following the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, these scholars built the Jewish religion anew. This religion would have no centralizing Temple, nor would it be ruled by the hereditary Priestly caste; it would be, in Kobi Oz's words, a privatized religion, interpreted differently in different places. The multi-denominational, multi-customed Judaism that we know today was set in motion – so Kobi would maintain – by the fateful decision of Yochanan ben Zakkai.

8. Kobi Oz sees Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai as something of a 'Patron Saint' of Pluralism. He is so pluralist, suggests Kobi, that he even has three names!

- \* In what way is this a personal prayer, in your opinion?
- \* In what way is this a collective prayer, in your opinion?
- \* Do you see the first verse as being critical of this non-religious approach to life?

**Kobi Oz sees Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai as something of a 'Patron Saint' of Pluralism. He is so pluralist, suggests Kobi, that he even has three names! As such, this song offers a vision of pluralism in action. In the song/prayer's minyan, the protagonist prays alongside those with whom he strongly disagrees and even dislikes.**

- \* Do you accept this as an ideal vision of pluralism and tolerance?
- \* Do current political issues find their way into your prayers?
- \* Is Jewish communal prayer the place for thinking about tough issues? Why/why not? Is there any other place for a sort of "prayer about" (beyond Shabbat or on Eretz Yisrael) that really "was religious about Israeli/Israeli politics" but not "was also born of" difficult political situation?



# A man with a cardboard sign

Words and music by Kobi Oz

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80

**Makōm diqōm**  
Engaging Israel

- 1 Every morning he is a pillar of salt  
beside the Ayalon Highway  
Always against the traffic, every driver  
makes a bumper face  
A hat with Na Nach Nachm Nachman  
Me'Uman and a pompom too  
His heart's mission he holds in both  
hands on a cardboard sign
- 2 כל בקר הוא נאיב של מלח מול  
נתניב באילון  
התנועה תמיד תבוא נגדו, נכל נהג  
עושה פרוצה טמבון  
כובע נה נח נחמ נחמן מאמן וגם  
פונפון  
משאות לבו מחזיק בשתי ידי על  
לבו בשלט מטרטון

And there is written:  
"Moshiach, Messiah  
I want Messiah"  
And the sun and the rain and the wind in  
his face  
"Moshiach, Messiah  
I want Messiah"  
And the mockery and the scorn strokes  
his cheeks

נשם כתוב:  
"משיח משיח  
אני רוצה משיח"  
והשמש והגשם והרוח על פניו  
"משיח משיח  
אני רוצה משיח"  
והלעג והקלס מלפנים את לחיו

Cars wink at him with a futuristic shiny  
metallic honk of the horn  
He shrinks back against the swathe of  
signs in forests of phallic towers  
This guy seems to be a bit 'off', neither  
here nor there, a little loopy  
I open the electric window and sing out  
to him a tune that comes to me:

מכוניות קורצות אליו בצפצוף  
עתידי מנצנצות מטאלי  
הוא מצטמצם מול שלל שלטי  
חוצות ביערות של מגדלי הפאלי  
האיש הזה הוא פגאה קצת OFF,  
לא בשר לא חלב קצת מטורדלי  
אני פותח את החלון החשמלי ושר  
אליו לפי לחן שעלה לי

"Moshiach, Messiah  
I want Messiah"  
And the sun and the rain and the wind in  
his face  
"Moshiach, Messiah  
I want Messiah"  
And the mockery and the scorn  
Play with his side-curls

"משיח משיח  
אני רוצה משיח"  
והשמש והגשם והרוח על פניו  
"משיח משיח  
אני רוצה משיח"  
והלעג והקלס משחקים בפאותיו

While we wait around for the holy red heifer he demands

and he draws our attention  
For a second away from  
the trivia of the present

Through the smog he is revealed  
I am certain that it is

Him standing alone

He is the savior,

thank God, he is the guarantor

For the yearning itself

sets up the solace

It's the longing that is Messiah

בְּעוֹד אֲנַחְנוּ מְחַפִּים לְפָנָה אֲדָמָה

הוא מתעקש והוא מסיים

אֶת דְּעֵתוֹ לְשׁוּנָה מִשְׁטוּיֹת שֶׁל הַיָּמָה

הוא מתגלה מתוך ערפלים

אֲנִי בְּטוֹחַ שֶׁזֶה הוּא שְׁעוֹמֵד לְבָדוֹ

הוא הגואל תודה לאל הוא

המבטיח

כִּי הַכְּמִיקָה עֲצֵמָה הִיא הַקְּנָה

לְנִחְמָה

הנְעִיגוֹעַ הוּא מְשִׁיחַ

### 3

1. The song is written about a real person who does stand by the Ayalon Highway in Tel Aviv, holding his cardboard sign.

2. Among the followers of Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, there is a belief that this combination of letters and half-words have sacred powers. They are painted on many walls throughout Israel, and decorate many of the white hats Breslavers tend to wear.

