LIBRARY COPYRIGHT NOTICE

www.huc.edu/libraries

Regulated Warning

See Code of Federal Regulations, Title 37, Volume 1, Section 201.14:

The copyright law of the United States (title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specific conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law.

למדתי אהבה בבית הכנסת
I Learned Love in the Synagogue:
A Liturgical and Musical Study of the Poetry of Yehuda Amichai

Sara Lillian Anderson

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Cantorial Ordination

Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute of Religion
Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music
New York, New York

March 3rd, 2022

Advisor: Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler

Summary

This thesis is about the use and meaning of the poetry of Israeli poet, Yehuda Amichai (1923-2000) in the context of Reform worship. My study of his work analyzes how he references liturgy in his poems, how progressive communities use his poetry as liturgical material, and how his poetry has been set to music both for the American Synagogue and Israeli popular culture. The introduction includes an overview of how the relationship between the United States and Israel over the last eighty years is ultimately responsible for liturgical innovation in both places. Chapters one, two, three, and four each study three poems as they relate to a facet of Jewish life that Amichai wrote about with frequency. For each poem, I analyze Amichai's use of intertextual allusion and provide my own insights into their meaning. For six of the twelve poems, I analyze musical settings, both written by Israeli popular singers and American synagogue composers, which reveal deeper layers to these poems and their potential for musical use in the synagogue. Chapter one is concerned with High Holiday liturgy. The poems studied in chapter two are about the synagogue and accompanying rituals. Chapter three holds three close readings of memorial poems: Israeli public memorial ceremonies, individual loss, and the interrelatedness of the High Holidays and memory. Chapter four examines Amichai's use of "common" liturgy, both daily and for shabbat. The appendix is a chart that categorizes the liturgical and musical uses of Amichai's poetry uncovered in my research. Interest in Amichai's work as liturgical material has greatly increased in the last twenty years, and this thesis supports its use and hopes to further expand on potential uses of Yehuda Amichai's poetry.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents 3

Introduction 4

Chapter 1: High Holidays ימים נוראים 16

- Before בטרם 16
- And That is Your Glory וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתֵךְ 25
- The Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela מסעות בנימין האחרון מטודילה 38

Chapter 2: Synagogue בית כנסת 53

- Whoever Wrapped in a Tallit מִי שֶׁהִתְעַטֵּף בְּטַלִּית 54
- Song Without an End שִׁיר אֵינְסוֹפִי 65
- I Studied Love in my Childhood Synagogue לָמַדְתִּי אַהֲבָה בְּיַלְדוּתִי בְּבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת 71

Chapter 3: Memorial Poems אַזכָּרָה 78

- El Malei Rachamim אֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים 78
- Yom Kippur יוֹם כִּפּוּר 86
- What is the Correct Way to Stand at a Memorial Ceremony? וְאֵיךְ עוֹמְדִים בְּטֶקֶס זִכָּרוֹן? 93

Chapter 4: Liturgy תפלה 97

- My God, the Soul that You have Given Me אֱלֹהַי, הַנְּשָׁמָה שֶׁנָּתַתָּ בִּי 97
- Song for the Sabbath Eve שִׁיר לֵיל שַׁבָּת 102
- Ein K'Eloheinu אֵין כֵּאלֹהֵינוּ 111

Conclusion 119

Appendix: Liturgical and Musical uses of Amichai's Poetry 121

Bibliography 129

Introduction

This thesis is about the use and meaning of the poetry of Israeli poet, Yehuda Amichai (1923-2000) in the context of Reform worship. His poetry is widely used in Progressive and Reform prayer books, despite his being categorized as a secular poet. My study of his work analyzes how he references liturgy in his poems, how progressive communities use his poetry as liturgical material, and how his poetry has been set to music both for the American Synagogue and Israeli popular culture. The ties between Israel and the United States over the last eighty years is ultimately responsible for the liturgical use of Amichai's poetry in both places.

The relationship between American Reform Judaism and Israel can be examined through the lens of liturgy by way of its attitudes toward Zionism and modern Hebrew / Zionist literature, and where modern Hebrew or Zionist literary materials surface in Reform prayer books. The Reform Movement's first prayer book, edited by Isaac S. Moses, was *The Union Prayer Book* published in 1892. This siddur was an amalgamation of Isaac Meyer Wise's *Minhag America* (1857) and David Einhorn's *Olat Tamid* (1858). Upon its release, a group of rabbis led by Kaufmann Kohler and Emil G. Hirsch sought to change the liturgy published in 1892, successfully recalling it and publishing *The Union Prayerbook Vol. 1* in 1895. This prayer book, mostly in English, has a universalist orientation, which rejects the traditional topics of peoplehood, chosenness, the resurrection, and return to the land of Israel. After the Reform movement undertook the Columbus Platform in 1937, which supported the rebuilding of Palestine as a safe haven for victims of anti-semitic persecution in Europe, a newly revised version of the

prayerbook was published in 1940 which incorporated the English prayer, "Uphold the hands of our brothers who toil to rebuild zion,"[1] in liturgy for Shabbat evening.

By the time Israel was established in 1948, Anti-Zionist American Rabbis were few, and a love of Israel became a central tenet of Reform Judaism. The devastation of the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel created a need for a new edition of the prayerbook, the compilation process of which began in the 1960s. In the United States, this era coincided with the climax of the Civil Rights Movement, ending in 1968, the Vietnam War ending in 1975, and a wave of sexual and substance exploration between 1960-1980. Additionally, during the Reagen administration, the US began to provide Israel with political and financial support. In 1975, the *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayer Book* was distributed and celebrated. This new edition articulated the movement's commitment to the State of Israel as the Jewish homeland, and incorporated liturgy for *Tisha B'av*, *Yom HaShoah*, and *Yom Haatzmaut*– the first liberal prayer book in the United States to include a service celebrating the establishment of the State of Israel. It changed its English translations in support of gender neutrality, and "thee" and "thou" shifted to "you." It includes ten services for Friday evening, six for Shabbat morning, weekdays, and special occasions. To understand why American prayer books are formatted as they are, Rabbi Larry Hoffman[2] links prayer books to economic history. He compares the 1895 Union Prayer Book to the Model T ford, reflecting an industrial economy geared toward standardization and a unified experience. Gates of Prayer served a post World War II service economy, where ten service options for Friday evening

---

[1] *The Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship, Newly Revised Edition* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1940), 68.
[2] Interview from Reform Judaism Magazine (Summer, 2006) www.reformjudaismmag.org.

sought to meet the whole community's needs. *Gates of Prayer* included poetry by the following poets: Nelly Sachs, Kathleen Raine, E.E. Cummings, Robert Frost, Leonard Cohen, among others. Using the poetry of great American poets, both Jews and non-Jews, was an innovation of this prayer book, though Hebrew poets were not included. Despite this, it did include more Hebrew than previous Reform prayer books.

The 1960's-1980's in America also featured a spiritual outgrowth of organized smaller groups and communities known as the *havurah* movement, which brought "the personal into the religious domain…included less hierarchical structures of governance and for leading services, empowering its members to be full participants in their Jewish lives. The attempt to provide an alternative and its direction finds an echo now with the Israeli communities…"[3] These smaller, independent communities utilized a more eclectic array of texts and prayers, and were frequently groups of friends who knew each other well. Additionally, the neo-Hasidic expressions of ecstatic singing and dancing appealed to these groups, further separating them from Reform Synagogues.[4] These communities and their organizational and worship styles impacted the style of the independent secular communities formed in Israel in the early 2000s, which will be elaborated on later in this chapter.

By 1980, the *Gates of Prayer* was viewed as a book of material that lacked cohesion between liturgical sections. Additionally, it still referred to God using masculine pronouns, making it outdated for a post-second-wave-feminism Reform community. To address these problems and increase the poetic nature of the Reform prayer book, Israeli

---

[3] Adina B. Newberg. "New Prayers, Here and Now: Reconnecting to Israel Through Engaging in Prayer, Poetry, and Song" *Israel Studies Forum* (23:2, Berghahn Books, 2008), 88.
[4] Newberg, *Israel Studies Forum*, 88.

poet T. Carmi was engaged by the CCAR in 1981 to offer post-biblical (liturgical and non-liturgical) Hebrew texts that could be part of the next iteration of Reform liturgy. A 1985 study surveyed congregants in Reform communities toward the goal of creating a more meaningful siddur, and their feedback was that the numbered services in Gates of Prayer did not fit the spiritual needs of everyone– it was too targeted at specific groups, meaning each service left part of the community feeling unfulfilled. They wanted accurate translations of prayers rather than paraphrased language. They wanted more poetry.

In 2007, the Reform movement published *Mishkan T'filah*– an innovative prayerbook with a layout consisting of one traditional prayer per two-page spread. On the right side is the Hebrew text, translation, and transliteration, and on the left are alternative meditations and readings related to the prayer's theme. Unlike its predecessors, *Mishkan T'filah* provides many options for worshippers, but on the same page, creating the possibility for a singular worship experience. This emphasizes that the act of praying matters more than the words themselves, and allows for an individual prayer experience within the context of the community. In keeping with Reform Judaism's "big tent" ideal, many interpretive readings on the left side of the page are palatable to those who struggle to believe in God and are seeking text centered on the Human Condition.

On the poetic and theological inclusivity of *Mishkan T'filah*, Rabbi Sheldon Marder wrote the following:

> By the time Elyse Frishman led the CCAR's creation of *Mishkan T'filah,* decades of discourse and experimentation had laid a strong foundation for the pervasiveness of modern piyutim in Reform prayer books. With *Mishkan T'filah'*s publication in 2007, the poetry of Bialik, Leah

> Goldberg, and Yehuda Amichai was now fully at home among the works of Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Yehuda Halevi, and the psalmists.[5]

Amichai is frequently called a modern *paytan* or as *The New Yorker* said, "the secular psalmist,"[6] though he might have dismissed any such titles. Yehuda Amichai's poetry, specifically, has been frequently used in the many of liturgical publications from the CCAR since 2007, when *Mishkan T'filah*[7] included three English translations of his poems in their Shabbat siddur. *Mishkan T'filah for the House of Mourning,*[8] published in 2010, included two of his poems. In 2015, the Reform movement published its Machzor for the Days of Awe, *Mishkan HaNefesh.*[9] All told, in the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur prayer books, Amichai poems appear fifteen times. *Lakol Zman V'eit,*[10] the CCAR's newest lifecycle anthology, was published the same year and included two of his poems. Published in 2017, *Mishkan HaLev for S'lichot and the Month of Elul* used two of his poems.

The Israeli Movement for Progressive Judaism published their prayerbook, *Siddur Ha'avodah Shebalev,* in 1982. This prayerbook used both Hebrew and Yiddish modern poetry, "inspiring a generation of creative liturgists, and laid the groundwork for the recent *series of editions* of *Siddur Erev Shabbat Umoed* of the Tel Aviv community *Beit*

---

[5] Sheldon Marder. *What Happens When We Use Poetry in our Prayer Books– And Why?* (CCAR Journal, the Reform Jewish Quarterly, Summer 2013), 18.
[6] https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/01/04/like-a-prayer
[7] *Mishkan Tefilah, A Reform Siddur for Shabbat*. (New York, New York: CCAR Press, 2007). Poems included: "Appendix to the Vision of Peace" 61, "Whoever Wrapped in a Tallit in his Youth" 73, "What is my Lifespan" 123.
[8] *Mishkan Tefilah, For the House of Mourning*. (New York, New York: CCAR Press, 2010). Poems included: "Beterem" 24b, "Chalon Tamid" 34b.
[9] *Mishkan HaNefesh, Machzor for the Days of Awe, Rosh Hashanah*. (New York, New York: CCAR Press, 2015.) *Mishkan Hanefesh, Machzor for the Days of Awe, Yom Kippur* (New York, New York: CCAR Press, 2015).
[10] *Lakol Z'man Vaeit, For Sacred Moments*. (New York, New York: CCAR Press, 2015. Supplemental material) Poems included: "Free," "A Man in his Life."

T'filah Israeli (2011)."[11] Beit T'filah Israeli, an independent, Egalitarian community based in Tel Aviv founded by Rabbi Esteban Gottfried (who was ordained by the Jerusalem campus of HUC) published their *siddur*[12] in 2013, utilizing Amichai's poetry in seven places. Beit T'filah's worship services are frequently attended by American Jews, and their worship style is musically similar to many Hebraically-oriented, progressive/Reform communities in the United States– specifically the unaffiliated community B'nai Jeshurun on the Upper West Side. Leaders of both communities are connected as they visit one another.[13] *T'filat HaAdam*, the Israeli Reform Movement's newest siddur published in 2021, includes his work in six places.

Secular Israeli interest in Judaism surfaced in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War (1973) as both secular and religious Israelis were forced to reckon with the devastation and their identity as Israelis, as well as their relationship to their national religion. This reckoning resulted in a renewed interest in spirituality, prompting many young Israelis to travel to India in the 1980s upon completing their Army service, exploring eastern philosophy and spirituality. This, in combination with the strengthening ties of Israeli and American communities, the Oslo Accords, and distrust of Israeli politics created a new hunger for Jewish reclamation. Soon secular *Batei Midrash* were established, and as an outgrowth from this, secular prayer communities began to form.[14]

---

[11] Marder, *What Happens When We Use Poetry in our Prayer Books– And Why?* 17.
[12] *Siddur Erev Shabbat Umoed: Beit T'filah Israeli*. Tel Aviv, Israel, 2013.
[13] Newberg, *Israel Studies Forum*, 88.
[14] Yaron Kapitulnik, "The Liturgy and Ritual of Independent Congregations in Israel," Rabbinic Thesis, HUC-JIR, Jan 2010, 20.
http://library.huc.edu/pdf/theses/Kapitulnik%20Yaron-NY-Rab-2010%20rdf.pdf

According to Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler, this confluence of religiosity and secularism in Israel gained prominence after the assasination of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin. She writes:

> Ever since the assasination of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin on November 4th, 1995, an effort has been underway to infuse secular Israeli identity and Zionist Hebrew Culture with a new connection to classical Jewish texts and Jewish religious expression. If the secular Kibbutz community had previously ceded critical Jewish, textual and religious ground to the haredi and religious Zionist camps, and if Rabin's religious Zionist assassin, Yigal Amir, had justified his heinous act on the basis of Jewish religious principle, a new determination took root among Kibbutz and other liberal Israeli educators and community leaders to reclaim Jewish texts, values, and religious practices on their own terms.[15]

As these secular prayer communities began to form, they were influenced by the style and structure of the 1960's-80's American *Havurah* movement mentioned above. Interpersonal relationships, ecstatic song and dance, alternative readings, and meditation are commonalities between them. With that said, the secular Jewish Israeli population is inherently Judaically literate. Secular Israelis study *Tanach* throughout their public education, and Judaism is baked into the daily life of Israel. Unlike citizens of other countries, Jewish Israelis have been categorized by religious observance as the overarching principle of their identities– either they are observant, or they are not. More recently, many Israelis have been rejecting this black and white binary, opting instead for a hybrid or syncretic sense of secular religious identity.

As the leaders of these communities (Esteban Gottfreid of BTI, Yoel Sykes and Daphna Rosenberg of Jerusalem's *Nava Tehila*) visit American Reform congregations and American Reform clergy and seminary students continue to spend time in Israel, their

---

[15] Wendy Zierler, "Anthological Poetics," in *Since 1948*, Nancy Berg and Naomi Sokoloff eds. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020) 59.

similarities are not limited to worship style but include similarities in their *siddurim*.[16] Between the publication of *Mishkan T'filah* in 2007 and the *Mishkan HaNefesh machzorim* for High holidays in 2015, the similarities between American Reform Siddurim and liberal Israeli siddurim increased. Beit T'filah Israeli's *Siddur Erev Shabbat Umoed* utilizes a similar layout to *Mishkan T'filah*, with traditional prayers inhabiting one side of the page and their thematically associated poems and songs on the page opposite them. Beit T'filah Israeli uses five selections of Abraham Joshua Heschel, celebrated American Rabbi and theologian, translated into Hebrew. The 2015 Reform machzorim include the original Hebrew of some Amichai selections as well as their translations, whereas *Mishkan T'filah* only includes english translations of his Hebrew poems. *T'filat HaAdam*, the new Israeli Reform prayer book (2021) uses a similar layout, with modern Hebrew poetry interspersed throughout the liturgy. Furthermore, poetry written in English has been translated into Hebrew and utilized in this prayerbook, too[17]– the same way that American Reform prayer books use English translations of Hebrew poets. This convergence between communities continues to make space for the use of Hebrew poems in American prayer spaces and vice versa, each becoming more accepted in this context.

Though frequently labeled as a secular, atheistic poet, Amichai himself viewed his work as a conduit of religious content:

> Every word we use (of Hebrew) carries in and of itself connotations from the Bible, the Siddur, the Midrash, the Talmud. Every word reverberates through the halls of Jewish history. Coming from a religious background the spoken language I use still retains for me the original traditional flavor. In my poems I work with both levels, the new and the old, simultaneously.

[16] Zierler, *Since 1948*, 60.
[17] *Siddur T'filat HaAdam*, Hebrew Translation of Leonard Cohen poem, 88.

> In my poems I try to recreate and reinterpret. In this sense my writing is genuinely Jewish. -Yehuda Amichai[18]

Yehuda Amichai's writing has indeed become religious material, used as liturgy in both Progressive Israeli and Reform prayer books. The reason for this is that his poems and identity transcend the need to be in a fixed position on the binaries that pervade the life of a liberal Jew– American or Israeli. Reform and progressive Judaism both refute these binaries, in that both include aspects of secular and religious engagement. One element of his writing which makes it distinctly Jewish is his use of intertextuality. He draws equally from Jewish texts and practice and a secular lifestyle. Woven with references to liturgy, *Tanach*, and *Talmud*, he scaffolds everyday situations with pieces of *Torah*– both literally and metaphorically, as his use of Jewish text forces the reader to understand both the traditional Hebrew reference and its poetically secular surrounding in a new way. For a Jewishly literate davener, Amichai defamiliarizes common Jewish concepts and themes, relating them to something so common that it is overlooked. For someone only reading an English translation of an Amichai poem, his struggle with God, use of metaphor, and constant search for holiness within the mundane resonate deeply with modern life.

