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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From Tradition to Revival

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

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

Dear Educator,

Something exciting is happening on the Israeli music scene — piyutim, mostly Mizrachi 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"
Kobi Oz

Psalms for the Perplexed

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 multi-faceted 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 Ankeri 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 a 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 “Mizrahi Democratic Coalition,” on 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 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 Mizrachi 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 darbuka drumming in private lessons with master Israeli musician Shlomo Bar during his army service, Harel discovered that connection between connection 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 Mizrachi 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 Nefesh' 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 Pediya

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 came 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 Shahrarit 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 Mizrachi 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 Mizrachi 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 Fтайah, 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 Eyyatar Banai, Micah Sheerit, Barry Sakharov, Maor Cohen, Eti Anki, Yonatan and Aharon Raziel 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 Mizrachi 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 Ftyah 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 02, 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 on stage 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 pijutim (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 Mizrahi roots. As if this Ashkenazi-Mizrahi 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.

Traffic Jam of Miracles
By Kobi Oz

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

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

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
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

1. Babylonian Talmud Gittin 52b. This phrase is an ironic reworking of the praise "Who is like unto you among the gods?" (יְהֵי שָׁם יְהֹוָה לְךָ כְּשָׁם הוֹדוֹ). In the Temple without any seeming隔 from the heavens, the house of Rabbis is named כֶּלֶם - gods or כֵּלֶם - name. Some interpret this is 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 conjunction of this prayer does not include the word's forgiveness and atonement, Sobol says... to the English version...
3. Mount Nebo is the place from which Moses looked out over the Promised Land into which he was forbidden to enter.
4. The phrase comes from Samson, Judges Chapter 14, when discovering a grown man about to be the conqueror of a lion.

There would seem to be a two-way lack of communication in this song: Moses is looking out for his good, and God is troubled.

* Is this a literal interpretation of the song?
* Is this divine non-communication a pattern that you identify with?

Possibly one of the most tragic images of the Bible is of Moses standing on Mount Nebo, 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.

* What do you think Sobol Oz is suggesting when he says that we are still standing at Mount Nebo?
* What are we looking for?
* What must we not yet reach?

If this were a comment on the State of Israel, how would you respond to it?

...the song speaks to injustice, of God’s silence, and of poverty. However, Sobol Oz’s admonishment... to God? Is this commentary on the Torah?

What does the phrase "a mother of all" refer to in your view? How much of the story is left unexplained?
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?

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

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Elohai
by Kobi Oz

אתה אל אלהי אתה אל אלהי
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כי ברי ברי ונOfStringים עם הרוח
ושלמה מושיענא מלאכי דוד בן פרע

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I have so so so many thank yous standing
in line at your door, but my thank yous always
come out corny
I have so so so so many requests to ask of
you, though I’m basically fine.
“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 Peretz”

In writing, we may also hesitate between G-d, or inserting the ‘o’... 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?

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’?

Kobi Oz talks of the way in which his Grandfather – a Rabbi who made aliyah 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 mizrahi 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?

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?
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

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
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.

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.
1. "He is called Jacob - the Hebrew name for James. James 3:2 is speaking of the biblical story of Jacob's ladder. In Genesis 28:10-17 we read: "Then Jacob took the stone and set it up as a pillar. And he named it Besorah. He came to the place where he had set it and called it Besorah. Then Jacob said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place; I do not know that I am passing through this place.' Then he said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I do not know that I am passing through this place.' Then he said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Take this bread and eat. It will give you strength to go on your way.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be blessed beyond measure.' Then Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' He said, 'Then you shall be bless..."

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 "seen the light", the angel of faith, is presented as slightly threatening, as if ancient.

- Is it your experience that the spiritual, "seen the light" side of religion is thus threatening or awkward?
- Have you ever asked an Israelite the same question?
- What do you imagine might be their answer?

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

The angel of the "Enlightenment" would seem to be the opposite of both. It's clear.

Is it your experience that the more materialistic approach is more the less true or play-

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 think Kobi would have you with a heart of charity towards the one who he calls the "Skeptic"?

Are you like Kobi, left stuck in between, feeling inside-out?
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

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

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

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
1. This is a play on a well-known phrase - 'pass the test' - believe that through struggle you will make it.

2. "Diversions" is a particular translation, playing on the more straightforward understanding of course - 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 Rabbinic 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 discontent on arrival with regards Israel?

Can you see this circular image of longing - leaving - wishing to leave even 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 Kings. What do you say there is anything significant about this song having a 'gypsy' feel to it?