3. It is believed that the birth of an unblemished red heifer (cow), such that would be appropriate for sacrifice at the Temple, is the heavenly sign that the Messiah is due.

- ✧ Is the man holding the cardboard sign crazy? A hero? Both?
- ✧ Have you come across people who insist on proclaiming their beliefs and desires in the face of unanimous opposition?
- ✧ How do you relate to them?  
(Do you 'drive past'? Sing along with them? Join them? Join them by the side of the 'road'?)

**If you were in the place of the man with the cardboard, holding up a sign that states your most strongly held beliefs in the face of huge opposition, what would be written on it?**

Sometimes it feels that the State of Israel is a bubble in the world, standing against the global traffic, shielded by international aid – by a bubble of safety.

- ✧ How do you see the young as an obstacle to Israel in the world?



# Rabbi Joe Kappara

Words and music by Kobi Oz

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המכון היהודי למחקר  
Jewish Agency for Israel

80

**Makōm diq**  
Engaging Israel

Between the mountains  
and the rocks

A righteous angel lives well

A car and two houses

The holy spirit

is a business for him

A long line of the whole clan

Requesting a blessing or two

For health and for work

Rabbi Joe Kappara

Agonay megiman hu

Tu tu you called

From dust he'll raise up a king

Tu tu you called

Od avinu alive or dead?

Tu tu you called

There's no one greater,

no one like you

Every blind man now can see

Where the money flows

Every sheep needs a herder

Who speaks so fluently

He asks and there is an answer

Calls the heavens on the phone

He gives you hope

The Holy Joe Kappara

Agonay megiman hu

Tu tu you called

From dust he'll raise up a king

Tu tu you called

Od avinu mah nishma?

Tu tu you called

There's no one great,

no one like you

Who is the Torah Great?

Rabbi Joe Kappara

בין הרים ובין סלעים

חי צדיק מלאך בחסד

מכונית ושני בתים

השכינה אצלו זה עסק

תור ארוך כל העדה

מבקשים ברכה או שתניי

גם בריאות גם עבודה

הרבי ג'ו כפרה

1

2

אגוני מגינים הוא

טו טו קראת

מעפר ירים מלך

טוטו קראת

עוד אבינו חי או מת

טוטו קראת

אין גדול אין כמוך

טוטו קראת

כל עיור עכשיו רואה

להיכן זורם הכסף

כל כבשה צריכה רועה

שנואם יפה ברצף

הוא שואל ויש תשובה

מטלפן אל השמיים

הוא נותן לך תקווה

הקדוש ג'ו כפרה

אגוני מגינים הוא

טוטו קראת

מעפר ירים מלך

טוטו קראת

עוד אבינו מה נשמע?

טוטו קראת

אין גדול אין כמוך

מי הגדול שבתורה?

הרבי ג'ו כפרה

Who heals all the barren?  
Holy Joe Kappara  
He saved many people  
From demons and the evil eye  
He is an expert in  
*kabbala*  
Rabbi Joe Kappara

3

מי מרפא כל עקרה?  
הקדוש ג'ו כפרה  
הוא הציל אנשים רבים  
משדים ועין הרע  
הוא מומחה בקבלה  
הרבי ג'ו כפרה

Agonay megiman hoo  
Tu tu you called...

אגוני מגינים הוא  
טוטו קראת...

1. This song was the first hit of Kobi's earlier band Teanacks in 1992. 19 years on, the song has the same satirical sting, and is as relevant as ever. He sings of the Israeli phenomenon of Rabbis, Kabbalists, and Holy Men who make their fortune selling their spiritual/magical services to believers.
2. The word 'agonal' is used, instead of the word for God that is used in the R. Shlomo Carlebach song that is being referred to.
3. Kabbalah, the Jewish spiritual practice, is also the Hebrew word for a receipt, and for 'receiving'...