Personally, Amichai's poetry outside has been a recurring comfort and interest to me throughout my cantorial education. I came to love his writing outside of the liturgical context and so, it functioned as secular liturgy in my life as a seminary student. During my year-in-Israel, I read Amichai poems when I felt lonely in my Jerusalem apartment. I read them sometimes to my (now) husband as we fell in love that year. He stayed in Israel

---

[18]Glenda Abramson, *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai: A Thematic Approach* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1989), 14.

another year and so I went back to reading Amichai by myself on the Upper West Side. The following year, the pandemic hit, and I returned to his poems once again. The reason I return to his poetry during difficult times is the same reason I argue that his poetry is suitable for liturgical and religious use. Though his poetry is as clever and cynical as his critics suggest, his message is fundamentally hopeful. He doesn't shy away from the difficult elements of life: loss, struggle with God, longing, love. Frequently, these are the reasons why progressive Jews find themselves in synagogue to begin with.

This thesis looks at Amichai's work through the lens of liturgy, and provides close readings of poems that have not yet been analyzed, as well as poems that are already used in prayer books. In this way, my thesis adds to the discussion started by Rabbi Craig Axler, who wrote his 2003 Rabbinic thesis on liturgical aspects of Amichai poetry.[19] In the best way, interest in Amichai's work as liturgical material has greatly increased since then, as evidenced by the recent publications of the CCAR and progressive Israeli siddurim. Amichai, seen as both a secular poet and now a posthumous liturgist, has achieved a super-canonical status– his poetry serves as a kind of substitute prayer book.[20] Like many celebrated Israeli poets, his work has frequently been set to secular popular music in Israel. Because of his inclusion in Reform prayer books over the last twenty years, contemporary American composers have written more formal musical settings for his poetry, both in the original Hebrew and English translations. Where relevant, this thesis provides musical analyses of musical settings, which reveal deeper layers to these poems and their potential for musical use in the synagogue.

---

[19] Craig H. Axler. "Liturgical Aspects in the Poetry of Yehuda Amichai," Rabbinical Thesis, Hebrew Union College‑Jewish Institute of Religion, Feb. 28, 2003.
[20] Zierler, *Since 1948*, 60.

Liturgy and synagogue music are the domain of the Reform cantorate, and my thesis aims to expand the usage of Amichai's work as educational and religious material. As instruments of Torah, the role of the cantor is to demonstrate that the new and the old can work to elevate one another, and to preserve our Jewish history through melody while also writing new songs– new Torah– with our communities. Throughout his work, Amichai amalgamates the ancient and the modern to create a personal *midrash*. A knowledge based, artistic confluence of traditional and new ideas is exactly what Reform Judaism seeks and celebrates. Despite this, continued use of Amichai poetry as progressive religious material is not encouraged by all who love his work. In her book *The Full severity of Compassion,* Amichai scholar and translator Chana Kronfeld criticizes the popularity of his work in the United States, attributing its use to readerly obtuseness:

> I find that the great popularity of his poetry in the United States has been accompanied by some readerly obtuseness to what this poetry actually says and does. Amichai has often found his way into the Jewish American prayer book and rabbinical sermon, but not because of a prevailing interest in his iconoclastic engagement with Jewish sacred texts—although, thankfully, that type of countertraditional reading is becoming increasingly "kosher," leading a growing number of "alternative" Jewish American congregations and their rabbis to read Amichai's poetry *for* its irreverence, feminism, and critique of the establishment tout court. All too frequently, however, have I seen Amichai's poems embraced by American readers who, knowing very little about the sacred texts he takes apart, remain unaware of—and uninterested in—his resistant, anticlerical poetics and are lulled into complacency by the apparent simplicity of his poems' surface. The mere reference to prayers, God, and the Bible in his poetry has qualified him for the role of a religious Jewish poet laureate for the Jewish American community. Thus, Amichai's poetry is not infrequently used to provide readers in the United States with something textual to hold onto, either as a marker of some fuzzy, feel-good Jewish identity or, more generally, for its pleasantly vague sense of Old World tradition….The Amichai I wish to reclaim in this study is the poet for whom simplicity

> and accessibility are serious *ethical* principles, guidelines for a poetic effect and a verbal art that can be part of the fabric of everyday life…[21]

She cites the example of the Jewish American Reconstructionist *Machzor*'s use of a particular section from Amichai's "Songs of Zion the Beautiful," which expresses frustration for the memorial rituals for the Israeli Army's fallen soldiers, and shows how this section is appropriated and stripped of its critical messaging in order to fit into the martyrology section of the *Yom Kippur Musaf* service. This instance is not the only unfortunate example of Amichai's poetry losing its essence as a result of liturgical repurpose– in chapter 1 of this thesis I examine how the Reform movement's use of "*Beterem*" in *Mishkan Tefilah, for the House of Mourning*[22] is unfaithful to the poem's message. Despite these cases, I disagree that the inclusion of his poetry in Jewish worship indicates ignorance, obtuseness, and censorship. As Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler states in her article about anthological poetics, to read Amichai's work as "so God-skeptical and anti-institutional as to be incompatible with prayer indirectly simplifies Amichai's poetry, not to mention that it underestimates the complexities of contemporary prayer."[23] As a man who infused his secular life with Jewish meaning, it is counterintuitive to use his work to reinforce the binary of what material belongs to religion, and what material does not. The very act of prayer in progressive spaces is a combination of religiosity and secularism– an inbetween– the very poetic philosophy that Kronfeld argues is the foundation of Amichai's work. As she suggests above, I believe that the relatability and accessibility of Amichai's poems and their commentary on everyday life are exactly why progressive Jews choose to include his work in their prayer books.

---

[21] Chana Kronfeld, *The Full Severity of Compassion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 3.
[22] *Mishkan Tefilah, for the House of Mourning*, 24b.
[23] Zierler, *Since 1948*, 62.

Chapter 1: High Holidays

ימים נוראים

Before[24] בטרם

Before the gate is shuttered	בטרם השער ייסגר
Before every word is uttered	בטרם כל האמור יאמר,
Before I become another,	בטרם אהיה אחר,
Before wise blood is congealed,	בטרם יקריש דם נבון,
Before things in a cabinet are concealed,	בטרם יסגרו הדברים בארון,
Before the cement is sealed,	בטרם יתקשה הבטון
Before all the holes in flutes are closed	בטרם יסתמו כל נקבי החלילים
Before all the rules are disclosed	בטרם יוסברו כל הכללים
Before the dishes are disposed	בטרם ישברו את הכלים,
Before the law becomes clear	בטרם החוק יכנס לתוקפו,
Before God's hands disappear	בטרם אלוהים יסגור את כפו
Before we leave from here.	בטרם נלך מפה

Amichai's poem "*Beterem*," or "before," encapsulates the inbetweenness of "the moment after an action is conceived but before it actually gets done, when one lives between these realities."[25] Much of Amichai's work dwells in this liminal space.[26] Amichai scholar Chana Kronfeld argues that inbetweenness, or *beynayim*, is the poetic philosophy that guides all of Amichai's work. Amichai's choice of the preposition *beterem* as the repeated anaphoric opening of every line of the poem calls out for exegesis. One thinks of its first biblical usage in Genesis 19:4 when, before sleep, the townspeople of Sodom surround Lot's house, after he has taken in the angels for the night. [27]

[24] Yehuda Amichai, "Beterem," *Shirim 1948-1962* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1963), 201. English translation by Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler.
[25] Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler's study of this poem.
[26] Kronfeld, *The Full Severity of Compassion,* 5.
[27] Rabbi Steven Exler alerted Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler to this reference.

Genesis 19:4:

טֶרֶם, יִשְׁכָּבוּ, וְאַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר אַנְשֵׁי סְדֹם נָסַבּוּ עַל-הַבַּיִת, מִנַּעַר וְעַד-זָקֵן: כָּל-הָעָם, מִקָּצֶה

They had not yet laid down, when the townspeople, the men of Sodom,
young and old—all the people to the last man—gathered about the house.

In this verse from Genesis, the word טֶרֶם (*terem*) is used to describe the moment after the angels have eaten, but before they've gone to bed. This crucial moment of in betweenness is exactly when the chaos ensues. This intertextual reference shows us how Amichai values liminal space for its unsuspecting potential to expose the truth. We frequently value events that we can easily name and rarely explore what happened to us between them. This poem encapsulates the experience of "almost," just as Lot almost succeeded in keeping the angels from witnessing the evil of his community, Amichai's "Beterem" utilizes the High Holiday image of *Neilah*'s gates, not yet open nor closed.

The concept of liminality is particular to the High Holidays, which perhaps contributes to Amichai's endless references to the Days of Awe in his poetry. In the context of the *Neilah* service, the image of the closing gates draws us to the moment before the *Yamim Noraim* end. As in all of Amichai's poems, his words here evoke the daily experience of the mundane– references to cement and dishes are mixed with evocations of abstract states of mind or emotions– the innate human fear of change and doubt about God's involvement in our lives. The poem utilizes many passive verbs– ten of its twelve lines describe an action being completed without divulging who exactly is completing them. In writing this way, Amichai incorporates a common theme in his work-- he illuminates the possibility that God is absent and empowers us as people to be the arbiters of our own fate. Are we completing these tasks before the gates we have built ourselves close on us? Or is God anthropomorphized in this poem, and completing these

necessary tasks the way we do as humans before an approaching deadline? For many Jews, their relationship to God is most potent during the days of Awe, and so to them, this is God's busiest time. During the Yamim Noraim, we feel God's presence looming over us, and as a result, are more quick to do *t'shuvah* than we are the rest of the year. This poem asks who is doing the work required during the High Holidays. Is God working too, with us, or are we working alone?

Liturgically in the Reform Movement *machzor Mishkan HaNefesh*, this poem is placed in the *S'lichot* section of the *Neilah* service, after *P'tach Lanu Sha'ar* (open the gates for us). This image of the closing gates is again invoked in the *piyyut El Nora Alilah*, where we petition God to grant us forgiveness at *bish'at haneilah* (this hour of locking up). The High Holidays are not the only time our liturgy uses the symbolism of gates to represent a connection to God.

In the liturgy for the Torah service on festivals and *shabbatot*, we read the words of Psalm 24:9:

שְׂאוּ שְׁעָרִים רָאשֵׁיכֶם וְשָׂאוּ פִּתְחֵי עוֹלָם וְיָבֹא מֶלֶךְ הַכָּבוֹד׃

> Lift up your heads, gates! Lift them up, you everlasting doors, so the King of glory can come in.

The *Talmud* writes that these were the pleading words of King Solomon to the gates themselves. After he completed the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the gates wouldn't open to bring in the ark in order to install it in the Holy of Holies. According to Rav Kook, the gates' refusal to open for the installation of the ark is a metaphor for the lack of spiritual preparedness among the people. Perhaps God, too, waits for us to be spiritually prepared enough before God opens the gates.

In this psalm, God is described as a mighty warrior. This strong facet of God is not the one we see as the gates of repentance close on the holiest day of the year. While a valiant God may suffice for the weekly reading of Torah, in the Neilah service, we are drawn toward a familiar, more intimate and providential God– a God who keeps the gates open for us.

Like psalm 24, the gates we reference in Neilah are indeed the closing gates of the Temple in Jerusalem. The word Neilah means closing or locking, and this service was originally called "*Neilat Shearim*." Spiritually, the service represents that God wants to forgive us, and we are offered our last chance for atonement before our fate is sealed. In the third line of the poem, we read "*beterem ehyeh acher*"-- before I become another, or before I become different. This connotes change, and could be viewed as the process of t'shuvah, where we resolve to change ourselves. Alternatively, it could represent the other that we become in death, when we have no ability to change.

In line 5, the word "*aron*"" could be cabinet, or bookcase. The word "*d'varim*" means both things (items) and words. Before the gates are closed, our "things," our bad habits and behaviors, are still changeable. We are offered a last chance to become better people before God is finished inscribing names into the book of life, and it takes its place once again on the shelf. Alternatively, the *Aron Kodesh* is the synagogue ark. It is customary to leave the ark open for the entirety of the Neilah service, signifying that the gates are still open to us. Before we close the ark, we want to believe that God is open to hearing our prayers. In this poem, Amichai doubts whether God is actually listening to us. The word *aron* also means coffin, and in the context of the poem and the days of awe, we ponder the questions from *Unetaneh Tokef* about who shall live and who shall die, and

how. On Yom Kippur, we are reminded of our human fragility and the possibility of death.

The imagery in Amichai's "Beterem" is of a set of hands, actively putting items away, sealing cement, and clanging dishes together. When Yom Kippur ends, the active hands that Amichai describe vanish from our line of sight. While Amichai's poem takes an agnostic stance and is doubtful of God as an active presence in our lives, he mirrors the image of God's hands as they are used in Neilah liturgy in his poem. He writes:

בטרם אלוהים יסגור את כפו

Before God's hand closes

The Neilah service contains several *piyyutim*, and liturgically speaking, *Atah Notein Yad* and *Atah Hivdalta* take the place of *Al Cheit Shechatanu Lefanecha* and *Ashamnu*. The inclusion of these piyyutim and their messaging represents an ideological shift in the liturgy. Instead of squeezing in more confession of sin before the gates close, we read, "*atah notein yad laposhim veyimincha peshuta lekabel shavin.*" You stretch out your hand to those who sin and your right hand is open to those who want to return. At the last moment, we turn and address God directly, and God opens God's hand to us. Amichai's reference to God's hands are in the penultimate line of the poem, just as in the liturgical landscape of the high holy days, "Atah Notein Yad" is in the last service before the holiday ends and we all leave, as Amichai suggests.

Amichai closes the poem with the words, "Before we leave here." The use of the word *po* here is vague and open-ended, connoting many possible places and by extension, many possible exits. On *Chanukah*, the word *po*, as in "*nes gadol hayah po*," (A Great miracle took place here), means the Land of Israel. Alternatively, this line may refer to the quick exit people make at the end of Neilah so that they can go home and eat. Still

alternatively, the word po can refer, in the largest possible sense, to this world and this life and the exit, to death.

As mentioned above, this poem is used in the Reform movement's *Mishkan HaNefesh* for Yom Kippur in the Neilah service, on the left side of the page facing the piyyut "*P'tach Lanu Sha'ar.*" This poem is one of countless references Amichai makes to Yom Kippur, specifically the *Neilah* service.[28] *Mishkan HaNefesh* includes both an English translation of this poem and the original Hebrew. This poem's pairing with its correlated liturgy gives the davener an opportunity to contextualize the liminality expressed in the traditional piyyut in a modern context. This poem is also included in *Mishkan T'filah for the House of Mourning* (2010). In this prayerbook, the poem is placed in the Shalom section of the *Amidah*, as an interpretive reading paired with *Shalom Rav*. Only an English interpretation is included, heavily edited:

BEFORE THE GATE has been closed,
Before the last question is posed,
Before I am transposed.
Before the weeds fill the gardens,
Before there are no pardons,
Before the concrete hardens.
Before all the flute-holes are covered,
Before things are locked in the cupboard,
Before the rules are discovered.
Before the conclusion is planned,
Before the closing of God's hand,
Before we have nowhere to stand.
Bless us with peace.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יְיָ, הַמְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּשָּׁלוֹם.
Baruch atah, Adonai, ham'vareich et amo Yisrael bashalom.

[28] "*Yom Kippur*" from *Gam Haegrof Hayah Pa'am Yad P'tucha v'Etzbaot, Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Volume 5, 119.

Given that this prayerbook is constructed specifically for a *shiva minyan*, the editors of this prayerbook have removed and added lines to "Beterem" to make it fit in this context. This reinterpretation seeks to send the message of finding peace before death, making "bless us with peace" the concluding line. They pair this with the *chatima* for "Shalom Rav." These additions are infelicitous to the essence of this poem, which is very much a high holy day poem. While the possibility of death is inseparable from much of the liturgy of the High Holy Days, death is not the centerpiece of the poem. In contrast to this use in the prayer book for mourning, the use of this poem in *Mishkan HaNefesh* enhances the message of the liturgy while maintaining the integrity of the original poem. Amichai wrote many poems about death of all kinds– both personal and communal. He also wrote many poems about peace– finding peace in a war-torn country, and finding inner peace. For this reason, there are surely more appropriate Amichai poems to be used in siddurim intended for mourners.

Musical Analysis

Cantor Jonathan Comisar was ordained from the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred music at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute for Religion in 2000, and has served on its faculty since 2009. He studied piano at Oberlin Conservatory and completed his Masters in classical composition at the Manhattan School of Music. He is the Cantorial advisor for this thesis' accompanying cantorial recital. In discussing this composition, Cantor Comisar shared that he thinks of "change as being the most heartbreaking and hopeful thing at the same time. It's both. There's a relishing in things before they change, and the possibility of what they could become." He tried to evoke this sentiment in his composition of "Beterem." He mostly uses English in this setting, all

of which is taken from the translation used in Mishkan HaNefesh for Yom Kippur. The only addition he made was the line, “in the moment in the moment just before the moment.” When Comisar uses English translation in his work, he balances accessibility with honoring the original Hebrew. In this piece, he comments on the Neilah experience: “Whether you had a mystical experience in synagogue or you were mentally absent, if you vowed to change your life or you leave unchanged, there comes a point where we all leave and we have to move on with our lives. Time is inevitable.” He also considers the larger question of the heartbreaking and eternal Jewish experience of having to rise and leave a place they have settled.[29]

Musically, the piece was written for SATB choir, tenor and soprano soloists, flute, oboe, violin, and cello. The rhythm uses little syncopation, alternating between long sustained notes and melodic lines of eighth notes that delineate the 6/8 meter. Periodically, there are interspersed dotted rhythms with 32nd note flourishes. While consistently metrical, the sparse texture and sustained notes aurally create the impression intended by the composer, that we are “out of time.” Harmonically, the piece stays mostly within the g harmonic minor scale, utilizing many melodic augmented seconds and raised 4th scale degrees. This use of chromaticism invokes nusach (Ukrainian Dorian mode) and middle eastern sounds. The open sonorities, middle eastern harmonic palette and ornaments create a prayerful, atmospheric sound. This piece fits perfectly within the contemporary/classical liturgical music context and was intended for use in a Reform congregation on Yom Kippur.

Cantor Comisar invokes the severity of the decree that we know is inherent to our observance of Yom Kippur with several percussive moments in the piece. It depicts the

[29] Cantor Jonathan Comisar, interview, 1/25/22.

majesty intended for the holy days, but also makes space for the intimate experience of an individual in their community. Comisar's ability to achieve these opposites is an employment of the *beynayim* that pervades Amichai's poems. When the singers chant, "before the apertures of flutes are sealed," he paints the text by writing trills for the flute. The treatment of the line "before the hand of God is closed" has a tender and relational quality to it, hearkening to the familiar, forgiving God that we seek during the Neilah service. There is simplicity in the piece's ending, evoking the simplicity of Amichai's last line. Sung in unison; "before we rise to leave this place… and go." The end trails off, like footsteps leaving the synagogue on the holiest day of the year. Comisar adds an additional sentiment to those mentioned in the above liturgical analysis. On Yom Kippur, we physically rise to leave the synagogue, and in death we leave this world. In conversation about this composition, he understands this leaving to also represent the eternal uprooting of Jewish communities throughout history. Jews have so often lived in the state of beterem, of waiting for the other shoe to drop before they have to rise and leave once more.