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

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

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

That’s how I prayed at a Jewish minyan
Next to me a Haredi trembled
a volcano of fears
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 candles

1. הִגְרַע יָדָךְ עָלָיו
    2. מִצְרַיִם יָדָךְ מָצָא
    3. הַמְּחָלַת הַחוּמִּים גְּופֶלָה
    4. הַמְּחָלַת הַחוּמִּים גְּופֶלָה
    5. הַמְּחָלַת הַחוּמִּים גְּופֶלָה
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

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

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

1. Hasidic, Ultra-Orthodox. The literal translation of 'habad' would be 'quickly', or 'trembled'.
2. The phrase "blessed with children" is now, among other things, a political phrase in Israel and recalls the fact that large families are eligible for significant government subsidies, or more per child than small families.
3. Here the reference is to the religious settlers who settle the land of the Bible. The question is raised: what is the land of the Bible? The question is not answered by the religious settlers; in their opinion, the land of the Bible is the land of the religious.
4. Here, Rabbi Oz raises a question to whether Reform Judaism has become different from Judaism.
5. The Kuzari nation, that learned how to convert to Judaism after the persecutions of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, was a Jewish nation, Sephardi legends have it that the Ashkenazim are descended from the Kuzari. The question of the Ashkenazim is whether the Kuzari is a Jewish nation. Hence if you are a descendant of the Kuzari, you will be a Ashkenazi.
6. A Jewish prayer requires 10 people to pray together. In Orthodox communities, the number is ten. This number refers to the ten words of the Shema.
7. The story of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai seeks to illustrate that the Kuzari is not a Jewish nation. The Ashkenazi is different from the Sephardic nation and the Shema.
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 asked him, "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 as the new 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.

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!

1. In what way is this a personal prayer, in your opinion?
2. 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 stuff? Maybe this is another feature that's a consequence of the break of separation between religion and politics. In modern, multi-faith societies, religion has become political, but politics has also become religious.

27
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 Nachman Me’Uman and a pompom too
His heart’s mission he holds in both
hands on a cardboard sign

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

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:

“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
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

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 Breslov, 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 Breslovites 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 'shrive past'? Sing along with them out of the window? 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 little bit like the man in the song, standing against the global tide, challenged by international modernity, a little crazy.
* How do you see the song as analogous to Israel in the world?
Rabbi Joe Kappara
Words and music by Kobi Oz

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
Casts 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
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

Agonay megiman hoo
Tu tu you called...

1. This song was the first hit of Koba’s earlier band Teenacks in 1993. 18 years on, the song has the same satirical sting, and is as relevant as ever. It sings of the Israeli phenomenon of Rasbiks, Kabbalists, and Holy Men who make their fortune selling their spiritual/magical services to believers.
2. The word ‘agonah’ 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?

- What do you see as the ideal qualities of a leader?
- Have you ever been in a situation where a leader has disappointed or even cheated his or her followers? Did the responsibility lie solely with the leader or also with those being led?
- Would you say that your community has reached a level of respect for leaders or does it lack those willing to be led?
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
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?
How much of this is megalomania?
How much is anthropology?
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?

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?

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
1. Mikbat HaShiloach is an underground waterway fashioned in the days of the Yehoshua, that acted as the water source for the ancient city of Jerusalem.
2. The Jewish purification ritual of Milveh involves naked immersion in natural sourced water.
3. The Hebrew for 'burst forth' is a play on the word Gihon, the name of the river that feeds Mikbat 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 concern of 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 Mikbat HaShiloach: Meglomania, Anthropology, Guilt, and a feeling that his life is dirty.
- What reason might you offer yourself for visiting Jerusalem?
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.

**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
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
Religious Life

Almost two millennia ago, the land of Israel was pacific and peaceful, charmingly walled by a hallowed spirit. Jewish holidays are celebrated with great joy, filled with family and friends. The synagogues are centers for prayer, study, and community. On Shabbat and during Jewish holidays, the synagogues are packed with worshippers, all coming together to celebrate the week.

Souk Jerash, the marketplace, is a bustling hub of activity. Here, stalls overflow with fresh produce, spices, and local crafts. The souk is a place where locals and tourists alike can mingle and make new friends.

The Setting

Doorsway To a House in Jerash

The hundred-year history of Jerash, a city in Jordan, is rich with cultural and religious significance. Members of the Jewish community, most of whom are practicing Jews, manage the city's affairs. The city is known for its well-preserved Roman ruins and beautiful architecture, making it a popular destination for tourists.

Today, the Jewish community is closely tied to the local government, which supports Jewish practices and helps maintain the city's historical significance. The city is a testament to the coexistence of different cultures and faiths, making it a unique and fascinating place to visit.
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. Djerbans 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 pepperizing 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 Hount Souk street, Rue du Bizertes (the street of jewelers). Other Djerbans cater their business to the local community, such as Dolly Haddad, who runs the kosher Comolome Blanc restaurant, and her husband Danny who owns an electronics business.

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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Photography in this section: Jay Sand
Tunisian Cuisine

From: *Jewish Foods of the World*

By Daniel Rogov

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.

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**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 over steam for 20 min. Remove the fish from the pot. Pour the sauce over the couscous. Decorate your couscous with green peppers and the fish.

**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.
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