### **"Every sheep needs a shepherd"**

While this is difficult to question with regards livestock, do you believe this is the case when talking about humans? Do we all need a leader?

### **"He gives you hope"**

Is there anything wrong with offering hope to those in need?

1. What do you see as the ideal qualities of a leader?
2. Have you ever been in a situation where a leader has disappointed or even created his or her followers? Did he/she responsibility in solely with the leader or also with those being led?
3. Would you say that your community is well led? Under what work to do so? Or does it lack those willing to be led?



# Nikbat HaShiloach

Words and music by Kobi Oz

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# Makom Dik Israel

Engaging Israel

1

On my way to the Nikbat HaShiloach  
 Want to immerse myself in the living waters  
 I'm breathing air from the days of the Kings  
 Crawl along your tunnel to the Nikbat haShiloach  
 Soon I'll take off my clothes  
 Waters are furious, sparkling, mischievous

גִּידְךָ לִנְקֻבַת הַשִּׁלּוֹחַ

רוֹצֵה לְטָבֵל בַּמַּיִם הַחַיִּים  
 נוֹשֵׁם אֲוִיר מֵיְמֵי הַמְּלָכִים  
 זוֹחֵל בְּמַחֲלוֹתֶיךָ לִנְקֻבַת הַשִּׁלּוֹחַ  
 עוֹד מַעֲט אֲסִיר תִּיבְגָדִים  
 מַיִם שׁוֹפָפִים, רוֹשְׁפִים חֲצוּפִים.

2

Crawling in your tunnels, Jerusalem  
 Gurgling below, struggles above  
 Battling for land and polluting the water  
 Perhaps my soul will find rest  
 Here in your tunnels Jerusalem  
 Maybe I will burst forth  
 and find the Kingdom?

זוֹחֵל בְּמַחֲלוֹתֶיךָ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם  
 לְמַטָּה פִּכְפוֹת לְמַעְלָה סִכְסוֹת  
 נִלְחָמִים עַל אֲדָמָה וּמְהַרְמִים אֶת הַמַּיִם  
 אוֹרֵז נִפְשִׁי תַמְצֵא מְנוּחָה  
 כְּאֵן בְּמַחֲלוֹתֶיךָ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם  
 אוֹרֵז אֲנִי אֲגִיד וְאֶמְצֵא מְלוּכָה

3

How much of this is megalomania?  
 How much is anthropology?  
 How much is guilt?

כַּמּוֹה מַזְוֵה אֲנִי וְאַנְטְרוֹפּוֹלוגְיָה?  
 כַּמּוֹה מַזְוֵה הַגִּישִׁי אֲשָׁמָה?  
 כַּמּוֹה מַזְוֵה כִּי הָעוֹלָם שְׁלִי מְלַלְךָ?

4

How much because my world is unclean?  
 Her lips on the way to the light  
 Touching, I am drunk with cold  
 When I come out  
 Will I be pure?  
 Will I have emerged a king or mule?

כַּמּוֹה מַזְוֵה כִּי הָעוֹלָם שְׁלִי מְלַלְךָ?  
 שְׁפִתֶיךָ בְּדַרְךְ אֶל הָאוֹר  
 נוֹגֵעַ אֲנִי שְׁכוֹר מְכוּר  
 כְּשֶׁאֲצֵא בְחוּץ  
 הֲאִם אֶהְיֶה טָהוֹר?  
 הֲאִם יֵצְאָתִי מִלֶּךְ אוֹ מִמּוֹר?

Get out and towel off the water  
 Where did I put my spectacles?  
 Feel like myself, thank God  
 A crown did not await me, nor donkeys  
 My body full of strange sensations  
 Not entirely pure and not a savior  
 How much of this is megalomania?  
 How much of this is anthropology?  
 How much is guilt?  
 How much because my world is unclean?