And That is Your Glory וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתֵךְ[30]

With my large silence and my small outcry	וְהִיא תְהִלָּתֵךְ
I plough mingled seed.	מתוך פיוט לימים הנוראים
I've been through water and fire.	בִּשְׁתִיקָתִי הַגְּדוֹלָה וּבְצַעֲקָתִי הַקְּטַנָּה אֲנִי חוֹרֵשׁ כִּלְאַיִם.
I've been in Jerusalem and in Rome. Perhaps	הָיִיתִי בַּמַּיִם וְהָיִיתִי בָּאֵשׁ.
I'll get to Mecca.	הָיִיתִי בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם וּבְרוֹמָא. אוּלַי אֶהְיֶה בְּמֶכָּה.
But this time God is hiding, and man shouts,	אַךְ הַפַּעַם אֱלֹהִים מִתְחַבֵּא וְאָדָם צוֹעֵק אַיֶּכָּה .
"Where are you?"	וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתֵךְ.
And that is your glory.	
	אֱלֹהִים שׁוֹכֵב עַל גַּבּוֹ מִתַּחַת לַתֵּבֵל,
God lies on his back underneath the universe,	תָּמִיד עָסוּק בְּתִקּוּן, תָּמִיד מַשֶּׁהוּ מִתְקַלְקֵל.
always fixing, something always goes wrong.	רָצִיתִי לִרְאוֹתוֹ כֻּלּוֹ, אַךְ אֲנִי רוֹאֶה
I wanted to see him whole, but I see only the	רַק אֶת סַלְיוֹת נְעָלָיו וַאֲנִי בּוֹכֶה.
soles of his shoes, and I weep.	וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתוֹ.
And that is his glory.	
	אֲפִלּוּ הָעֵצִים הָלְכוּ לִבְחֹר לָהֶם מֶלֶךְ.
Even the trees went to choose themselves a king.	אֶלֶף פְּעָמִים הִתְחַלְתִּי אֶת חַיַּי מִכָּאן וָאֵילֵךְ.
I've started my life over a thousand times.	בִּקְצֵה הָרְחוֹב עוֹמֵד אֶחָד וּמוֹנֶה:
At the end of the street somebody stands and	אֶת זֶה וְאֶת זֶה וְאֶת זֶה וְאֶת זֶה.
counts on:	וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתֵךְ.
this one, and this one and this one and this one.	
And that is your glory.	אוּלַי כְּמוֹ פֶּסֶל עַתִּיק שֶׁאֵין בּוֹ זְרוֹעוֹת
	גַּם חַיֵּינוּ יָפִים יוֹתֵר, בְּלִי מַעֲשִׂים וּגְבוּרוֹת.
Perhaps like an ancient statue that has no arms	פִּרְקִי מֵמֶנִּי אֶת שִׁרְיוֹן גּוּפְיָתִי הַמַּצְהִיבָה,
Our lives, without deeds and heroes, would be	נִלְחַמְתִּי בְּכָל הָאַבִּירִים, עַד הַחַשְׁמַל כָּבָה.
more beautiful.	וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתִי.
Take off the armor of my yellowing undershirt	
I fought all the knights until the power went out.	תָּנוּחַ דַּעְתֵּךְ, דַּעְתֵּךְ רָצָה עִמִּי בְּכָל הַדֶּרֶךְ,
And that is my glory.	וְעַכְשָׁו הִיא עֲיֵפָה וְאֵין בָּהּ עוֹד עֵרֶךְ,
	אֲנִי רוֹאֶה אוֹתָךְ מוֹצִיאָה דָּבָר מִן הַמְּקֻרֵר,
Rest your mind, it ran with me all the way,	מוּאָרֶת מִתּוֹכוֹ בְּאוֹר שֶׁמֵּעוֹלָם אַחֵר.
Now it's tired and can offer no more.	וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתִי
I see you taking something out of the refrigerator	וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתוֹ
illuminated by it's light as if from another world.	וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתֵךְ.
And that is my glory	
and that is his glory	

[30] Yehuda Amichai, "V'hi Tehilatecha" *Shirim 1948-1962* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1963), 74-75. English translation adapted from Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell, trans., *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, (University of California Press: Berkeley, California), 11.

and that is your glory.	

"V'hi Tehilatecha" is a phrase that we find laced throughout Yom Kippur liturgy, and the themes of Yom Kippur are both obviously and discreetly the lifeblood of this poem. The title of Amichai's poem is taken from a Yom Kippur piyyut of the same name, which we recite during the Musaf service on Yom Kippur, directly before *Unetaneh Tokef*. The piyyut is riddled with contrast, each stanza ending with "V'hi Tehilatecha," and that is your glory. It juxtaposes contradictory images repeatedly to intensify the holiness of God: angels formed by ice and light are compared to men made of dust, roaring angelic hosts with nonsensical and evil people, floating clouds with men full of grief. Each stanza describes a fantastical image of a resplendent God in heaven and then compares it to its polar opposite: a human being suffering on earth. The piyyut is an alphabetical acrostic describing an all-powerful God who stands over the world, praised by all its inhabitants, and yet this God on high desires to be praised by sinful humans.

Two phrases are repeated in each stanza of the poem: "*Asher Eimatcha*" and "V'hi Tehilatecha," though your awe is with the angels...that is your glory. The repetitiveness of these phrases indicate a fear that these words of praise may be forgotten.[31] Liturgically, repetition indicates importance but also acts as a fence, keeping us focused on the message we're meant to glean from the prayer. Perhaps this is why Amichai preserved the repeating phrase "V'hi Tehilatecha," to draw attention to the fact that no matter what may surface in between the phrase, God's glory is named. The language in this piyyut paints a picture of a glorified but insecure God who, no matter how high God ascends, still needs acknowledgement from the weak. These contrasting images and the space

[31] Philip Birnbaum, *Mahzor Hashalem: High Holy Day Prayer Book* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1988), 788.

between them are the building blocks of Amichai's poetic structure in his "V'hi Tehilatecha," though he is concerned with the experience of "I", rather than the God of hosts. To establish this viewpoint, he begins the poem in the first person:

בִּשְׁתִיקָתִי הַגְּדוֹלָה וּבְצַעֲקָתִי הַקְּטַנָּה אֲנִי חוֹרֵשׁ כִּלְאַיִם.

With my large silence and my small outcry I plough mingled seed.

Amichai's decision to lead with images of voice fits the High Holiday context, insofar as the High Holy liturgy also intermingles elements of voice, volume and silence. Amichai grounds the reader in the *Yamim Noraim* by referencing the human cry that recurs physically throughout our high holy day liturgy in the plaintive responsive chant of *Al Cheit Shechatanu*, in the cries of *Ashamnu* and *bagadnu*, in the weeping of our *Yizkor* service. The cry and our voices are also textually referenced– in the evening and morning services on Yom Kippur, we hear the words of *Sh'ma Koleinu*, where we plead with God to hear our voice. In preparation for the High Holy Days it is customary to recite Psalm 27 during the month of *Elul*. Psalm 27 is viewed in its entirety as a cry for help which is distilled in verse 7:

שְׁמַע־יְהוָה קוֹלִי אֶקְרָא וְחָנֵּנִי וַעֲנֵנִי׃

Hear, God, my voice when I cry, be merciful to me and answer me.

In beginning his poem with the crying and silence evoked by our High Holiday liturgy, Amichai prepares the reader for the larger experience described throughout the poem– a man calling out to God, only to meet silence in return. Poignantly, Amichai establishes a recurring intertextual reference by connecting his large silence and small cry to the piyyut *Unetaneh Tokef*, which directly follows "V'hi Tehilatecha" in the *machzor*. This liturgical section is the foundation on which Amichai builds his poem. "Unetaneh

Tokef" describes the holy and methodological way that God assesses us during the days of awe. In its second paragraph we read, "*Uveshofar gadol yitaka, uvekol demama daka yishama*," the great *shofar* is sounded and the still small voice is heard. In directly quoting this line, Amichai uses the poetic "I" to express that instead of the shofar, his silence is large, and like the still small voice from the liturgy, his cry is small. He sets the stage for the countless contrasting images to come by using the words "חוֹרֵשׁ כִּלְאַיִם" from Deuteronomy 22: 9-10. These verses explain that sowing two kinds of seeds together is forbidden, as is plowing with an ox and ass yoked together. The "mingled seed" used here is the yoking together of silence and crying out, something that we do frequently in prayer. By using this distinctive biblical term, Amichai introduces his poetic method of yoking ideas that do not go together, both in this line and throughout the poem.

These opposites drawn from liturgy continue in the second line:

הָיִיתִי בַּמַּיִם וְהָיִיתִי בָּאֵשׁ

I've been through water and I've been through fire

This is a quotation both from the liturgical piyyut "V'hi Tehilatecha," as well as the *B'rosh Hashanah* paragraph of "Unetaneh Tokef" where we ask who will die by fire and who by water. The poetic "I" wades through these conflicting experiences in the first stanza, searching for the God he hasn't yet found. He looks for God in the obvious places, the religious centers of the world– similar to how one might look for their wallet or keys. God can't be found in Jerusalem or Rome, despite the claims of Judaism and Christianity, respectively. Perhaps one day, he'll go to Mecca to look as well, if he's ever able to travel there as an Israeli citizen.

The first stanza concludes with a reference to the first instance in Torah when God and humans are deeply disconnected. Amichai takes the exchange between God and Adam in Genesis 3:9 and flips it on its head: now God is hiding, and the speaker shouts "אַיֶּכָּה"-- Where are you? The extremes contained in this first stanza show us that the speaker is on a committed, albeit fruitless search to find God. If the liturgical piyyut paints the picture of an awesome God in heaven seeking praise from us on earth, Amichai portrays that we are on earth, enduring trials and tribulations, to find a God that won't show themself.

In the next stanza, it seems we are done searching and have located God, ironically not in one of the world's holiest sites. In true Amichai fashion, the holy is mixed with the ordinary. God is in a mechanic's garage, tinkering underneath the car that is this world. To connect this line to the liturgy of Yom Kippur, an additional piyyut read in the Yom Kippur *Ma'ariv* service also utilizes the phrase "V'hi Tehilatecha." Its opening paragraph is as follows:

It's Your way, our God, to defer your anger, both for the wicked and the good, and this is Your glory. Act for Your own sake, our God, and not for ours. Look at our condition, how destitute and empty we are.	דַּרְכְּךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְהַאֲרִיךְ אַפֶּךָ. לָרָעִים וְלַטּוֹבִים וְהִיא תְהִלָּתֶךָ: לְמַעַנְךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ עֲשֵׂה וְלֹא לָנוּ. רְאֵה עֲמִידָתֵנוּ דַּלִּים וְרֵקִים:

This piyyut is attributed to the earliest known liturgical poet, Yose ben Yose, who lived in 7th century Palestine. Similar to the "V'hi Tehilatecha" piyyut from the Musaf service, God's interactions with the wicked are connected here with "and this is your glory." They differ in that the piyyut from Musaf is grandiose and comments on the distance between a majestic God and us on earth, whereas this piyyut more closely

resembles the intimacy and dialogue with God that we find in prayer. The Musaf piyyut is one of praise, and this piyyut is one of petition, where we ask God to be forgiving of us. In my exploring the liturgical surroundings of this Ma'ariv piyyut, the line, "*Asher beyado mechkerei aretz"*[32] אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדוֹ מֶחְקְרֵי אָרֶץ, meaning, "the whole universe is under God's control" stood out to me in relation to Amichai's image of God as the car mechanic. Amichai may very well have had this in mind when he wrote of God, not standing over the world controlling it, but laying underneath it, tinkering with it. There is a modesty and simplicity to the image of God as a mechanic, another polar opposite to Yom Kippur's image of a God that controls the universe. We repetitively name God our *El Melech Yosheiv*, *Adonai Tzevaot*– the God who sits on a heavenly throne, the lord of hosts. Here, though, rather than sitting on a throne, God lies underneath a car, trying to repair it, but never completing the job. And even though this God is a mere mechanic, we still cannot see God's face. The notion of forbiddenness of God's visage recurs many times throughout *Tanach*. Again in reference to Psalm 27, we read in verse 8:

לְךָ ׀ אָמַר לִבִּי בַּקְּשׁוּ פָנָי אֶת־פָּנֶיךָ יְהוָה אֲבַקֵּשׁ׃

> On your behalf my heart says seek my face, God, I seek your face, but such glimpses remain unattainable.

In Genesis 3:8, the same section that Amichai explicitly referenced in the first stanza, we read that Adam and Eve hid themselves from "the face of God" after consuming forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge. After admitting to having murdered Abel, in Genesis 4:14 Cain explains that as part of his punishment he must "conceal himself from the face" of God. In Exodus 33:20, God tells Moses that "no man may see me and live." Much like the great and powerful Oz behind the curtain, Amichai

[32] Psalm 95:4.

suggests here that a God who won't reveal themself may not be as magnificent as they say they are.

This subtle accusation of God as a worshiped yet unqualified ruler continues into the next stanza of the poem. In the first sentence we encounter two explicit textual references, one from the Yamim Noraim and the other from the book of Judges.

אֲפִלּוּ הָעֵצִים הָלְכוּ לִבְחֹר לָהֶם מֶלֶךְ.

Even the trees went to choose themselves a king.

Rosh Hashanah is a celebration of both the birthday of the world and God's coronation as our King. *Malchuyot*, or God's Kingship, is one of three most important liturgical sections of the Rosh Hashanah Musaf service. As noted above, The High Holidays contain countless references to God's Kingship. Fittingly, the Rosh Hashanah morning service begins with the word "*HaMelech*."

Amichai further undercuts the majesty and regal quality of the service by referencing the biblical Yotam's Parable from the book of Judges 9:1-20, a biblical parable about a corrupt, aspiring king. In the parable, the bramble, an easily flammable, thorny tree that offers no shade and no fruit– symbolic of an overall lack of merit– is the one most eager to be crowned King. Other fruit-bearing trees were approached first– the olive, the fig– but none were willing to relinquish their fruit-bearing activities to rule. In mentioning this story, is Amichai suggesting that on Rosh Hashanah we, too, crown a corrupt ruler?[33] Alternatively, perhaps he is reaffirming his earlier statements about God's total absence by suggesting that even the trees are able to choose a King for themselves, and ours cannot even be identified.[34]

---

[33] Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler's study of this poem.
[34] Idea from Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler in conversation about this poem.

Rosh Hashanah, though awesome in nature, is a celebratory holiday. We accept and rejoice in God's renewed kingship. We also celebrate the creation of humanity and mark the beginning of a new year in the Hebrew calendar. Like the secular New Year, we treat Rosh Hashanah as an opportunity for rebirth and change. On Rosh Hashanah we aspire to have a year of blessing, of betterment, and of peace. On the secular New Year we make resolutions of a similar nature. All of this is relevant to the second line of the third stanza:

אֶלֶף פְּעָמִים הִתְחַלְתִּי אֶת חַיַּי מִכָּאן וָאֵילֵךְ.

I've started my life over a thousand times.

Each year on the Yamim Noraim we take stock of who we have been over the past year, and we engage in spiritual accounting. We atone for our sins and strive to be better. We apologize to those we have wronged, we forgive those who apologize to us, and we reckon with who we are. On both Rosh Hashanah and the secular New Year we delight in the possibility of a clean slate– we make resolutions[35] that we only sometimes keep, and then maybe make them again the next year or atone for how we didn't keep our promises to ourselves. We start our life over a thousand times, as Amichai suggests.

The metaphor of accounting is ubiquitous in the High Holiday liturgy. As if to respond to and undermine this, Amichai paints God as a sidewalk evangelist warning of the end of days, or a street person counting random passersby without a sense of theological order or purpose:

בִּקְצֵה הָרְחוֹב עוֹמֵד אֶחָד וּמוֹנֶה:
אֶת זֶה וְאֶת זֶה וְאֶת זֶה וְאֶת זֶה.

Down the street someone stands and counts:
this one and that one, this one and that one.

[35] Idea from Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler in conversation about this poem.

The *Avodah* service[36] in Yom Kippur liturgy describes how the *Kohen Gadol* (high priest) would carefully sprinkle the blood of his sacrifice to God in the Temple on Yom Kippur in a deliberately measured and choreographed manner: one time upward and seven times downward. He counted out loud as he did this to ensure he was doing it correctly:

> וְכָךְ הָיָה מוֹנֶה: אַחַת, אַחַת וְאַחַת, אַחַת וּשְׁתַּיִם, אַחַת וְשָׁלֹשׁ, אַחַת וְאַרְבַּע, אַחַת וְחָמֵשׁ, אַחַת וְשִׁשׁ, אַחַת וְשָׁבַע. יָצָא וְהִנִּיחוֹ עַל כַּן הַזָּהָב שֶׁבַּהֵיכָל

> And this is how he would count: one, one and one, one and two, one and three, one and four, one and five, one and six, one and seven. The High Priest then emerged from there and placed the bowl with the remaining blood on the golden pedestal in the Sanctuary.

If we were to remove the priest from the Temple, strip him of his vestments, and place him on a Jerusalem street corner in modern times, he would surely seem like the man Amichai describes. The repetitive pattern of Amichai's street counter is intrinsically connected to the priest's counting from the above section of liturgy. It also echoes (and subverts) our experience of God as an accountant. We read in the piyyut mentioned above from Erev Yom Kippur (that contains V'hi Tehilatecha) that God "*ma'avir rishon rishon*" מַעֲבִיר רִאשׁוֹן רִאשׁוֹן. This comes from *Talmud* (Rosh Hashanah 17a) where we learn that God examines each sin individually before weighing them on a scale. Rashi "explains this expression to mean that if one's good deeds are in excess, God puts aside the first iniquity and does not reckon it with the others."[37] In both of these examples of counting on Yom Kippur, there is word repetition that Amichai mirrors poetically.

---

[36] Birnbaum, *Mahzor*, 819.
[37] Birnbaum, *Mahzor*, 527.

Additionally, Amichai's use of the word "*moneh*" is another explicit reference to Unetaneh Tokef, where God is described as playing every role in a courtroom, an accountant or record-keeper being one of them. Amichai suggests here that God as our accountant may not be methodical or all knowing. God may instead be the street preacher, counting our deeds one by one, prepared to throw some of our bad away if we have done enough good. We, in turn, are just units to be measured, items to be weighed and counted.