יֵצֵא וּמְנַגֵּב אֶת הַמַּיִם  
 אִיפֹה שָׂמַתִּי אֶת הַמַּשְׁקָפִים?  
 מְרֻגֵשׁ כְּמוֹ עַצְמִי תוֹדָה לָאֵל  
 כִּתֹּר לֹא חָכָה לִי וְגַם לֹא אֲתוֹנוֹת  
 בְּגוּף יֵשׁ לִי תחוֹשׁוֹת מִשְׁנוֹת  
 לֹא לְגַמְרִי טָהוֹר וְגַם לֹא גּוֹאֵל  
 כַּמּוֹה מַזְוֵה מְגֻלְמוֹנְיָה?  
 כַּמּוֹה מַזְוֵה אֲנְטְרוֹפּוֹלוגְיָה?  
 כַּמּוֹה מַזְוֵה הַגִּישִׁי אֲשָׁמָה?  
 כַּמּוֹה מַזְוֵה כִּי הָעוֹלָם שְׁלִי מְלַלְךָ?

Her lips face the light  
 Touched, I am drunk with cold  
 Here, I'm outside  
 Not very pure  
 I have a feeling I might return

שְׁפִתֶיךָ בְּדַרְךְ אֶל הָאוֹר  
 נוֹגֵעַ אֲנִי שְׁכוֹר מְכוּר  
 הֵנָּה אֲנִי בְחוּץ  
 לֹא מְאֹד טָהוֹר  
 יֵשׁ לִי הַרְגָּשָׁה שְׁעוֹד אֲחֻזָּר.



1. Mikbat HaShiloach is an underground water way fashioned in the days of the Yehzekiel, that acted as the water source for the ancient city of Jerusalem.
2. The Jewish purification ritual of Mikveh involves naked immersion in natural sourced water.
3. The Hebrew for 'burst forth' is a play on the word Gichon - the name of the river that feeds Nikbat HaShiloach.
4. The song plays with the fear of the Jerusalem Syndrome. This is a medically recognized syndrome, where visitors to Jerusalem suddenly are convinced they are Jesus, or King David, or some other historical hero.

- \* Are there any places in the world that you feel have an intrinsic power, holiness, specialness?
- \* Have you ever visited a place that left you transformed in any way?
- \* Have you ever visited anywhere in Israel with a similar connected expectation of self-transformation?

Kobi Oz undergoes a powerful experience in the waters, yet in the end he emerges more or less unchanged.

- \* Is this similar or different to your feeling on leaving Israel?

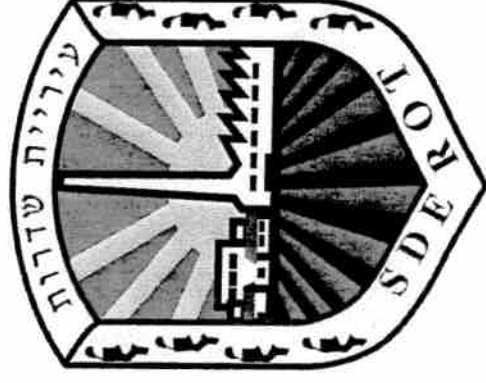
Kobi Oz considers four motivating factors for why he visits Nikbat HaShiloach. Meglomania, Anthropology, Guilt, and a feeling that his life is dirty.

- \* What reason might you offer yourself for visiting Jerusalem?

# Sderot

## *A Western Negev Desert City*

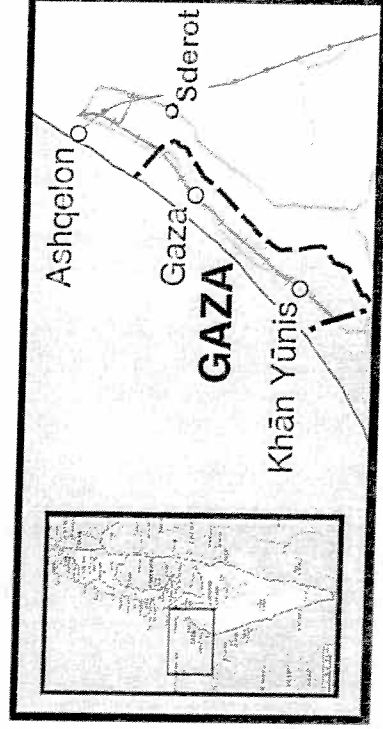
Sderot is a western Negev desert city in the Southern District of Israel and one of several development towns that were built in Israel during the 1950s in order to expand the population of the country's peripheral areas and to ease development pressure on the country's crowded center. The towns are the results of the Sharon plan - the master plan of Israel. The majority of such towns were built in the Galilee in the north of Israel, and in the northern Negev desert in the south. The first development town was Beit Shemesh, founded in 1950 around 20km from Jerusalem. They were mostly populated by new immigrants from Arab countries such as Morocco, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Tunisia, and many gained a new influx of residents during the mass immigration from former Soviet states in the early 1990s.



## *History*

Sderot was founded in 1951 as a transit camp ('ma'abara') for Kurdish and Persian Jewish immigrants who lived in tents and shacks before permanent housing was completed in 1954. Sderot was named after the Eucalyptus boulevards ('sderot') planted along its perimeter. In 1956, Sderot was recognized as a local council. In the 1950s, the city continued to absorb a large number of immigrants from Morocco and Romania, and was declared a local council in 1958. Sderot again absorbed a large immigrant population during the Aliyah from the Soviet Union in the 1990s, and its population doubled in this decade. In 1996 it was declared a city.

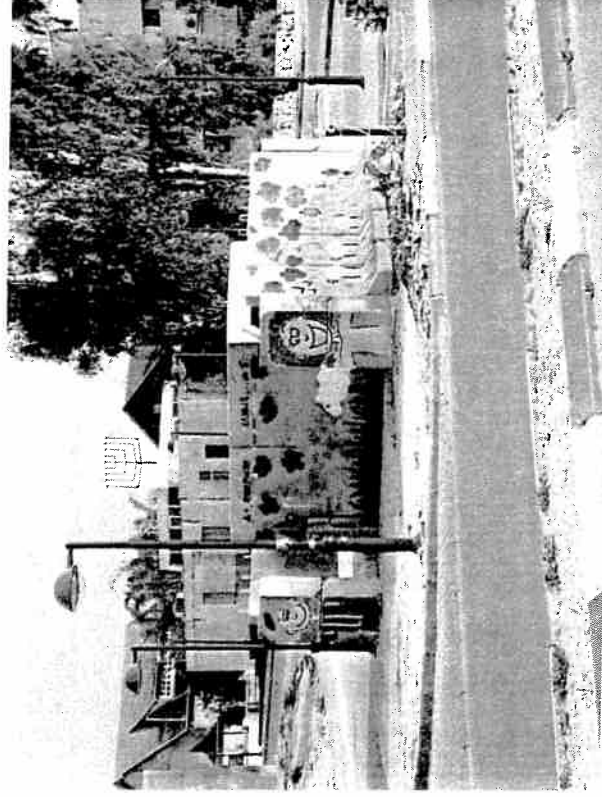
Sderot lies one kilometer from the Gaza Strip and town of Beit Hanoun. Since the beginning of the Second Intifada in October 2000, the city has been under constant rocket fire from Qassam rockets launched by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Sderot's population density is slightly greater than that of the Gaza Strip. Due to this, and despite the imperfect aim of these homemade projectiles, they have caused deaths and injuries, as well as significant damage to homes and property, psychological distress and emigration from the city. The Israeli government has installed a "Red Color" (tzeva Adom) alarm system to warn citizens of impending rocket attacks, although its effectiveness has been questioned. Citizens only have 15 seconds to reach shelter after the sounding of the alarm. Thousands of Qassam rockets have been launched since Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip in September 2005.



In May 2007, a significant increase in shelling from Gaza prompted the temporary evacuation of thousands of residents. By November 23, 2007, 6,311 rockets had fallen on the city. Yediot Ahronoth reported that during the summer of 2007, 3,000 of the city's

22,000 residents (comprised mostly of the city's key upper and middle class residents) left for other areas, out of Qassam rocket range. Russian billionaire Arcadi Gaydamak organized a series of relief programs for residents unable to leave. On December 12, 2007, after more than 20 rockets landed in the Sderot area in a single day, including a direct hit to one of the main avenues, Sderot mayor Eli Moyal announced his resignation, citing the government's failure to halt the rocket attacks. Moyal was persuaded to retract his resignation. In a gesture of solidarity, El Al (Israel's national airline) named one of its first two Boeing 777 passenger planes "Sderot" (the other was named for Kiryat Shmona).