In the next stanza, Amichai elaborates on the established idea that God may not live up to the attributes we assign to God in our liturgy. He suggests that our consistent aggrandizing of God only complicates our lives as human beings. As Jews, our attachment to the God described in the *G'vurot* (Amidah), which is referenced in the second line below, only sets us up for disappointment when the God we champion as our hero doesn't even show up.

אוּלַי כְּמוֹ פֶּסֶל עַתִּיק שֶׁאֵין בּוֹ זְרוֹעוֹת
גַּם חַיֵּינוּ יָפִים יוֹתֵר, בְּלִי מַעֲשִׂים וּגְבוּרוֹת.

Perhaps like an ancient statue that has no arms
Our lives, without deeds and heroes, would be more beautiful.

In the above lines, Amichai draws our attention to the ideals of beauty and wholeness. He argues that out of context, it would be difficult to describe a statue of a woman with no arms as beautiful. Here he is referencing the Venus de Milo, an ancient Greek sculpture from the Hellenistic period housed at the *Louvre* in Paris. Tourists and museum goers are eternally eager to gaze upon the beauty of this depiction of Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, despite the statue not having arms. Although she is incomplete, the statue is beautiful in her brokenness and her missing pieces, and it is unfathomable to

imagine the arms added on, as they would detract from her beauty. Amichai asserts here that as Jews, though it may be difficult to imagine living meaningful lives without myths of God's heroism or even our own heroism,[38] our lives might become more beautiful without them, just as the Venus de Milo is more beautiful without arms. Additionally, he uses the word *pesel,* which is associated with the forbidden idolatry of the Ten Commandments. Perhaps he is suggesting that our worship of God is idolatrous. Alternatively, as we are drawn to the statue in the Louvre, he is acknowledging that humans are all idol-worshiping in nature and the sovereignty of God is a farce.

Throughout the poem, Amichai narrows the scope of his writing: he begins with a global search for God in the first stanza, to the God we see everyday in a car mechanic, then as a corrupt King and a crazy counter, and in the above stanza he points to the acclaimed hero who continues to disappoint us. To redirect the narrative of the poem from God, to us, back to "I," he takes the elevated idea of God as our *gibor,* our hero, and looks in the mirror at the heroism and humanity of a soldier in the Israeli army.

פְּרֹק מִמֶּנִּי אֶת שִׁרְיוֹן גּוּפִיָּתִי הַמַּצְהִיבָה,
נִלְחַמְתִּי בְּכָל הָאַבִּירִים, עַד הַחַשְׁמַל כָּבָה.

Take off the armor of my yellowing undershirt
I fought all the knights until the power went out.

Following the thread of the female beauty introduced in his above reference to the Venus de Milo, we know that the speaker is now with a woman, as he succinctly uses second person feminine forms. An Israeli soldier on his weekend off, perhaps, the speaker indicates that his job is complete, at least for now. Amichai deflates the heroic picture of the knight in shining armor courting his beloved. He is simply a man who

[38] Idea from Rabbi Dr Wendy Zierler's study of this poem.

wants to make love to his girlfriend.[39] Unlike the false heroism of the God of the G'vurot, these soldiers are truly fighting off knights and protecting us.

Amichai dwells in this sphere of the intimate at the conclusion of the poem, ending with vulnerability and the precious nature of human relationships. He keeps us in the intimacy of post-coital bliss as he describes the divinity accessed in a mundane experience. This element of his writing gives us permission, too, to see God in intimate, simple moments.

אֲנִי רוֹאֶה אוֹתָךְ מוֹצִיאָה דָּבָר מִן הַמְּקָרֵר,
מוּאֶרֶת מִתּוֹכוֹ בְּאוֹר שֶׁמֵּעוֹלָם אַחֵר.
וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתִי
וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתוֹ
וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתֵךְ.

I see you taking something out of the refrigerator
illuminated by it's light as if from another world.
And that is my glory
and that is his glory
and that is your glory.

At the very end, he sees his lover in the next room standing in front of the fridge, contemplating what to take out. The speaker notices the way the light glows on her, and there's something heavenly and otherworldly about it. Perhaps this simple moment and moments like it are truly the glory of God– sparks of light and flashes of divinity that can't be named or grasped. וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתִי, and that is my glory, the speaker says to himself, noticing her and the otherworldliness of this everyday moment. In the speaker saying its "my glory," Amichai suggests that all of the transcendent experiences he has sought for God to provide him with are up to him to find, in the end. The speaker's search for God

[39] Idea from Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler in conversation about this poem.

has been unsuccessful, but his relationship to the woman in front of the fridge is holy. וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתוֹ, and that is his glory, the glory of the God that can simultaneously be both majestic and intimate, present and absent. God finds a way into the mundane moments and gives us reason to continue on our search for the divine. וְהִיא תְּהִלָּתֵךְ, and that is your glory, the the speaker says to the reader, giving each of us permission to acknowledge God's absence and experience divinity in our relationships with one another.

Amichai concludes the poem by using these phrases in this order because it is the reverse of the way they were used through the body of the poem. This reverse structure indicates the circular nature of the poem's narrative– the search for God and the attainment of human intimacy is a never ending cycle. On a larger scale, the high holidays cycle through our lives each year. These cycles are encouraging, because as people we seek God and continually learn that holiness is truly found in creating meaningful relationships with other people. We seek God in the expanse, and find God in a person– be it the mechanic, or the person we love.

Excerpt from "The Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela"

מסעות בנימין האחרון מטודילה[40]

Benjamin of Tudela, the great Jewish traveler, lived in the twelfth century and chronicled his journey through Palestine, Syria, Persia, Egypt, Provence, and Italy in his *Book of Travels*. He was the first (traveler) Benjamin. The second was Rumanian explorer Israel Joseph Benjamin (1818-1864), the self proclaimed Benjamin II, who wrote of his search for the Ten Lost Tribes in his book *Five Years of Travel in the Orient, 1846-1851*. The third Benjamin was the fictional character of Mendele Mocher Sfarim's satirical novel *Travels of the Third Benjamin*. Amichai's title derives from this history of traveler Benjamins, placing himself at the end of this lineage. Yehuda Amichai lived on Benjamin of Tudela Street in Jerusalem when he wrote this poem.[41]

This is Amichai's longest and most experimental poem. According to Chana Kronfeld, it "presents in jumbled snippets of a simultaneous narrative of personal and communal history and– in blurred and fragmentary abstract lines– a spatial panorama of sites of memory."[42] Similar to the *Mendele Mocher Sfarim* novella, Amichai disrupts linear and chronological thinking by reordering places and events in history, creating a sense of circularity and unresolvement. He also inserts unembellished facts about his own life and upbringing. On this poem and his mental state while writing it, Amichai said, "Trauma is an explosion which brings to the surface completely different materials… Though I never intended to write an autobiographical *poema*, I guess that's basically what it is, but one in which I look at the world through the lens of my life… each strophe is

---

[40] *Mas'ot Binyamin HaAcharon Mitudela, Achshav Bara'ash: Shirim 1963-1968*, *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Volume 2 (Schocken: Tel Aviv, 2004), 117.
[41] Bloch and Mitchell, trans., *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, 66-67.
[42] Kronfeld, *The Full Severity of Compassion,* 48.

like a riptide drawing all the materials around into it, and then comes another riptide, as in the ocean."[43] All of the matters that existed in Amichai's reality at this time– the Six Day War, his impending divorce, and living in the United States for a year.

This long poem comes from *Achshav Bara'ash* (Now In The Noise), which was published in 1968.[44] It contains two longer works: "Jerusalem 1967" and "The Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela." The style of this poem is "a confessional review of his life from the time of his departure from Germany in 1936 and, at the same time, a reflection on the human condition in the 20th century."[45] Psychoanalytic in style, Amichai utilizes a character as an alter ego to parse through his autobiographical mythology,[46] naming events and discussing them in hopes that doing so will release him from continually reliving them. It doesn't. He adopts the persona of a traveler in this poem because he himself journeyed– physically from Germany to Palestine and emotionally through his childhood up until his writing of this poem. Stylistically, Amichai dances between his character being the second person "you" and first person "I." The "you" is most often used to depict autobiographical scenes from his childhood.The "I" is used to comment and muse. The impact of using the second person demonstrates the affection and empathy that the older, adult Amichai has for his childhood self.

According to Glenda Abramson, the linking of sin and religious worship is introduced as a theme immediately and continues throughout the poema. Amichai's references to the liturgy of the high holy days are frequently used to elaborate on the connection between sin and prayer. Additionally, "love and religion are conjoined in a

---

[43] Kronfeld, *The Full Severity of Compassion*, 51.
[44] Yehuda Amichai, *Achshav Bara'ash* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1968).
[45] Glenda Abramson, *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai: A Thematic Approach*. (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1989), 15.
[46] Abramson, *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai,* 18.

figurative example of their interrelationship."[47] These two pairs and their relationship to High Holiday liturgy are evident in the stanzas excerpted below.[48]

On Yom Kippur, in tennis shoes, you ran. And with holy, holy, holy, you jumped high Higher than anyone, nearly up to the ceiling angels, And in the Simchat Torah circling you went around seven times and seven And arrived without breath. Like a panting weightlifter you hoisted aloft The sefer Torah With two shaking arms So that all could see what was written, and the power of your hands.	וּבְיוֹם כִּפּוּר בְּנַעֲלֵי הִתְעַמְּלוּת רַצְתָּ וּבְקָדוֹשׁ, קָדוֹשׁ, קָפַצְתָּ גָּבֹהַּ וְגָבַהּ יוֹתֵר מִכֻּלָּם, כִּמְעַט עַד לְמַלְאֲכֵי הַתִּקָּרָה וּבְהַקָּפוֹת שִׂמְחַת תּוֹרָה סוֹבַבְתָּ שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים וָשֶׁבַע וְהִגַּעְתָּ בְּלִי נְשִׁימָה כְּמוֹ מֵרִים מִשְׁקוֹלוֹת הָדַפְתָּ אֶל עָל אֶת סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה בְּהַגְבָּהָה בִּשְׁתֵּי זְרוֹעוֹת רוֹעֲדוֹת שֶׁיִּרְאוּ כֻלָּם אֶת הַכָּתוּב וְאֶת כֹּחַ יָדֶיךָ
At "bowing down and bending knees," you fell to the earth Like a big starting leap into the whole of your life And on Yom Kippur you started a fistfight with yourself: We have sinned, we have dealt treacherously, Bare fists and without gloves, Nervous Featherweight against sad heavyweight surrendered. Prayers dripped from the corners of the mouth a slender red stream. With a tallit they wiped sweat off you between rounds.	בְּכוֹרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים נָפַלְתָּ אַרְצָה כְּמוֹ לִזְנוּק שֶׁל קְפִיצָה גְּדוֹלָה אֶל כָּל חַייִךְ וּבְיוֹם כִּפּוּר יָצָאתָ לְמִלְחֶמֶת אֶגְרוֹף נָגַד עַצְמְךָ: אָשַׁמְנוּ, בָּגַדְנוּ בְּאֶגְרוֹפִים קָשִׁים וּבְלִי כְּפָפוֹת מִשְׁקַל נוֹצָה עַצְבָנִי נָגַד מִשְׁקָל כָּבֵד וְעָצוּב וְנִכְנָע. הַתְּפִלּוֹת זָלְגוּ מִזָּוִית הַפֶּה בְּקַלּוּחַ אָדֹם וְדַקִּיק. בַּטַּלִּית מָחוּ לְךָ אֶת זֵעַת אַפֶּיךָ בֵּין הַסִּיבּוּבִים
The prayers you prayed in your childhood, now they return, falling from above Like bullets that don't hit and return to earth after much time has passed Without notice, without causing harm. When you lie with your beloved They return. "I love you," "you're mine." I give thanks before you. "You shall love" the Lord your God. "with all my might" Be angry and do not sin and be truly still Stone/rock. Silence. Hear O Israel in bed. In bed without Hear O Israel. In a double bed The double cave of the bed Sh'ma. Sh'ma. Hear me again now. Sh'ma. Without you.	הַתְּפִלּוֹת שֶׁהִתְפַּלַּלְתָּ אוֹתָן בְּיַלְדוּתֶךָ, עַכְשָׁו הֵן חוֹזְרוֹת וְנוֹשְׁרוֹת מִלְּמַעְלָה כַּקְּלִיעִים שֶׁלֹּא פָגְעוּ וְחוֹזְרִים אַחֲרֵי הַרְבֵּה זְמַן לָאָרֶץ, בְּלִי תְּשׂוּמַת־לֵב, בְּלִי לִגְרֹם נזק. כְּשֶׁאַתָּה שׁוֹכֵב עִם אֲהוּבָתְךָ הֵן חוֹזְרוֹת. "אֲנִי אוֹהֵב אוֹתָךְ", "אַתְּ שֶׁלִּי". מוֹדֶה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ. "וְאָהַבְתָּ" אֶת אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֶיךָ. "בְּכָל מְאֹדֶךָ" רִגְזוּ וְאַל תֶּחֱטָאוּ וְדמוּ, סֶלָה. סָלַע, דְּמָמָה קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע עַל הַמִּטָּה, עַל הַמִּטָּה בְּלִי קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע. עַל הַמִּטָּה הַכְּפוּלָה, מְעָרַת הַמַּכְפֵּלָה שֶׁל מִטָּה. שְׁמַע. שְׁמַע. שְׁמָעִי עַכְשָׁו עוֹד פַּעַם

[47] Abramson, *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai*, 20.

[48] English translation (adapted with the help of Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler) from Robert Alter, *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 116.

שְׁמַע. בִּלְעָדַיִךְ.	

וּבְיוֹם כִּפּוּר בְּנַעֲלֵי הִתְעַמְּלוּת רַצְתָּ

On Yom Kippur in tennis shoes, you ran

This section of the poem begins by referencing the Rabbinic determination that to afflict ourselves fully on Yom Kippur, we must deprive ourselves of certain luxuries, wearing leather being one of them. As he speaks to his childhood self, he recalls how he followed the rules and wore sneakers instead of leather shoes. In referencing this, Amichai verbalizes the ironic sight of people on Yom Kippur wearing exercise sneakers together with their best clothing for synagogue. He uses this as a metaphor for the "exercise" of repentance itself– in a room full of people in athletic footwear, surely some sport is taking place. He weaves this metaphor through the first stanza, establishing the theme of the davener as a decathlete. On Yom Kippur we deprive ourselves of food and water, yet there is much physical activity– standing and sitting, bowing, laying on the floor, etc. He continues by referencing the text of the *K'dusha*,[49] where we bounce up and down on our toes, as if imitating the airbound movements of the celestial seraphim.

וּבְקָדוֹשׁ, קָדוֹשׁ, קָדוֹשׁ, קָפַצְתָּ גָּבֹהַּ
וְגָבַהּ יוֹתֵר מִכֻּלָּם, כִּמְעַט עַד לְמַלְאָכֵי הַתִּקְרָה

And with holy, holy, holy, you jumped high
Higher than anyone, nearly up to the ceiling angels

Amichai comically and ironically exaggerates this by referencing the athlete jumping toward a win. Competitiveness is inherent within sport, along with it boasting

[49] Isaiah 6:3, Morning Liturgy. Amichai utilizes this trinomial structure (referencing this line from Isaiah) eight other times in eight different poems throughout the body of his work.

that you jumped higher than anyone, nearly up to the ceiling angels. You jumped the highest, and you won the contest. In referring to ceiling angels, Amichai alludes to the cherubs in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. He frequently references Rome[50] as a holy city throughout his writing, specifically in poems that quote liturgy directly. Here in particular, he also may be suggesting that the angels we imagine aren't in heaven, but rather reside a few feet from us on the ceiling; they are merely a figment of what we choose to believe and so they don't exist in heaven, they are simply in our own heads, our own realities, when we intone them into existence.

וּבְהַקָּפוֹת שִׂמְחַת תּוֹרָה סוֹבַבְתָּ שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים וָשֶׁבַע
וְהִגַּעְתָּ בְּלִי נְשִׁימָה

> And in the circling of Simchat Torah you circled seven times and seven
> And arrived without breath.

The exercises or tournaments of Amichai's athletic davener continue with the rituals and celebrations of *Simchat Torah*, the prayer-athlete now running in *hakafot* circles. Amichai specifies that there are seven hakafot, seven being a special number in Judaism. Seven represents creation, and the renewal presented weekly in Shabbat. Customarily we circle with the Torah on *Sukkot* and on *Shemini Atseret/Simchat Torah* Seven times. Jews also circle seven times during their wedding ceremony under the *chuppah*, and the *chazzan* chants the seven wedding blessings. In this way, he foreshadows the topic of his marriage which he explains is falling apart in the next stanza. For now, the davener must continue in his sport.

כְּמוֹ מֵרִים מִשְׁקוֹלוֹת הָדַפְתָּ אֶל עָל
אֶת סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה בְּהַגְבָּהָה

[50] "V'hi Tehilatecha," chapter 1 page 25 of this thesis.

בִּשְׁתֵּי זְרוֹעוֹת רוֹעֲדוֹת
שֶׁיִּרְאוּ כֻלָּם אֶת הַכָּתוּב וְאֶת כֹּחַ יָדֶיךָ

Like a panting weightlifter you hoisted aloft
The sefer Torah
With two shaking arms
So that all could see what was written, and the power of your hands.

Still exhausted from the previous event, Amichai's weightlifter nevertheless must hoist the Torah above his head. Though his arms are shaking, his competitive nature shines through and he is committed to proving his strength, his love of Torah. Though he is exhausted, he shows the people God's law. The athlete falls to his knees and then to the floor, one would think from exhaustion, but this, too, is part of the decathlon. Stereotypically, Jews are not considered to be particularly athletic. At least before the modern period, sports were always viewed by religious Jews as hellenistic. If observant Jews believe that their sons should be in the *Beit Midrash* and not on the basketball court, the idea that they would be playing sports on the holiest day of the year can only be viewed comedically.

בְּכוֹרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחוים נָפַלְתָּ אַרְצָה
כמוֹ לִזְנוּק שֶׁל קְפִיצָה גְדוֹלָה אֶל כָּל חייך
וּבְיוֹם כִּפּוּר יָצָאתָ לְמִלְחֶמֶת אֶגְרוֹף
נֶגֶד עַצְמְךָ: אָשַׁמְנוּ, בָּגַדְנוּ

Bowing down, bending knees, you fell to the earth
Like a big starting leap into the whole of your life
And on Yom Kippur you started a fistfight with yourself:
We have sinned, we have dealt treacherously

Amichai further parallels the physicality of our prayer on the High Holidays with sport. At the beginning of the Malchuyot section In the Musaf Rosh Hashanah service, the *Shaliach Tzibbur* physically prostrates before God while chanting the Great *Aleinu*, putting their entire body face down on the floor. Amichai writes that this is like a

"starting leap into the whole of your life," a sarcastic statement about beginning the new year face down on the floor, and a polar opposite experience to leaping toward the angels. He is suggesting that if on Rosh Hashanah you were face down, by Yom Kippur you are a boxer in a ring, fistfighting yourself– punching and confessing: *Ashamnu, Bagadnu*.[51] For the Jew in prayer, this is how the *Viddui* section of our Liturgy can sometimes feel. We beat our chests, sometimes beating the confession out of ourselves.

בְּאֶגְרוֹפִים קָשִׁים וּבְלִי כְּפָפוֹת
משקל נוֹצָה עַצְבָּנִי נֶגֶד מִשְׁקָל כָּבֵד וְעָצוּב
וְנִכְנָע. הַתְּפִלּוֹת זָלְגוּ מִזָּוִיֹת הַפֶּה
בְּקַלּוּחַ אָדֹם וְדַקִּיק. בַּטַּלִּית מָחוּ לְךָ
אֶת זֵעַת אַפָּיִךְ בֵּין הַסִּיבּוּבִים

Bare fists and without gloves,
Nervous Featherweight against sad heavyweight
surrendered. Prayers dripped from the corners of the mouth a slender red stream.
With a Tallit they wiped sweat off you between rounds.

Amichai specifies that this is bare-knuckle boxing, without gloves. This implies a lack of decorum and protection for the fighter. In our Yom Kippur liturgy, we strip away our padding, too, and submit to the possibility of emotional bleeding and injury in naming our sins outright. The boxing imagery continues as we read about the nervous featherweight matched against the sad heavyweight and the inevitable surrender of the former. In the sport, boxers from these two weight classes are not permitted to fight each other because of the inherent disadvantage of being different sizes, but in Amichai's poem, here they are in the ring together. By now placing two mismatched people in the ring– with a *tallit* serving as a towel to wipe away the blood of our self-inflicted wounds – Amichai acknowledges the mismatched contest between humans and God, namely the *t'shuvah* process inherent in the High Holidays. As each of us are the nervous

[51] Birnbaum, *Mahzor*, 511.

featherweight or the sad heavyweight, we inevitably surrender and apologize, beaten down to the ground– back where we were when we prostrated during the Great Aleinu.

Indeed, Amichai's comparison of prayer to sport portrays the secular viewpoint of religion as being oppressive–the individual eager to prove their observance is eventually beaten down. Once eager to "win" the High Holidays, to prove our commitment to God by way of physical exertion, we now lay on the ground with prayers dripping out of our mouths like blood dripping from a boxer's mouth after a surrender. The decathlon davener is defeated– by his own behavior, by the behavior of others, and perhaps by the judgment of God. Like a coach who runs to wipe blood and sweat from a boxer with a towel, the speaker's community wipes away the words of the would-be praying speaker of the poem with a tallit, of all things.

In moving to the next stanza, Amichai pivots from the sports metaphor and moves to the image of bullets, comparing them to prayer:

הַתְּפִלּוֹת שֶׁהִתְפַּלַּלְתָּ אוֹתָן בְּיַלְדוּתְךָ,
עַכְשָׁו הֵן חוֹזְרוֹת וְנוֹשְׁרוֹת מִלְמַעְלָה
כַּקְלִיעִים שֶׁלֹּא פָּגְעוּ וְחוֹזְרִים
אַחֲרֵי הַרְבֵּה זְמַן לָאָרֶץ,
בְּלִי תְּשׂוּמַת־לֵב, בְּלִי לִגְרֹם נזק.

> The prayers you prayed in your childhood, now they return, falling from above
> Like bullets that don't hit and return to earth after much time has passed
> Without notice, without causing harm.

These bullets are the prayers from Amichai's childhood– misfired and misdirected. They fall from the sky, but thankfully, because they are impotent, they don't wound anyone. Their descent goes unnoticed. This statement suggests that our prayers aren't dangerous, rather, they are meaningless. We exert ourselves physically to lose the battle with God always, and our prayers have no impact. But writing about all of this –

making poetry out of this experience–has real potency and impact, a kind of replacement for prayer.

Another such replacement is human (sexual and emotional) love. Throughout much of his work, Amichai processes the guilt and experience of substituting the God of his childhood for the woman he loves as an adult. He frequently uses the image of himself laying in bed with his beloved as a means to turn inward to self reflection, the way some do in prayer. In these stanzas, he begins by wrestling with God before bringing his focus to the most intimate moments of his life– in close encounters with the person he loves.

כְּשֶׁאַתָּה שׁוֹכֵב עִם אֲהוּבָתְךָ
הֵן חוֹזְרוֹת. "אֲנִי אוֹהֵב אוֹתָךְ", "אַתְּ שֶׁלִּי".
מוֹדֶה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ. "וְאָהַבְתָּ"
אֶת אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֶיךָ. "בְּכָל מְאֹדִי"

When you lie with your beloved
They return. “I love you”, “you’re mine”. I give thanks before you.
“You shall love” the Lord your God. “with all my might”

In moments of intimacy he can finally understand the meaning of some of the prayers he learned in his childhood. “I love you,” “you’re mine” are statements he makes to his beloved, perhaps the person he made seven circles with under the chuppah at their wedding. These words are ones of love– a personalized inversion, redirection or sublimation of the liturgy of the *V’ahavta*. Here, Amichai conflates the holy and the profane. This section of the poem is concerned with Yom Kippur, when it is forbidden to make love. He continues by yoking the holy language of the V’ahavta and *Modeh Ani* prayers to words one might say to a lover in bed. Amichai argues that this is what it means to love God and to be thankful for God– to be close to someone who you love, someone who you are thankful for.

מוֹדֶה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מלך חַי וְקַיָּם שֶׁהֶחֱזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחֶמְלָה, רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתֶךָ[52]

I thank you, living and enduring King, for you have graciously returned my soul within me. Your faithfulness is great.

We say this prayer in the morning before getting up from bed, in a half-sleep state. In putting this reference in the same section as his statement about bullets, perhaps Amichai is drawing the following connection: we say Modeh Ani to express our thanks for being alive, but there are no guarantees that we will wake up each morning. This is evidenced in Jewish texts as the Talmud[53] states that sleep is 1/60th of death, and that our souls are absent from our bodies during sleep. Just as there are no guarantees that we will live each day, there are also no guarantees that one survives war, and so the moments that soldiers have with their loved ones are understandably special. This intimate moment with his lover surfaces memories of his childhood because of the guilt he carries of having survived– having escaped the holocaust, having survived war in defense of Israel. Or, perhaps he is wondering how to believe despite all of the death he has seen in these experiences. Alternatively, the soul may depart the body during sleep just as the soul must depart the body in order to carry out the behavior necessitated by war.

This connects to the Chassidic idea that sleep is a sort of *galut* (exile).[54] We know that in exile, historically, Jews feel absent from God. In this absence, our commitment to seeking God is strengthened. Amichai often writes from the perspective of being exiled from God, but instead of finding a renewed commitment because of this disconnection, he transfers his relationship with the divine onto his relationships with women. Finally, the word מוֹדֶה (*modeh*) translates to thanks, but also means to admit or surrender. These

[52] Morning Liturgy.
[53] B'rachot 57B.
[54] *Likutei Halachot,* Orach Chayim, 5:12.

alternate translations of the word are a direct connection to the expression of defeat from the beaten down athlete in the first section.

Amichai's use of quotation marks delineates which words are ones he says out loud to his lover. He speaks the words in quotations, or she does. In the opposite way, the phrases without quotation marks give us an insight into his consciousness– he thinks these words while he is with her, but he doesn't say them outloud.

Amichai directly quotes the *V'ahavta*:

וְאָהַבְתָּ֞ אֵ֣ת יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהֶ֗יךָ בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ֙ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ֔ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדֶֽךָ׃[55]

> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might.

In this quotation, however, he changes the second-person conjugation of the words וּבְכָל־מְאֹדֶֽךָ׃ (with all of your might) to the first person form, instead saying "בְּכָל מְאוֹדִי", with all of my might. As such, he transforms the object of his adoration from God to his lover; physically and emotionally, he loves this woman with all of his might. Amichai thus blurs the distinction between the commandment to love God and the love we can have for another person. Furthermore, he may reject love of God in favor of a human relationship, both carnal and emotional. The V'ahavta is the continuation of the Sh'ma, and in referencing it, Amichai lays the foundation for his later similar use of the Sh'ma in the same context of being in (romantic) relationship. He also directly quotes the book of psalms in order to maintain a liturgical connection to his being in bed with his lover.

רִגְזוּ֙ וְאַל־תֶּֽחֱטָ֔אוּ אִמְר֥וּ בְלִבַּכֶ֖ם עַל־מִשְׁכַּבְכֶ֑ם וְדֹ֣מּוּ סֶֽלָה׃[56]

> So tremble, and sin no more, say this in your heart

[55] Deuteronomy 6:5-9, Liturgy.
[56] Psalm 4:5.

ponder it on your bed, and be still:

Firstly, this verse immediately draws to the liturgy of Yom Kippur in its use of the words וְאַל־תֶּחֱטָאוּ. We chant the "*Al Cheit Shechatanu*" vidui prayer cycle on ten separate occasions in the Yom Kippur liturgy. In the verse referenced here by Amichai, the psalmist writes וְאַל־תֶּחֱטָאוּ, with these words meaning do not sin– אַל Al meaning do not. In our Yom Kippur liturgy, we say עַל חֵטְא שֶׁחָטָאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ (*Al Cheit Shechatanu L'fanecha*). Amichai uses the word *Al* as a homonym, signifying that the phrase can both mean "do not sin" and "for the sin you have committed." Secondly, this psalm contains the word בִּלְבַבְכֶם (in your heart). This circles back to Amichai's reference of the V'ahavta, where we are commanded to love God בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ (*b'chol l'vavcha*), with all of our heart. Thirdly and most obviously, Amichai incorporates this verse for its use of the word מִשְׁכַּבְכֶם. This word is one with several meanings. The word מִשְׁכַּב (*mishkav*) is used in the memorial prayer *El Malei Rachamim* as the peaceful final resting place for the deceased:

וְיָנוּחַ בְּשָׁלוֹם עַל מִשְׁכָּבוֹ

He shall rest peacefully at his lying place

It also connotes a couch or a bed for sleeping, or the act of lying down for sexual contact. The word mishkav ties together several facets of this stanza. In the previous lines the speaker is in bed with his beloved, sexualizing the words of the V'ahavta. As in the instance described above, where Amichai plays on the homonyms אַל and עַל, Amichai enacts a similar wordplay with the words סֶלָה: *Selah*, an untranslatable Hebrew word that acts as an accentuating end-word in a line of biblical poetry and the word סֶלַע, meaning rock or stone.

רִגְזוּ וְאַל תֶּחֱטָאוּ וְדמוּ, סֶלָה. סֶלַע, דְּמָמָה

Be angry and do not sin and be truly still

Stone/rock. Silence.

The word סֶלַע, with an ayin, appears infamously in the story of Moses striking a rock,[57] as God instructs, in order to provide water to his people. His use of these two words, סֶלָה: and סֶלַע fit the adversarial nature of the poem– a rock is an object capable of causing physical harm, and the poetic biblical word סֶלָה: has no meaning other than the function of closing a poetic unit. Next to סֶלַע is the word דְּמָמָה, another word pair, as the word דמו is also used in psalm 4. This word means to be still, which draws us again to the Yamim Noraim, specifically to the "Unetaneh Tokef" prayer. In "Unetaneh Tokef" we read the words קוֹל דְּמָמָה דַקָּה, the still small voice of God. Though the speaker has come to accept that God is silent, this behavior transferred onto his lover doesn't connote absence, but an impenetrable emotional block. Perhaps he is suggesting that his lover is still like a rock, saying nothing. Alternatively, perhaps they have agreed that they should separate, *Amen Selah*, but neither of them can get up to leave.

This scene of the speaker and his lover takes place in bed, which provides context for the intertextual references of Psalm 4:5 and the bedtime Sh'ma. Amichai quotes this psalm which is also quoted in the Talmud[58] by Rabbi Yosei as the biblical source for the recitation of the bedtime Sh'ma. Amichai's use of this psalm creates layers. The speaker blasphemously conflates the Sh'ma and V'ahavta with the intimacy of being with a woman, and in his simultaneous stream of consciousness narrative, the speaker remembers the Talmudic teachings surrounding the bedtime Sh'ma. He includes this

[57] Numbers 20:13.

[58] Berachot 4b: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Even though one recited Sh'ma in the synagogue, it is a mitzvah to recite it upon his bed in fulfillment of the verse: "When you lie down." Rabbi Yosei said: What verse alludes to the fact that one must recite Sh'ma in the evening, upon his bed, as well? "Tremble, and do not sin; say to your heart upon your bed and be still, Selah" (Psalms 4:5). This is understood to mean: Recite Sh'ma, about which it is written, "on your hearts," upon your bed, and afterward be still and sleep.

psalm as the link between the V'ahavta, the Bedtime Sh'ma, and his intimate relationship to express his thinking as a jumble of his devout upbringing and his secular adulthood.

קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע עַל הַמִּטָּה, עַל הַמִּטָּה
בְּלִי קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע.

Hear O Israel in bed. In bed without Hear O Israel. In a double bed
The double cave of the bed
Sh'ma. Sh'ma.
Hear me again now. Without hearing. Without you.

The bedtime Sh'ma is an extended version of the traditional Sh'ma, and is recited before going to sleep. Amichai playfully uses this reference; he says "the bedtime Sh'ma" and continues by explaining that he is frequently in bed without saying the Sh'ma, being otherwise occupied. He continues the word play with the concept of a double bed:

עַל הַמִּטָּה הַכְּפוּלָה,
מְעָרַת הַמַּכְפֵּלָה שֶׁל מִטָּה.

In a double bed
The double cave of the bed

The double bed הַמִּטָּה הַכְּפוּלָה of which Amichai speaks is an admission of his sinful, secular, adult behavior. In accordance with family purity laws, a double bed would never be found in an observant home– there must be two separate beds for husband and wife in order to follow *Halacha* surrounding menstruation. He is in a double bed with a woman, admitting that they do not follow these rules. He then redirects back to tradition by piecing together his ignorance of halacha in sharing his bed with the מְעָרַת הַמַּכְפֵּלָה Cave of *Machpelah*, the biblical/historical sight in modern day Hebron, which literally translates to "cave of the doubles" or "double cave." This double cave provides a resting place for the matriarchs and patriarchs, buried in pairs, and whose twin merits are invoked in our prayers. It also foreshadows an impending loss of the relationship, either

in death or in separation. His use of the Sh'ma concludes the section:

שְׁמַע. שְׁמַע.
שִׁמְעִי עַכְשָׁו עוֹד פַּעַם. בִּלְעָדַיִךְ.

Sh'ma. Sh'ma.
Hear me again now. Sh'ma. Without you.

Amichai's repeating of the word Sh'ma here induces a sort of semantic satiation. In repetition, the word loses its meaning and disconnects from its associations. It is no longer the watch word of our faith, but a two syllable mishmosh. Alternatively, it can be viewed as a link to the above reference to the Cave of *Machpelah*, as the Sh'ma becomes a plaintive part of our final vidui before death. The speaker, in the first person now, demands again that his lover listen, but she doesn't. The word בִּלְעָדַיִךְ connotes their separation– he is now without her. In these sections, we follow Amichai from his childhood to the dissolution of his first marriage, all through the lens of liturgical and biblical references.

Chapter 2: Synagogue

בית כנסת

Patuach Sagur Patuach[59]

In this synagogue-centered section of my thesis, I explore four poems from two cycles of Amichai's last collection, *Patuach Sagur Patuach*: "*Mi Shehitateif Batzitzit*" (#19), *"Lamad'ti Ahava B'yalduti B'veit Knesset" (#25),* and *"Ein Keloheinu" (#11)* from "Eilim Mitchalfim, Hat'filot Nisharot La'ad*"* (Gods Change, Prayers are here to Stay), and *"V'eich Omdim B'tekes Zikaron" (#3)* from "Umi Yizkor et HaZochrim?" (And Who Will Remember the Rememberers?). *Patuach Sagur Patuach* includes several cycles, each of which includes several poems. This collection is Amichai's swan song– his last published volume before his death in 2000. As Leon Wieseltier writes, *Open Closed Open* is "an extended humanist midrash on a wide variety of biblical and liturgical passages. Amichai's keen entanglement with the verbal and symbolic resources of classical Judaism is everywhere– playfully and seriously, affectionately or angrily. He was not only a great Hebrew poet, he was also a great Jewish poet."[60] In this cycle, Amichai contemplates the realities of human life: death, memory, belief, and relationships. He approaches the ongoing dialogue he sustained with God throughout his writing differently in these poems– a maturity of age comes through in a more reconciliatory approach to the divine. Amichai references his own poems throughout, making his own canon one of the prooftexts (in addition to Tanach, Talmud, and liturgy)

[59] Yehuda Amichai, *Patuach Sagur Patuach* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1998).
[60] Leon Wieseltier, "Yehuda Amichai's Old-New Words: Five Fragments and a Note", *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 96:4 (2006): 522–25. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25470183.

from which he draws. He explores his personal story and revisits all of the defining experiences and relationships of his life, though these poems are also riddled with relatable communal experiences and feelings, both Jewish and secular.