In January 2008, the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York organized a display of 4,200 red balloons outside the United Nations building. Each balloon represented a Qassam rocket that had been fired into Sderot, where for years the town and its surrounding area have been under near-constant bombardment by thousands of rockets and mortar shells fired from Gaza. Consul general at the time, David Saranga, who conceptualized the display, said he used the balloons as an opportunity to call upon the international community to stop ignoring what's happening in Israel. The balloon display made headlines in New York City papers as well as international publications. The Gaza War at the beginning of 2009 largely put an end to the shelling from the Gaza Strip.



*Bomb shelter in Sderot*

## *Culture*

According to the Jerusalem Post, an unusually high ratio of singers, instrumentalists, composers and poets have come from this small town. In 2007 American-Israeli filmmaker Laura Bialis immigrated from California to Sderot "to find out what it means to live in a never-ending war, and to document the lives and music of musicians under fire."

Several popular bands have been formed by musicians who practiced in Sderot's bomb shelters as teenagers. Because Sderot is a poor, immigrant town with high unemployment experiencing a dramatic musical success as bands blend international sounds with the music of their Moroccan immigrant parents, it has been compared to Liverpool in the sixties. Among the notable bands are Teapacks, Knesiyat Hasekhel and Sfatayim. Well-known musicians from Sderot include Shlomo Bar, Kobi Oz, Haim Ulliel and Smadar Levi. Israeli poet Shimon Adaf was born in Sderot, as well as the actor and entertainer Maor Cohen. Documentary filmmaker Laura Bialis, currently living in Sderot, released a film entitled Sderot: Rock in the Red Zone, released in 2010 to great acclaim. The film focuses on young musicians living under the daily threat of Qassams. Rock in the Red Zone link: <http://sderotmovie.com/index.php>

# Tunisian Jewish Community

*From: The Jews of Africa*

By Jeff Sand

*Visiting this separate colony in an Arab country that not too long ago was home to the Palestine Liberation Organization, I felt like an alien on several levels. I was American, English-speaking and an Ashkenazi Jew, keenly aware of the overwhelmingly Muslim Arab population and unfamiliar with many of the rituals and customs of the local Jewish community. But I felt a kinship, too, with these observant, Hebrew-speaking people who have managed to preserve their traditions over centuries and whose affection for Israel is as deep-seated as it is unspoken, at least in public.*

· Garry Rosenblatt, Publisher and Editor of the New York Jewish Week,  
in The Jewish World Review July 20, 1998

Jews in Tunisia have always tread a precarious path between social acceptance and downright oppression. From their first documented appearance in 2nd century Carthage to their current status as a tolerated minority, Tunisian Jews have been subject to shifts in regional and international politics that have dictated the relative security of their community. As the Oslo Peace Process has eased tensions between Israel and the Arab world, the Jews of Tunisia are once again able to practice their religion in public and with pride.

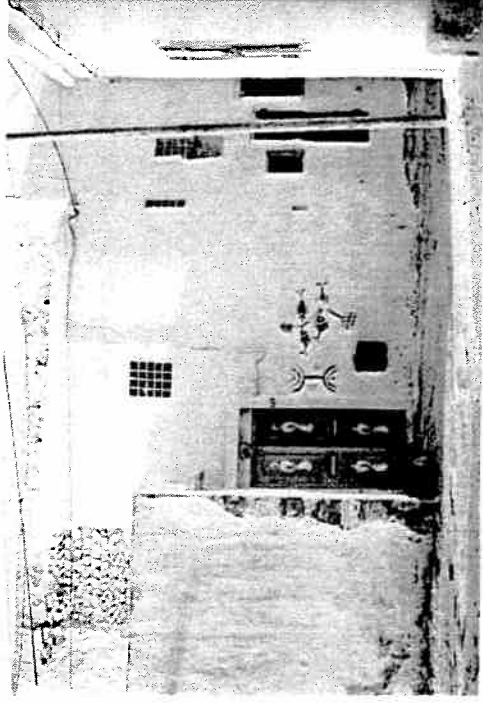
Today, the island of Djerba, ten hours from Tunis off the southeast of the country, is a particular center of Jewish spiritualism, one of the few places where scribes still hand print the Torah and community elders chant the words of the Zohar, Judaism's book of mysticism. Most of the Djerban Jews still live as they have for centuries, surviving by metalworking and jewelry-making, maintaining strict and spiritual Jewish practices. In Djerba some children still dress in a blusa under which they wear a small, mauve vest to protect them from the cold and belgha, goatskin slippers. Some women wear brightly colored jumpers in red, green or bronze – in public the young women wear futa, striped silk or cotton dresses. They keep their hair covered, in formal occasions, with a gold-embroidered coffia (headress). In their long prayer robes and dark skullcaps, Djerban men appear to come from a time long past. Though contact with the secular West has begun to influence the younger generation's dress and observances, the Djerban Jewish community is what some would describe as a living museum to the Judaism of their ancestors.