Whoever Wrapped in a Tallit[61] מִי שֶׁהִתְעַטֵּף בְּטַלִּית

Whoever wraps in a Tallit in their youth will never forget taking it out of the soft velvet bag, opening the folded tallit, spreading it out, kissing the length of the neckband (some neck bands embroidered, others trimmed in gold) After that, with a great unfurling overhead like a sky, a wedding canopy, a parachute And then winding it Around his head as if playing hide-and-seek, and then wrapping his whole body in it, tight tight, snuggling into it like the cocoon of a butterfly, then opening would-be wings to fly. And why is the tallit striped and not checkered black and white, like a chessboard. Because squares are finite and hopeless. Stripes come from endlessness and go to endlessness like runways in an airport where angels land and take off Whoever wraps in a tallit will never forget When he gets out of the swimming pool or the sea, he wraps himself in a large towel, spreads it out again over his head, and again, snuggles into it tight tight, and still shivering a little, he laughs, and blesses.	מִי שֶׁהִתְעַטֵּף בְּטַלִּית בִּנְעוּרָיו לֹא יִשְׁכַּח לְעוֹלָם הַהוֹצָאָה מִשַּׂקִּית הַקְּטִיפָה הָרַכָּה וּפְתִיחַת הַטַּלִּית הַמְקֻפֶּלֶת פְּרִישָׂה נְשִׁיקַת הַצַּוָּארוֹן לְאָרְכּוֹ (הַצַּוָּארוֹן לִפְעָמִים רָקוּם וְלִפְעָמִים מְזֻהָב) אַחַר־כְּךָ בִּתְנוּפָה גְּדוֹלָה מֵעַל הָרֹאשׁ כְּמוֹ שָׁמַיִם כְּמוֹ חֻפָּה כְּמוֹ מַצְנֵחַ. אַחַר־כְּךָ לְכָרְכְּךָ אוֹתָהּ סָבִיב הָרֹאשׁ כְּמוֹ בְּמַחֲבוֹאִים, אַחַר־כְּךָ לְהִתְעַטֵּף בָּהּ כָּל הַגּוּף צָמוּדָה צָמוּדָה וּלְהִתְכַּרְבֵּל כְּמוֹ גֹּלֶם שֶׁל פַּרְפַּר וְלִפְתֹּחַ כְּמוֹ כְּנָפַיִם וְלָעוּף וּמַדּוּעַ הַטַּלִּית בְּפַסִּים וְלֹא בְּמַשְׁבְּצוֹת־שָׁחוֹר־לָבָן כְּמוֹ לוּחַ שַׁחְמַט. כִּי הָרִבּוּעִים הֵם סוֹפִיִּים וּבְלִי תִּקְוָה הַפַּסִּים בָּאִים מֵאֵין־סוֹף וְיוֹצְאִים לְאֵין־סוֹף כְּמוֹ מַסְלוּלֵי הַמָּרְאָה בְּשָׂדֵה תְּעוּפָה לִנְחִיתַת הַמַּלְאָכִים וּלְהַמְרָאָתָם מִי שֶׁהִתְעַטֵּף בְּטַלִּית לְעוֹלָם לֹא יִשְׁכַּח כְּשֶׁהוּא יוֹצֵא מִן הַבְּרֵכָה אוֹ מִן הַיָּם מִתְעַטֵּף בְּמַגֶּבֶת גְּדוֹלָה וּפוֹרֵשׂ אוֹתָהּ שׁוּב מֵעַל רֹאשׁוֹ וְשׁוּב מִתְכַּרְבֵּל בָּהּ צָמוּד צָמוּד וְרוֹעֵד עוֹד קְצָת וְצוֹחֵק וּמְבָרֵךְ.

This poem is a section from Amichai's longer work, "Gods Change, Prayer is here to Stay" from *Patuach Sagur Patuach*. In it, he challenges the role of God and explores

[61] "*Mi Shehitateif Batzitzit*" #19 from "Eilim Matchilim, Hat'filot Nisharot La'ad: Patuach Sagur Patuach," *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 155.
English Translation adapted from Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler in her study of this poem, and Chana Bloch, Chana Kronfeld, trans., Alter, *Amichai,* 414.

the meaning of Jewish prayer, elaborating on ritual objects and offering both ironic and heartfelt personal stories and inventions. In this particular section, he earnestly investigates the role of the *tallit* in his life from childhood to adulthood.

The commandment to place *tzitzit* on four cornered garments comes from *Parshat Sh'lach Lecha* in the book of Numbers 15:39, which also furnishes the third paragraph of the Sh'ma. Observant Jewish males wear a *tallit katan*, a small *tallit*, either under or over their clothing to fulfill this *mitzvah*. The *tallit gadol*, or large *tallit*, is the prayer shawl ritually donned during the *Shacharit* service. Ritual objects are at the center of Jewish tradition. Like *nusach*, their presence and use dictate our yearly and weekly calendars, as well as the important moments in the lifecycle of a Jew. Jewish children wear them at *B'nai Mitzvah*, adults stand beneath them at their wedding and stand under their children's chuppah, and then are buried in them after death. Amichai understood the weight of this as a child, and it remains with him as he develops into an adult. The developmental nature of the poem shows us how his relationship to the tallit, and therefore to the religious community of his childhood, has changed shape over the course of his life, especially given the later date of this particular poem.

מִי שֶׁהִתְעַטֵּף בְּטַלִּית בִּנְעוּרָיו לֹא יִשְׁכַּח לְעוֹלָם

Whoever wraps in a tallit in their youth will never forget

At a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, a child takes on the responsibility of following the commandments. This is customarily symbolized (though not required) by wearing a tallit for the first time as one becomes Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Amichai's poem is autobiographical in nature, and he speaks in the third person about his own experience going from a boy raised in a traditional environment to a secular Israeli man. The first

section of the poem is instructional and describes how to wear a tallit. The blessing itself contains the word הִתְעַטֵּף (to wrap), a word which Amichai uses in the first line to invoke the first step of the ritual. As is explained in the book of Numbers, one wears tzitzit as a visual reminder of their obligation to fulfill *mitzvot* and heed God's commandments, as well as not to stray after idols or other forbidden temptations. Amichai earnestly comments on this reasoning in the first line by saying whoever wrapped in a tallit as a child will never forget the ritual of wearing it, but in a much larger and more poignant sense, will never forget Judaism and God's commandments. It is for this reason that he uses the word לְעוֹלָם, which appears countless times in our holy texts to mean world, eternity, afterlife, or as part of a descriptor for God. Here, he may mean it as "beyond time and space"-- which indicates again that the Judaism of his childhood is with him always, even if he is no longer observant.

He explains the next steps required to wear the tallit:

הַהוֹצָאָה מִשַּׂקִּית הַקְּטִיפָה הָרַכָּה
וּפְתִיחַת הַטַּלִּית הַמְקֻפֶּלֶת
פְּרִישָׂה נְשִׁיקַת הַצַּוָּארוֹן לְאָרְכּוֹ
(הַצַּוָּארוֹן לִפְעָמִים רָקוּם וְלִפְעָמִים מֻזְהָב)

taking it out of the soft velvet bag,
opening the folded tallit,
spreading it out, kissing the length of the neckband
(some neck bands embroidered, others trimmed in gold)

The beginning of the poem is instructional, and echoes a father teaching his son how to wrap himself in a tallit. In reading it you can almost hear how a parent lovingly teaches a child– the bag is soft, the tallit is folded inside like the מְקֻפֶּלֶת, the thinly-folded Israeli chocolate bar. Jews are not commanded to kiss holy objects but often do so to

show reverence to God.[62] It is typical in Orthodox Ashkenazi communities to purchase a standard black and white striped tallit, and then to have a special *atarah* sewn onto it– which explains the matter-of-fact, parenthetical description of the neckband in Amichai's poem. The similes used in the next line illustrate the child-like wonder that permeates the entire poem:

אַחַר־כְּךָ בִּתְנוּפָה גְּדוֹלָה מֵעַל הָרֹאשׁ
כְּמוֹ שָׁמַיִם כְּמוֹ חֻפָּה כְּמוֹ מַצָּנֵחַ.

> After that, with a great unfurling overhead
> like a sky, a wedding canopy, a parachute.

As a child in synagogue looking up at an adult putting on a tallit, the "great unfurling" takes on a mystical, magical quality. He uses similes to make three associations– the sky, a wedding canopy, a parachute. First, he says שָׁמַיִם (sky). This word (in addition to הִתְעַטֵּף and עוֹלָם) has an inherently biblical quality. *Shamayim* is the visible sky, as well as heaven, the dwelling place of God. As such, "Shamayim" is a metonymic identifier for Godself. Second, he compares the unfurling and lifting of the tallit to a חֻפָּה, a wedding canopy. A tallit is frequently included in Jewish marriage ceremonies in several different ways. It typically functions as the cloth part of the chuppah under which the couple stands. The couple is often wrapped in a tallit during the final blessings of the wedding. Brides present their betrothed with a tallit as a gift before the wedding ceremony. In Eastern European Ashkenazi communities, a man only regularly wears a tallit gadol daily after he is married.[63] To a child, a tallit gadol would indeed seem quite

---

[62] Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*, (PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2004) ; Alfred J. Kolatch, *The Jewish Book of Why/The Second Jewish Book of Why* (NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1989).
[63] Deuteronomy 22:12-13, the proximity of these verses to each other are the reason that Eastern European Ashkenazi men only begin wearing a tallit gadol daily after marriage.

large, and resemble the third association: a parachute, מַצְנֵחַ. This word references the gear of a paratrooper and a uniquely Israeli lifecycle event– joining the army. These three images– sky, chuppah, parachute– represent the accepted, the familiar, and the disparate. In placing the three together, Amichai defamiliarizes the object. In her study of this poem, Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler explains their connection:

> *Kemo shamayim*, *kemo huppah, kemo matsneach* – this three-part string of similes, ties together Heaven (a metonymy for God), marriage, and skydiving, suggesting, on the one hand, an unraveling of faith and fidelity: has the marriage you thought was made in Heaven come to a crashing end, necessitating the parachute of a divorce? On the other hand, is the act of parachuting not the ultimate demonstration of faith in the connection between sky and ground, between Heaven and earth?

Zierler's reading is supported by Amichai's biography, given that Amichai and his first wife, Tamar, divorced in the 1960's. In this string of similes, therefore, Amichai may be alluding to their separation by comparing the tallit to something that represents home and shelter in marriage to a piece of military equipment that keeps you from death when you are ejected into the sky, and set freefalling. As an Israeli child, both marriage and serving in the army may have seemed like moments to look forward to and to glorify. In adulthood, we learn that marriages don't always work out, and people die in wars. Perhaps Amichai is suggesting here, too, how his relationship to the ritual garment and to Jewish ritual has itself shifted. These similes are layered– both childlike and twinged with the sadness attached to aging. He reorients back to the narrative of the child by continuing to describe the tallit choreography in a naive way, invoking childhood play and fascination with the developmental transformation of caterpillars into butterflies (like that of children into adults):

אַחַר־כְּךָ לְכָרֹךְ אוֹתָהּ סְבִיב רֹאשׁ כְּמוֹ בְּמַחֲבוֹאִים
אַחַר־כְּךָ לְהִתְעַטֵּף

בָּהּ כָּל הַגּוּף צָמוּדָה צָמוּדָה וּלְהִתְכַּרְבֵּל
כְּמוֹ גֹּלֶם שֶׁל פַּרְפַּר וְלִפְתֹּחַ כְּמוֹ כְּנָפַיִם וְלָעוּף

And then winding it around his head as if playing hide-and-seek,
and then wrapping
his whole body in it, tight tight, snuggling into it
like the cocoon of a butterfly, then opening would-be wings to fly.

From a child's-eye-view, when one drapes the tallit over one's head, either when first donning it or during the Amidah, it might very well seem as though the davener is playing hide and seek. As Amichai describes the feeling of wrapping in a tallit, he elicits the comfort experienced in being wrapped in a blanket, repeating צָמוּדָה צָמוּדָה, tight tight, words a mother might whisper to her child who is cold. He also comments on the comfort experienced in the warmth of his childhood synagogue, where he felt swaddled and loved. As the wearer tosses the sides of the tallit over their shoulders, their arms extend in a flapping motion, as if they are flying. Amichai thus compares a butterfly emerging from a cocoon to this part of the ritual. At the same time, he expresses the confinement he felt in the community of his childhood, and his need to break free of that in order to become himself– to fly away.

His use of the word כְּנָפַיִם holds multiple meanings. On the most basic level, the use of the word כְּנָפַיִם here mean wings, as in the wings of a nascent butterfly, but there are other connotations as well. In Numbers 15:38, the Israelites are commanded to affix fringes עַל־כַּנְפֵי בִגְדֵיהֶם, on the corners of their clothes. Amichai thus grounds his metaphor of the opened tallit as wings in a lexical connection between the corners of the tallit and the wings of a bird or butterfly. In addition, the word כַּנְפֵי, here to describe the corners of clothes, is frequently used in liturgy to refer to כַּנְפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה, the wings of the divine presence, in the *El Malei Rachamim* prayer recited in memorial services. This adds

another, more ominous layer, given the developmental trajectory of the poem from youth to adulthood, the next steps being old age and death.

וּמַדּוּעַ הַטַּלִּית בְּפַסִּים
וְלֹא בְּמִשְׁבְּצוֹת־שָׁחוֹר־לָבָן
כְּמוֹ לוּחַ שַׁחְמַט.
כִּי הָרִבּוּעִים הֵם סוֹפִיִּים וּבְלִי תִּקְוָה

And why is the tallit striped
and not checkered black and white,
like a chessboard?
Because squares are finite and hopeless.

Again, Amichai yokes the childlike experience with an adult understanding. A child asks why the tallit has stripes, and compares it to a chessboard. Chess is one of the games that Orthodox children are permitted to play on Shabbat. These lines tell us about the limited experience of the child– the tallit in the synagogue, the chessboard at home. Perhaps Amichai is saying that the bounded square of observance became finite and hopeless for him. Many Jewish ritual objects are square-shaped, including the tallit. The commandment in the bible is to attach tzitzit to one's four-cornered, or square, garments. Nothing is more finite than death, when we are buried in a four-cornered shroud and put into a four cornered box. Religious life is, then, a travel between squares, rigid in their boundaries and only ever black or white. A chess game. His use of the words בְּלִי תִּקְוָה, hopelessness, portray the opposite of the experience of freedom in the land of Israel described in התקוה, the Israeli national anthem. The finite squares, סוֹפִיִּים, are the opposite of the צופיה– looking into the distance with expectations of dreams becoming reality– that we sing in *Hatikva*. He uses the word סוֹפִיִּים here to set up his use of endlessness, אֵין־סוֹף, in the following line:

הַפַּסִּים בָּאִים מֵאֵין־סוֹף וְיוֹצְאִים לְאֵין־סוֹף
כְּמוֹ מַסְלוּלֵי הַמָּרָאָה בְּשָׂדֵה תְּעוּפָה
לְנָחִיתַת הַמַּלְאָכִים וּלְהַמְרָאָתָם

Stripes come from endlessness and go to endlessness
like runways in an airport
where angels land and take off

The term אֵין־סוֹף is the Kabbalistic understanding of God's true essence. God has no beginning or end and transcends time and space. While this is conceptually difficult to grasp, Amichai pairs it with the airplane– a man-made, commonplace machine that seems to defy gravity. In this two-tiered metaphor, he describes the stripes of the tallitot as the runway at the airport where angels take off from infinity and land in infinity. Amichai mentions angels countless times throughout his work. They are always portrayed as physically located between the speaker and heaven– on ceilings, walking up stairs, taking off from airports. His reference to the angels, the airport, and earlier to the sky, the parachute, the butterfly wings– all these indicate the speaker's yearning for open space and freedom. The poem is polarized into these two opposite experiences: the warm embrace of the tallit and the closeness it comes with, versus the desire to fly away. Amichai then returns to the refrain, this time without the specificity of "in his youth" בִּנְעוּרָיו, as he is now– a secular adult:

מִי שֶׁהִתְעַטֵּף בְּטַלִּית לְעוֹלָם לֹא יִשְׁכַּח
כְּשֶׁהוּא יוֹצֵא מִן הַבְּרֵכָה אוֹ מִן הַיָּם
מִתְעַטֵּף בְּמַגֶּבֶת גְּדוֹלָה וּפוֹרֵשׂ אוֹתָהּ שׁוּב
מֵעַל רֹאשׁוֹ וְשׁוּב מִתְכַּרְבֵּל בָּהּ צָמוּד צָמוּד
וְרוֹעֵד עוֹד קְצָת וְצוֹחֵק וּמְבָרֵךְ.

Whoever wraps in a tallit will never forget
When he gets out of the swimming pool or the sea,
he wraps himself in a large towel, spreads it out again
over his head, and again, snuggling into it tight tight,
and still shivers a little, and laughs, and blesses.

Here Amichai describes the closest experience he has in his adulthood to the ritual of donning a tallit– that of coming out of the sea or the pool. Each time, he briefly relives wrapping himself in the tallit of his childhood– the physical tallit, and the nonmaterial memories it represents. He tosses it over his head, wraps himself tight tight, now because he's cold from having come out of the water. The poem concludes with three verbs: shivers, laughs, and blesses. Literally he shivers as a physical response to the temperature change, but this could also be read as he shudders when he catches himself reliving the religious experiences of his childhood. Additionally, this evokes the image of trembling before God. The word רַעַד is used in the Avodah section of the Yom Kippur Musaf service, where we read the Kohen Gadol's meticulous directions to correctly worship God through sacrifice. The beginning of this service begins with the High Priest's ritual immersion in a *Mikveh*. Perhaps Amichai connects his swims to ritual immersion, too.

By removing religious objects from their context, Amichai unapologetically asserts that Judaism, Jewish ritual, and their emotional/spiritual associations, shouldn't be confined to the synagogue. In his own way, his swimming at an Israeli beach and wrapping a towel around himself afterward is indeed as Jewish of an experience as the one from his childhood. He cannot sift his religious knowledge and vocabulary, both which came from a religious childhood that he remembers fondly, out from the life he leads as an adult. He thinks about this, laughs to himself, and says a blessing.

Musical Analysis

This poem is used with frequency in progressive and Reform prayer books (see appendix at the end of this thesis). Its use in Mishkan T'filah is what inspired composer Jack Gottleib (1930-2011) to set it to music. In 2009, Cantor Josh Breitzer was a student

at Hebrew Union College-Jewish institute of Religion, writing his thesis and preparing his thesis and senior recital about Jack Gottleib. Soon after they met, Josh expressed to Jack that the new Reform prayer book had many interesting readings on the left-facing pages. An english translation of this poem is on page 73 of Mishkan T'filah for shabbat. It must have called out to Jack, as he set it to music in honor of Josh's senior recital. "The Tallit" was the last piece of music Jack Gottleib ever wrote. Neil Levin at the Milken Archive of Jewish Music summarizes his contribution to Jewish Music with the following words:[64]

> Jack Gottlieb contributed his considerable creative gifts to a broad spectrum of musical endeavor that spans high art, Judaically related, functional liturgical, and theatrical musical expression—as well as music criticism and scholarship of American popular idioms. He described his own music as "basically eclectic," in the American tradition of Copland. His pungent rhythms, inventive harmonic colors, clarity, and refreshing directness bespeak a manifestly urban American influence, often also informed by Jewish musical traditions and, where applicable, by the natural sonorities and cadences of the Hebrew language…From 1970 until 1973 Gottlieb was the music director of Temple Israel in St. Louis, one of the major Reform congregations in America, where he instigated and supervised much creative musical programming; and during the 1970s he was a professor of music at the School of Sacred Music of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, in New York, where he was also composer-in-residence. From 1958 to 1966 he was Leonard Bernstein's assistant at the New York Philharmonic. Gottlieb was an authority, author, and lecturer on the influence of Jewish popular, folk, theatrical, and even liturgical music traditions on the rise of American popular music, to which he has devoted many years of study and research. One of the most outspoken critics of populist inroads into American synagogue music, Gottlieb was a vocal proponent of reforging a connection between learned cantorial-training and aesthetic-standards in American synagogues.