## History

The Jewish community of Tunisia originated as home to scholars exiled from Palestine, from Talmudic sages of the 2nd to the 4th centuries to today's Torah scribes. During the Byzantine period, Emperor Justinian excluded Jews from public life, prohibited their practice and ordering synagogues to become churches. Many Tunisian Jews fled into the mountains and the desert, joining secluded Berber communities there, and most remained there even after the Arabs conquered Tunisia in the 7th century, allowing Jews to practice again. Jews lived openly in Tunisia, albeit as second-class citizens, until the Spanish invasions of 1535-1574 chased Jews inland once again. The Jewish community returned to the coast under Ottoman and thrived under French rule until 1940, when Vichy subjected them to anti-Semitic laws. In 1942 Germans overran Tunisia, deported much of the Jewish population to labor camps and seized their property. The Tunisian Jewish community rebuilt itself through a

decade of Allied rule until the country achieved independence in 1956. The new Muslim government eliminated the Jewish Rabbinical tribunal and Jewish community councils, destroying the Jewish quarter of Tunis. After the Six-Day War in 1967, Muslims laid waste to the Great Synagogue of Tunis; much of the Jewish population fled to Israel throughout the 1970's and '80's, leaving a dedicated community of about 2000 Jews, primarily in Tunis and on the island of Djerba in the towns of Hara Keriba and Hara Sghira, where Jews have been worshipping at the El Ghirba Synagogue for almost 1900 years.

Today the Tunisian government watches the Jewish community closely but does not restrict Jewish practices. The government does appoint a committee which heads the community and manages most of its non-religious functions. There are five rabbis in Tunisia; there are even several kosher restaurants in Tunis and on Djerba, which has been an active, practicing Jewish community for over two millennia, where most of the community members observe Jewish dietary laws (kashrut).



Doorway to a household in Djerba

## *The Setting*

The seven hundred Jews who live on the island of Djerba have found themselves in the middle of what many would call an island paradise. Throughout the always balmy year, Northern European tourists flock to Djerban beaches to roast in the sun by day and revel in an insular tourist nightlife after the sun sets. Unlike the rest of Tunisia, which has a diverse landscape that includes beaches, mountains and broad, deep desert, Djerba's land is uniformly flat. The winters are hot, the summers are almost unbearable, but even the least beach-friendly tourist will appreciate the abundance of sunshine and blue skies on Djerba.

The main town of Houmt Souk isn't on the beach, but it does see its share of tourists who fill its streets to purchase colorful Djerban pottery and locally made jewelry. Most Jews in Djerba live in Hara Kebira, "the large ghetto," which is a small town that sits about a kilometer south of Houmt Souk. Hara Kebira is a compact village filled by a labyrinth of narrow streets lined by white, square houses with turquoise doors and window shutters. The neighborhood used to be exclusively Jewish, and though it is now mixed, little boys wearing colorful yarmulkes fill the allies, cackling fluidly in Hebrew, French and Arabic. Compact cars and puttering motor bikes skitter around closer corners, competing with cart-drawing donkeys for precious space on the road. On Shabbat and during Jewish holidays Hara Kebira is peaceful and friendly, solemn as it has been during the same holidays for almost two millennia.

## *Religious life*

Religious life in Djerba is, as it has been for over two millennia, traditional, devoted and serious. There are fifteen active synagogues in Djerba, and most fill every Shabbat and on holidays with tallis-clad men praying in thick Sephardic Hebrew. The synagogues are ornate, Islamic structures, full of stained glass and towering archways, plastered with intricate turquoise tile. In Djerba's Sephardic tradition

the bimah is in the center of each synagogue. Men (only men – women sit outside the synagogue in a waiting hall) gather about the bimah and buzz the prayers in unison from dense Hebrew siddurim. Djerbanans are dedicated to their religion and follow Jewish traditions, including kashrut and all of the holidays, devoutly.