Gottlieb's musical setting of "The Tallit" is a concert piece, and one of the first instances of a Jewish American composer setting an English translation of an Amichai poem to music. This having taken place at Hebrew Union College for the senior recital of

[64] Neil W. Levin, *Jack Gottleib* (Milken Archive of Jewish Music, https://www.milkenarchive.org/artists/view/jack-gottlieb/, 2014).

one of my teachers brings this full circle.

The harmonies and careful consideration of counterpoint used in “The Tallit” invoke mid to late twentieth century concert music. It is highly reminiscent of Kurt Weill, Benjamin Britten, and of Gottlieb’s mentor, Leonard Bernstein. This could be considered light opera– clearly coming from a classical tradition, but Cantor Breitzer’s singing on the recording from his recital holds back on heavy operatic tone. The style is clearly influenced by musical theater. The music is rhythmically rather simple, periodically shifting between straight eighth note subdivisions and triplets. The harmony is quite complex and sophisticated, featuring chromatic chords and frequently modulating to distantly related keys. The key area is often ambiguous, bordering on atonal. Charmingly, the score includes stage directions and comedic deliveries. Such devices lend a surprisingly theatrical tone for the synagogue context– making this piece perfect for a teaching, sermon anthem, or cantorial concert.

Song Without an End[65] שִׁיר אֵינְסוֹפִי

Inside the brand-new museum	בְּתוֹךְ מוּזֵאוֹן חָדִישׁ
there's an old synagogue,	בֵּית כְּנֶסֶת יָשָׁן
Inside the synagogue	בְּתוֹךְ בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת
Is me	אֲנִי,
Inside me	בְּתוֹכִי
My heart	לִבִּי
Inside my heart	בְּתוֹךְ לִבִּי
A museum	מוּזֵאוֹן,
Inside the museum	בְּתוֹךְ הַמּוּזֵאוֹן
A synagogue	בֵּית כְּנֶסֶת
Inside it, me	בְּתוֹכוֹ, אֲנִי
Inside me	בְּתוֹכִי
My heart	לִבִּי
Inside my heart	בְּתוֹךְ לִבִּי
A museum	מוּזֵאוֹן

The Droste effect, known in visual art as an example of *mise en abyme*, occurs when an image is recursive and it appears within itself continuously. Amichai's "שִׁיר אֵינְסוֹפִי" uses this same concept with poetry– he evokes images that appear one inside the other continuously. To dismiss this poem as a clever "Russian doll" would be to dismiss its many layers; like many of Amichai's poems, there is a psychoanalytical undercurrent in "*Shir Einsofi*" that comments on an essential truth about his life and the life of observant-turned-secular Jews. In the same vein as the Droste effect, Author Douglas Hofstadter coined the term strangeloop,[66] which explains the experience encapsulated in this poem through the lens of cognitive science:

> And yet when I say "strange loop", I have something else in mind — a less concrete, more elusive notion. What I mean by "strangeloop" is — here goes a first stab, anyway — not a physical circuit but an abstract loop in

[65] "Shir Einsofi" from *Shalva G'dolah: She'elot Utshuvot*, *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Volume 3, 369.
Translation by Chana Bloch, *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1996), 142.
[66] Douglas Hofstadter, *I Am a Strange Loop* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 101-102.

> which, in the series of stages that constitute the cycling-around, there is a shift from one level of abstraction (or structure) to another, which feels like an upwards movement in an hierarchy, and yet somehow the successive "upward" shifts turn out to give rise to a closed cycle. That is, despite one's sense of departing ever further from one's origin, one winds up, to one's shock, exactly where one had started out. In short, a strange loop is a paradoxical level-crossing feedback loop.

For Amichai, the cyclical experience of his life as a secular Israeli adult always loops around the religious experience of his childhood. This is exacerbated by his identity as a nationally celebrated poet whose writing is frequently dissected as being Jewish or not. The images described in Amichai's poem describe both the abstract and intimate nature of his relationship to both the museum and the synagogue, and their relationship to one another from his viewpoint. The catalyst for this poem seems to be the synagogue exhibit in Jerusalem's Israel museum. In this exhibit, four reconstructed synagogues from different parts of the world are displayed, including their arks and seating arrangements. In the same exhibit, there is a vast display of ritual objects from Jewish communities around the world. The exhibit's intention is to provide the museumgoer with an experience of the synagogue as the center of Jewish communities globally, and how the synagogues construction and accoutrement are impacted by local style and tradition.

Amichai uses his experience of seeing these synagogues in the museum to journey back to the synagogues of his childhood– perhaps his family synagogue in Wurzburg, Germany before they immigrated to Palestine, or to the Orthodox synagogue of his teen years in Jerusalem. Amichai left the religious observance of his childhood in favor of a more secular lifestyle. Despite this, his love for Jewish text and ritual and his struggle with God remain major themes in his poetry. In this way, the synagogue and the Judaism of his childhood are forever preserved in his consciousness (and his heart) as they were in his childhood, in the same way that these synagogues from around the globe are

preserved in the Israel museum. With his poetry as an enmeshment of Jewish doubt and cynicism with reverence and fondness, Amichai sometimes sees Judaism itself as a museum– a means of preserving something from the past that doesn't make sense to him in a modern context, but is nevertheless beautiful. Still, he cannot separate it from his identity and his relationship to Judaism defines him– so, his heart is in the synagogue-museum, too. His poems are autobiographical in nature and tell the story of a very full life– travel, war, intimacy and heartbreak, loss, day to day interactions, a struggle with God, a study in Jewish text. In this poem, he suggests what Douglas Hofstadter posits in the strangeloop concept– that no matter how far he goes or how doubtful he is, he always circles back to Judaism and the synagogue.

Amichai uses the term אֵינְסוֹפִי, without end or infinite, in other works, too,[67] such as the previously discussed tallit poem, to represent the divine or the unfathomable. Here, though, his use of this word in the title holds two additional meanings. On the most obvious level, the poem is a loop that goes on without end. The other meaning is that while Amichai's lifetime is finite, his poems will likely outlast him, and indeed, bounce between the places listed: namely, the museum, synagogue and heart.

First, a museum: the physical places in Jerusalem that he frequents, and the museum, conceptually, as a place his own work may someday be collected. Then, a synagogue– a place he sees on every corner, that pervades his thoughts and his writing, and that he approaches with bittersweetness. Is it possible that Amichai was himself anticipating the liturgical, synagogal incorporation of his poetry that this thesis represents? While he may not have seen himself as a synagogue goer, he seemed to have

[67] "Whoever Wrapped in a Tallit in his Youth," chapter 1 page 54 of this thesis.

identified deeply with the analogy between affairs of the heart and liturgical ceremonies, connecting all of them to his identity as a person, artist and Jew.

"Shir Einsofi" is not Amichai's only poetic mention of the museum. He references the museum as a metaphor for his life in his long form, autobiographical poem "The Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela":

לְפָעָמִים אֲנִי רוֹצֶה לַחֲזוֹר
אֶל כָּל מַה שֶׁהָיָה לִי, כְּמוֹ בְּמוּזֵיאוֹן,
כְּשֶׁאַתָּה חוֹזֵר לֹא לְפִי סֵדֶר
הַתְּקוּפוֹת, בְּכִוּוּן הַפּוּךְ, לֹא לְפִי הַחֵץ,
כְּדֵי לְחַפֵּשׂ אֶת הָאִשָּׁה הָאֲהוּבָה.
אֵיפֹה הִיא? הַחֶדֶר הַמִּצְרִי,
הַמִּזְרָח הָרָחוֹק, הַמֵּאָה הָעֶשְׂרִים, אֲמָנוּת
הַמְּעָרוֹת, הַכֹּל בְּעֵרְבּוּבְיָה, וְהַשּׁוֹמְרִים
הַמְּדָאֲגִים קוֹרְאִים אַחֲרֶיךָ:
זֶה בְּנֶגֶד לִתְקוּפוֹת! לֹא לְשָׁם!
כָּאן הַיְצִיאָה. אַתָּה לֹא תִלְמַד מִזֶּה,
אַתָּה יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁלֹּא. אַתָּה מְחַפֵּשׂ, אַתָּה שׁוֹכֵחַ.

Sometimes I want to go back
to everything I had, as in a museum,
when you go back not in the order
of the eras, but in the opposite direction, against the arrow,
to look for the woman you loved.
Where is she? The Egyptian Room,
the Far East, the Twentieth Century, Cave Art,
everything jumbled together, and the worried
guards calling after you:
You can't go against the eras! You won't learn from this,
you know you won't. You're searching, you're forgetting.

In this section of the poem he seeks to find the lost woman in the museum, and perhaps in "Shir Einsofi" he seeks to find the lost God of his childhood in the same setting.[68] His desire to explore the museum of his life out of order explains further the experience he describes in "Shir Einsofi." If his life is a museum, then he cycles through his memories out of chronological order, always in search of something, ultimately landing in the synagogue. The synagogue, too, has the Droste effect. In the context of the synagogue, this poem evokes the structure of the ancient temple in Jerusalem– three large

[68] Chana Kronfeld, "The Wisdom of Camouflage: Between Rhetoric and Philosophy in Amichai's Poetic System." *Prooftexts* 10:3, (Indiana University Press, 1990) 484.

rooms of equal size, one being the holy of holies where inside the ark, the *Shechina* dwells. Only the high priest could enter that space on Yom Kippur, and everyone else could only admire it from afar– like a valuable piece of art in a museum.

Musical Analysis

Ezra Donner is an American composer, pianist, conductor, and teacher. He holds a Doctorate in Music from Indiana University and a Bachelor of Music with High Honors from the University of Michigan. Having grown up in the Reform movement, he wrote this piece as one of three Amichai settings for The Guild of Temple Musicians Ben Steinberg Young Composer's Award in 2015. Donner was raised in the Reform movement.

The musical setting was composed for piano, voice, and clarinet, though the recording utilizes a violin in the clarinet's place. Rhythmically, the violin line is in triplets while the vocal line is predominantly eighth notes. The piano punctuates these patterns with periodic half note chords. Interestingly, while the piece is strictly metrical, the contrasting subdivisions of the beat and the general sparseness give the impression that it is somewhat free rhythmically. The piece is largely diatonic harmony, with the exception of some chromaticism in a brief sequence of secondary function chords beginning at measure 20. This is in contrast to the relative harmonic simplicity of all that comes before and after it, and is quite moving in effect.

The baritone on the recording is Cantor David Goldstein. These pieces were the center of a service for Shabbat Shirah in 2016– a perfect opportunity to teach about Amichai. Cantor Goldstein sings in a resonant, classical style. The higher pitch of the violin contrasts with the depth and breadth of his sound, as well as the open chords in the

piano. Together this creates an overall warm and full sonority. This piece is written from a contemporary, classical idiom, but the simplicity and lilting nature of the violin part lend a folk-like quality. Each line is unending in nature– the vocal line never seems to settle, and anticipation is maintained throughout the piece. The final cadence of the song lands on a dominant chord superimposed over the subdominant chord, with no third. This ending is inconclusive– just as the poem continues without end, so too could the musical setting continue to loop. As mentioned above, this setting was used in a synagogue service for Shabbat Shirah. It could function as a sermon anthem, a song related to the parsha, a cantorial concert, or in teaching about Amichai.

I Studied Love in my Childhood Synagogue [69] לָמַדְתִּי אַהֲבָה בְּיַלדוּתִי בְּבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת

I studied love in my childhood in the synagogue of my childhood	לָמַדְתִּי אַהֲבָה בְּיַלדוּתִי בְּבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת שֶׁל יַלדוּתִי
In the women's section with the help of the women behind the partition that locked up my mother with all the other women and girls. But the partition that locked them up, locked me up on the other side.	בְּעֶזרַת הַנָּשִׁים בְּעֶזרַת הַנָּשִׁים שֶׁמֵּאֲחוֹרֵי הַמָּחִצה שֶׁכָּלְאָה אֶת אִמִּי עִם כָּל הַנָּשִׁים וְהַנְּעָרוֹת. אֲבָל הַמְּחִצָּה שֶׁכָּלְאָה אוֹתָן, כָּלְאָה אוֹתִי מִן הַצַּד הַשֵּׁנִי
They were free in their love and I remained locked up with all the words and all the youths in my love and my longing	הֵן הָיוּ חָפְשִׁיוֹת בְּאַהֲבָתָן וַאֲנִי נִשְׁאַרְתִּי כָּלוּא עִם כָּל הַדְּבָרִים וְכָל הַנְּעָרִים בְּאַהֲבָתִי וּבִכְמִיהָתִי
And I wanted to be there with them and to know their secrets	וְרָצִיתִי לִהְיוֹת אִתָּן שָׁם וְלָדַעַת אֶת סוֹדוֹתֵיהֶן
And to say with them "blessed be He who made me according to his will."	.וּלְבָרֵךְ "בָּרוּךְ שֶׁעָשַׂנִי כִּרְצוֹנוֹ" אִתָּן
And the partition, a lace curtain white and soft as summer dresses,	וְהַמְּחִצָּה , וִילוֹן מַלְמָלָה לָבָן וְרַךְ כְּשִׂמְלוֹת קַיִץ וְהַוִילוֹן
swaying on its rings and loops back and forth	,זָז הָלוֹךְ וְשׁוֹב בְּטַבָּעוֹת וּבְלוּלָאוֹת
Lu lu lu loops, lu lu, voices of love in the closed room	לוּ לוּ לוּ לוּלָאוֹת, לוּ לוּ, קוֹלוֹת אַהֲבָה בַּחֶדֶר הַסָּגוּר.
And the faces of women like the faces of the moon behind the clouds	וּפְנֵי הַנָּשִׁים כִּפְנֵי הַלְּבָנָה שֶׁמֵּאֲחוֹרֵי הֶעָנָנִים
Or the full moon when the curtain is open, an enchanted cosmic order.	אוֹ הַמְּלֵאָה בְּהִפָּתֵחַ הַוִילוֹן כְּמוֹ בְּמַעֲרֶכֶת קוֹסְמִית קְסוּמָה. וּבַלַּיְלָה בֵּרַכְנוּ בִּרְכַּת הַלְּבָנָה בַּחוּץ וַאֲנִי חָשַׁבְתִּי עַל הַנָּשִׁים.
At night we said the blessing over the moon outside, and I thought about the women.	

This section comes from Amichai's long poem "Gods Change, Prayers Are Here to Stay," from *Open Closed Open*, which is largely concerned with God's relationship to the Jewish people, stories from Torah, and the understanding of Jewish prayer, as indicated in the *hitpa'el* verb *lehitapallel*, as reflexive– as an investigation of oneself. This stanza illustrates his yearning to understand the feminine parts of his own identity as well as the women in his life. He writes about the exclusion of women from Jewish practice, and illustrates how the sexism inherent in Orthodoxy always bothered him– and

[69] *"Lamad'ti Ahava B'yalduti B'veit Knesset" #25* from "Eilim Matchilim, Hat'filot Nish'arot La'ad," *Patuach Sagur Patuach, Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 158. English translation adapted from Chana Bloch, Chana Kronfeld, trans., Alter, *Amichai*, 412.

how this contributed to his disconnection from it. Furthermore, he lifts up emotional intelligence and sensitivity as a most treasured aspect of his religious upbringing. Most of his poetry about the community of his youth incorporates sarcasm and irony, which in this section is replaced with truth and tenderness, evoking the very qualities he learned from these women.

Unlike his contemporaries, Amichai continually expressed "his indebtedness to the women poets who came before him…Amichai is the only male Hebrew poet to present his own poetic lineage, at least in part, as a matrilineage."[70] He was deeply influenced by German expressionist poet Else Lasker-Schuler and modern Hebrew poet Leah Goldberg, the latter with whom he had a close connection, and who defended his work from its early criticism. Amichai dedicated many poems to both women, his "literary mothers". Additionally, he wrote about his own mother lovingly and even heroically. He frequently wrote about these women, as Chana Kronfeld states, to "thematize the limited and threatened agency of a poetic subject who struggles with the oppressive institutional authority… From their de-centered position, the female characters– like matrilineal affiliation in general– challenge established intertextual authority by dismantling its hegemonic discourse."[71] Feminist in his own way, Amichai commented on the exclusion of women from academic discourse and from religious participation in his writing.

Judaism is an inherently Patriarchal tradition that has relegated women to a lower status than men. Women are not halachically bound to religious activities outside of the home, which is traditionally considered to be their sphere. In Orthodox synagogues, there

[70] Kronfeld, *Full Severity of Compassion*, 153.
[71] Ibid, 156.

is separate seating for men and women. They are either separated by the women being seated in the balcony with the men in the synagogue space below, or on the same floor but separated by a *mechitza*, a partition that separates the two genders. This partition is frequently a screen or a curtain, like the one described in the poem. Amichai begins the poem by stating that he learned love in his childhood synagogue from the women's section:

לָמַדְתִּי אַהֲבָה בְּיַלְדוּתִי בְּבֵית הַכְּנֶסֶת שֶׁל יַלְדוּתִי
בְּעֶזְרַת הַנָּשִׁים בְּעֶזְרַת הַנָּשִׁים שֶׁמֵּאֲחוֹרֵי הַמְּחִצָה
שֶׁכָּלְאָה אֶת אִמִּי עִם כָּל הַנָּשִׁים וְהַנְּעָרוֹת
אֲבָל הַמְּחִצָה שֶׁכָּלְאָה אוֹתָן, כָּלְאָה אוֹתִי מִן הַצַּד הַשֵּׁנִי

> I studied love in my childhood in the synagogue of my childhood
> In the women's section with the help of the women behind the partition
> that locked up my mother with all the other women and girls.
> But the partition that locked them up, locked me up on the other side.