Sephardic tradition met North African culture in Tunisia. Djerban Jewry shows this mix in much of its folklore and latent superstitions. Like many other North Africans, Djerban Jews venerate scholars from their community, paying homage to them by peppering their synagogue with photos of the learned, and by making “pilgrimage” to their graves on certain holidays, or on particular days of the year. Each family has its favorite departed sages; when a family member is facing a difficult time he may ask the sage for guidance.

### *Secular life*

Most Jews on the island of Djerba are middle-class merchants, jewelers or shop-owners. Some, like Alex Haddad, operate in the tourist economy, selling handmade jewelry to visiting Europeans in little shops on the Houmt Souk street, Rue du Bizertes (the street of jewelers). Other Djerbanans cater their business to the local community, such as Dolly Haddad, who runs the kosher Comlombe Blanc restaurant, and her husband Danny who owns an electronics business.



*The El Ghirba synagogue, Hara Seghira*

Secular life in Djerba is becoming more and more modern. Djerban youth may buy fresh herbs for their mothers each day from a cart drawn by a donkey, but they also have motor bikes, carry cell phones and are fluent in several languages. Most Djerban youth have the opportunity to travel and/or study abroad. Some have moved away for good to places like Israel or France. Other remain but have as much in common with the globe-trotting Northern European tourists who frequent the resorts on the coast as they do with their more traditional parents and grandparents.

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## Tunisian Cuisine

*From: Jewish Foods of the World*

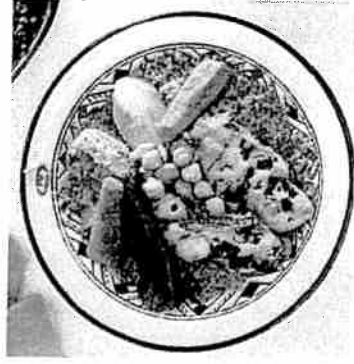
By Daniel Rosov

Few people celebrate religious festivals, weddings or other joyous family occasions with more culinary gusto than those Israelis who have their roots in Tunisia. In traditional homes, such festivals or other celebrations are perceived as reasons for entire families to gather together. On arrival, each family member is greeted with a cup of hot, sweet tea - even before having entered the home. Once settled, hot savory pastries and hors d'oeuvres are passed around on huge copper trays, candied almonds and stuffed prunes are served hot from the oven and an incredible amount of tea is consumed.

The actual celebratory dinner starts only when the oldest member of the family invites everyone to take their place at the table. Tunisian cuisine is not as exotic as some may imagine. If there is a single major descriptor appropriate for the food of Tunisia it is that the people like their food hot. In fact, Tunisian Jews probably have as many recipes for making hot sauce as Russian and Polish Jews have for borscht.

The Tunisian kitchen, although based on a country-style cuisine, is a rich one. Especially popular dishes both in Tunisia and Israel include tagines - meat or poultry stews often cooked together with fruits; fish dishes that rely on subtle seasonings and vegetables; couscous; merguez, a sausage that comes in what seems to be an infinite variety of flavors and of hotness; and a collection of marvelous sweet pastries and cream desserts.

Daniel Rogov is the restaurant and wine critic for the daily newspaper Ha'aretz. He is also the senior writer for Wine and Gourmet Magazine and contributes culinary and wine articles to newspapers in Europe and the United States.



**Ingredients** (for 6 persons): 2 lbs of Couscous; 6 pieces of fish (grouper); 2 garlics; 1 large onion; 12 hot green peppers; 1 tsp harissa; 2-1/2 tsp tomato puree; olive oil; 2 tsp cumin, salt and pepper.

### Tunisian Couscous from Djerba

**Preparation:** Rinse and dry the fish, rub a little salt, cumin and sweet pepper. Fry the onion in oil for 5 min. Add the hot peppers, cook for additional 5 min., add the harissa, tomatoes, cumin and garlic, cook for 10 min., stirring occasionally. Remove the hot peppers and save for later. Pour 4-5 cups of water on the mixture and bring to a boil. When the water starts to boil, add the fish and cook on low for 15 to 20 min. Wet the couscous with oil, water and salt. Cook the couscous with oil, for 20 min. Remove the fish from the pot. Pour the sauce over the couscous. Decorate your couscous with green peppers and the fish.

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