In stating that he studied love in the women's section of his childhood synagogue, Amichai discredits the idea that Jewish learning is for boys to learn from men. Before the age of mitzvot, children can accompany their parents in either section, and after they achieve this age of majority, they are required to sit according to gender. Amichai states that he studied love– not Tanach or Torah– in synagogue, and his learning took place on the women's side. He plays on the dual meaning of the word עֶזְרָה as precinct or section and help, in its dependent for עֶזְרַת– often used to refer to the help of God, as in the phrase בעזרת השם. Here the phrase used is בְּעֶזְרַת הַנָּשִׁים, suggesting he studied love in the synagogue of his childhood not with the help of God, but the help of women, and in the women's section, as the women's section of the synagogue is called the עֶזְרַת הַנָּשִׁים. Amichai notices the irony in the women being sectioned off, but with the use of the word *ezrat*, they are also praised.

Amichai learned love from the women of the synagogue as authentic teachers of human emotion, and once he was no longer considered a child, this love (and love of Judaism) was separated from him and locked away, along with his mother and the other women. He thus asserts that the mechitza is detrimental for both genders, as once he became Bar Mitzvah he felt jailed on a side where he didn't belong. This sentiment brings forward the concept of in-betweenness found so frequently in Amichai's writing– he doesn't belong in either of two categories, and seeks to describe his life in this in-between. The use of the mechitza was prescribed by the rabbis[72] to prevent frivolity of both spirit and behavior, and to keep the men from being distracted by the women. Amichai argues here that the very thing the mechitza functions to prevent is what he found most meaningful in his Jewish upbringing– love. In the next lines, he explains his understanding of gender identity and roles by using images of confinement and freedom:

הֵן הָיוּ חָפְשִׁיוֹת בְּאַהֲבָתָן וַאֲנִי נִשְׁאַרְתִּי
כָּלוּא עִם כָּל הַדְּבָרִים וְכָל הַנְּעָרִים בְּאַהֲבָתִי וּבִכְמִיהָתִי
וְרָצִיתִי לִהְיוֹת אִתָּן שָׁם וְלָדַעַת אֶת סוֹדוֹתֵיהֶן
וּלְבָרֵךְ "בָּרוּךְ שֶׁעָשַׂנִי כִּרְצוֹנוֹ" אִתָּן

They were free in their love and I remained locked up with all the things
And all of the boys in my love and my longing
And i wanted to be there with them and to know their secrets
And to say with them "blessed be He who made me according to his will."

His description of the women as being free in their love describes the sensitivity and affection stereotyped and perpetuated as female qualities. Sensitivity, a feminine virtue, is inherent in the identity of a creative, like Amichai. Thus, in the religious community of his youth, he was forced to stifle this part of himself in order to "belong" on the male side of the mechitza. He explains that he was locked up without love, in the men's section. Intimacy and closeness is part of secrecy and whispering, and he wanted to

[72] Mishnah Sukkah 51a-52a.

be a part of this. He yearns to recite the following line from the morning blessings in daily liturgy, which he quotes in this poem:

וּלְבָרֵךְ "בָּרוּךְ שֶׁעָשַׂנִי כִּרְצוֹנוֹ" אִתָּן

And to say with them "blessed be He who made me according to his will."

In Ashkenazi siddurim, this line is specifically to be recited by the women, one line after the following blessing prescribed for men:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. שֶׁלֹּא עָשַׂנִי אִשָּׁה:[73]

> Blessed are You Adonai our God, ruler of the universe, who did not make me a woman

Amichai derives pain from saying these words. As a child, he already doesn't view the opposite sex as being less than. He feels uncomfortable with the gender binary, and wishes he could say the more egalitarian blessing, designated for only women to say. He notices that the partition itself is feminine, and it reminds him of the dresses women wear in the summertime. In this sense, he seems to enjoy the mechitza and the opportunity it afforded him as a pre-bar-mitzvah, to sequester himself in female company.

וְהַמְּחִצָּה, וִילוֹן מַלְמָלָה לָבָן וְרַךְ כְּשִׂמְלוֹת קַיִץ וְהַוִילוֹן
זָז הָלוֹךְ וָשׁוֹב בְּטַבָּעוֹת וּבְלוּלָאוֹת
לוּ לוּ לוּלָאוֹת, לוּ לוּ, קוֹלוֹת אַהֲבָה בַּחֶדֶר הַסָגוּר

> And the partition, a lace curtain white and soft as summer dresses,
> swaying on its rings and loops back and forth
> Lu lu lu loops, lu lu, voices of love in the closed room

The curtain moves on its loops, and he watches the white fabric move. Amichai uses the first syllable of the word *lulaot* לוּלָאוֹת, loops, to describe the looping sounds of the women's voices, perhaps singing a *niggun*, or maybe even the feminine nickname Lulu. He specifies that these are voices of love, again saying that this love is separated

[73] Siddur Ashkenaz, Shacharit.

from him, as the voices chime out from a room with the door closed. He mentions women's singing to reference the Halacha of *kol isha*[74] which forbids men from hearing a woman sing, because its alluring sound may lead to immodest behavior.

וּפְנֵי הַנָּשִׁים כִּפְנֵי הַלְּבָנָה שֶׁמֵּאֲחוֹרֵי הָעֲנָנִים
אוֹ הַמְּלֵאָה בְּהִפָּתַח הַוילוֹן כְּמוֹ בְּמַעֲרֶכֶת
קוֹסְמִית קְסוּמָה. וּבַלַּיְלָה בֵּרַכְנוּ בִּרְכַּת הַלְּבָנָה בַּחוּץ וַאֲנִי חָשַׁבְתִּי עַל הַנָּשִׁים.

> And the faces of women like the faces of the moon behind the clouds
> Or the full moon when the curtain is open, an enchanted cosmic order.
> At night we said the blessing over the moon outside, and I thought about the women.

He compares the faces of the women behind the white fabric of the mechitza to the moon being hidden by the clouds. The moon and the evening evoke elusiveness and mystery, which is how Amichai now views the women's section. When the mechitza is open and he can see them, like an open curtain allowing a view of the moon, a magical and cosmic light is reflected. Amichai ties this to the ritual of קידוש לבנה *Kiddush Levanah* (sanctification of the moon), when during the beginning of the month, the moon is in its first stages of renewal. There is a special blessing along with additional prayers for the ritual of the new moon. This ritual is feminine in nature for several reasons. The sages[75] equate the fulfillment of this ritual at it's proper time to encountering the *Shechina*, the feminine presence of God. Ironically, in certain traditions women are at best exempted and at worst strictly banned from participation in this lunar ritual, perhaps because of its allegorical associations with women and the feminine. This blessing of the moon honors its rebirth and the renewal of the month. Birth and the monthly cycle allude to pregnancy and menstruation. Finally, there is rabbinic disagreement about whether one looks directly

[74] B'rachot 24a.
[75] Talmud: Sanhedrin 42a.

at the moon right before the blessing, or looks at it through the duration of the ritual.[76] This connects directly to Amichai's experience of looking at the faces of the women through the mechitza, and begs the question in both cases, how could it be forbidden to look at something beautiful?

[76] Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 426:2.

Chapter 3: Memorial Poems

אַזכָּרָה

El Malei Rachamim[77] אֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים

אֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים, אִלְמָלֵא הָאֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים הָיוּ הָרַחֲמִים בָּעוֹלָם וְלֹא רַק בּוֹ. אֲנִי, שֶׁקָּטַפְתִּי פְּרָחִים בָּהָר וְהִסְתַּכַּלְתִּי אֶל כָּל הָעֲמָקִים, אֲנִי, שֶׁהֵבֵאתִי גְּוִיּוֹת מִן הַגְּבָעוֹת, יוֹדֵעַ לְסַפֵּר שֶׁהָעוֹלָם רֵיק מֵרַחֲמִים. אֲנִי שֶׁהָיִיתִי מֶלֶךְ הַמֶּלַח לְיַד הַיָּם, שֶׁעָמַדְתִּי בְּלִי הַחְלָטָה לְיַד חַלּוֹנִי, שֶׁסָּפַרְתִּי צַעֲדֵי מַלְאָכִים, שֶׁלִּבִּי הֵרִים מִשְׁקָלוֹת כְּאֵב בַּתַּחֲרֻיּוֹת הַנּוֹרָאוֹת. אֲנִי שֶׁמִּשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ רַק בְּחֵלֶק קָטָן מִן הַמִּלִּים שֶׁבַּמִּלּוֹן. אֲנִי, שֶׁמֻּכְרָח לִפְתּוֹר חִידוֹת בָּעַל כָּרְחִי יוֹדֵעַ כִּי אִלְמָלֵא הָאֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים הָיוּ הָרַחֲמִים בָּעוֹלָם וְלֹא רַק בּוֹ.	God full of mercy Were it not for the God full of mercy There would be mercy in the world, and not only in Him. I, who have gathered flowers on the mountain Gazed into the valleys, I, who have brought bodies down the hillside, I know to say that the world is empty of mercy. I, who was the salt sultan by the sea Who stood undecided at my window Who counted angels' footsteps Whose heart lifted weights of pain In the terrible tournaments I, who uses only a small portion of the words in the dictionary. I, who solves riddles against my will Know that were God not full of mercy, there would be mercy in the world, and not only in Him.

In the traditional, "אֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים" prayer, we pray for the soul of the deceased to be granted proper rest in Gan Eden, for their soul to be tucked away– hidden and by implication, protected, under the wings of the Shechina, and to be bound up in the bonds of eternal life. In Amichai's poem by the same title, he argues with the liturgy's viewpoint that God is all-merciful. As a result of the bloodshed he witnessed as an Israeli soldier and the Israeli communal experience of loss, Amichai's point is that God has mercy, but

[77] "El Malei Rachamim" from *Shirim 1948-1962, Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Volume 1, 86. English translation adapted from Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler and Glenda Abramson, *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai*, 57.

keeps it all to Himself, not sharing it with the world. There is a sacrilegiousness to Amichai's invoking this prayer, sung at the saddest moments in human life, for a poem that questions the very existence of God. While this poem abounds in irony, Amichai names a painful truth, namely, that God's absence is commonly felt in moments of devastating loss. In invoking the "El Malei Rachamim" prayer to express the sense of Godlessness brought about by war, Amichai forces his audience– Israelis who have suffered loss– to actually consider what the words of memorial liturgy mean, and whether or not they truly believe what they are saying. The poem consists of a series of wordplays based on the original text of the liturgy:

אֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים,
אִלְמָלֵא הָאֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים
הָיוּ הָרַחֲמִים בָּעוֹלָם וְלֹא רַק בּוֹ.

God full of mercy
Were it not for the God full of mercy
There would be mercy in the world, and not only in Him.

The words of the first line take from the liturgical title– El Malei Rachamim– meaning God Full of Compassion. The second line begins with the word אִלְמָלֵא *ilmalei*, and by adding a single syllable he establishes the first of many doublings and wordplays which mimic those in the traditional liturgy: "*menuchah nechonah*," "*zohar mazhirim*," "*yastireha beseter*," and "*yitsror bitsror*." While these pairs "offer a sense of comforting plentitude in the "*Male* prayer," Amichai's poem uses the same techniques to convey arch skepticism and a sense of empty promises."[78] His "*geviot min hagevaot*," "*melech hamelach*," and "*taharuyot hanoraot*" create a sense of irony. Beneath it is a yearning for connection to the God of his childhood and the sadness that surrounds loss.

[78] Idea from Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler's study of this poem.

By using the word אִלְמָלֵא he comments on the liturgical language of God being מָלֵא, full or complete. Amichai suggests that the self-sufficient nature of the God of Judaism is even "splendidly detached and indifferent, in other words, absent from and silent to the painful elements of human existence."[79] The speaker in this poem is concerned with the world as he experiences it, and the vast difference between his life and the idea of a merciful God in heaven, who as the liturgy suggests, will protect the dead forever but didn't prevent the death to begin with.

He begins his argument with the text and swiftly moves to first person experiences, which suggests that this poem is not about God, but about him. While the traditional liturgy is a prayer for the dead, Amichai's setting is concerned with those still alive. In the next line, he establishes the recurring pattern of "I, who"-- a rhetorical stance[80] which explains that his personal, painful experiences allow for his acerbic tone.

אֲנִי, שֶׁקָּטַפְתִּי פְּרָחִים בָּהָר
וְהִסְתַּכַּלְתִּי אֶל כָּל הָעֲמָקִים,
אֲנִי, שֶׁהֵבֵאתִי גְוִיּוֹת מִן הַגְּבָעוֹת,
יוֹדֵעַ לְסַפֵּר שֶׁהָעוֹלָם רֵיק מֵרַחֲמִים.

I, who have gathered flowers on the mountain
Gazed into the valleys,
I, who have brought bodies down the hillside,
I know to say that the world is empty of mercy.

In using this poetic "I," Amichai illustrates that the content of this poem, and the impact of death on those who are still living, is not abstract or grandiose. It isn't one size fits all, as he views the liturgical El Malei Rachamim to be. He draws attention to himself as the individual, disappointed by God's absence– which, of course, departs from agnosticism and suggests that at some other time, he was aware of God's presence.

[79] Idea from Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler's study of this poem.
[80] Abramson, *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai,* 57.

Additionally, the repetitive use of …שֶׁ ,אֲנִי "I, who" mimics a liturgical poetic structure. There are many pieces of liturgy that repeat the name of God, followed by attributes used to "imply the multifacetedness of God… In this way the poem again satirizes traditional literature as it replaces God with a human being."[81] To specifically speak to the context of surviving war, Amichai uses the following word pair: גְּוִיּוֹת מִן הַגְּבָעוֹת, bodies from the hills. In saying that "I" brought bodies down the hillside, he clarifies that he is speaking of a distinctly Israeli reality, and not the universal understanding of death.

In these lines, Amichai establishes his connection to the physical world as a parallel to the metaphysical world God is absent from. In the poem, God is only described with the adjective *malei*, a description or attribute. Amichai's "I" is always paired with a verb– קָטַפְתִּי, הִסְתַּכַּלְתִּי, הֵבֵאתִי etc. in the past tense. This highlights the difference between God and humans that Amichai sees– God is vaguely described, but humans are forever impacted by their past experiences and actions. Amichai frequently accuses God of being out there, somewhere, while he fends for himself in his day to day life.[82] His physical experiences continue in the next lines:

אֲנִי שֶׁהָיִיתִי מֶלֶךְ הַמֶּלַח לְיַד הַיָּם,
שֶׁעָמַדְתִּי בְּלִי הַחְלָטָה לְיַד חַלּוֹנִי,
שֶׁסָּפַרְתִּי צַעֲדֵי מַלְאָכִים,
שֶׁלִּבִּי הֵרִים מִשְׁקְלוֹת כְּאֵב
בַּתַּחֲרֻיּוֹת הַנּוֹרָאוֹת.

I, who was the salt sultan by the sea
Who stood undecided at my window
Who counted angels' footsteps
Whose heart lifted weights of pain
In the terrible tournaments

[81] Naomi B Sokoloff, "On Amichai's El Male Raḥamim." *Prooftexts 4:2, (May, 1984): 131.*
[82] Ibid., 132.

In the word pair מֶלֶךְ הַמֶּלַח, salt sultan, Glenda Abramson suggests that Amichai is drawing a further connection between the holy and the mundane. Instead of *Melech HaOlam*, a name we use for God formulaically in blessings, his speaker is the Salt Sultan. His speaker is connecting again to the physical land of Israel, the sand of the beach, and perhaps here Amichai is referencing the ים המלח, directly translated as the Salt Sea (the Dead Sea). In the next line, the speaker stands at his window, an image used most notably in another Amichai poem– *Chalon Tamid*, which discusses the window as the *ner tamid* in the synagogue ark, but the light inside is a memorial lamp.

In the following line the speaker mentions counting footsteps, another recurrent image in Amichai's poetry.[83] Frequently, he uses the image of angels in connection with formality of organized religion, describing them as physical intermediaries between him and God. Here, they seem to be walking up stairs, and the poet speaker counts their footsteps behind them as they go. He continues by expressing how his heart lifted weights of pain in terrible tournaments, an image that he returns to later in his career in "The Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela," analyzed in chapter one of this thesis.[84] The idea of a tournament evokes a playfulness, but for Amichai, the physicality of the poem up until this point is solidified by the idea of his life truly being a tournament, a series of contests that he will never win. He picks flowers for the funeral of a man whose body he will soon carry down a hill, he realizes how small he is by ironically calling himself the king of the sea, he looks out his window, he counts angelic footsteps. In the end, his heart is doing the heavy lifting.

---

[83] "The Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela," chapter 1 page 40 of this thesis.
"And That is Your Glory," chapter 1 page 25 of this thesis.
[84] "The Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela," chapter 1 page 40 of this thesis.

אֲנִי שֶׁמִּשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ רַק בְּחֵלֶק קָטָן
מִן הַמִּלִּים שֶׁבַּמִּלּוֹן.
אֲנִי, שֶׁמֻּכְרָח לְפָתּוֹר חִידוֹת בְּעַל כָּרְחִי
יוֹדֵעַ כִּי אִלְמָלֵא הָאֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים
הָיוּ הָרַחֲמִים בָּעוֹלָם
וְלֹא רַק בּוֹ.

I, who uses only a small portion of the words in the dictionary.
I, who solves riddles against my will
Know that were God not full of mercy, there would be mercy in the world, and not only in Him.

To establish the inseparable relationship between heart and head, he states in the next line that he uses only some of the words in the dictionary. Amichai is conscious of the hero narrative, one he categorically detests, but makes this point to emphasize that his vocabulary and poetry is meant to be that of the everyday person, not the elite, that uses florid language. He's a simple man, and even so, was able to find compassion enough to carry bodies down a hillside. The next line summarizes the essential truth of this poem– that our life and God's role in it is a riddle we are all compelled to solve against our will.[85]

The last three lines are a recapitulation of the first three lines of the poem, as Amichai asserts again that God is full of the mercy that the world so badly needs. Though ironic and bitter in tone, this poem is not merely a dark parallel to liturgy reserved for memorial services. As in many Amichai poems, the speaker here starts out seeking God but is ultimately disappointed by God's absence or elusiveness. By the end of the poem, the speaker has proven the value in humans perpetuating the qualities toward each other that we use liturgically to describe God. Amichai's message is that God may not give us mercy, but each of us has some autonomy to solve or puzzle through the riddle of our lives. We are presented with opportunities to either be merciful and compassionate to one

[85] Idea from Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler's study of this poem.

another or to not. In this poem, Amichai states that our fate is not in God's hands, but in our own, and we should stop waiting for God to give us mercy in order for us to be merciful.

Musical Analysis

Shlomo Gronich (1949) is an Israeli composer, singer, songwriter, arranger, and choir conductor. He received a B.A. in composition from Mannes College, the New School for Music (the same conservatory where I earned my first Masters degree). He is most widely known as an Israeli singer of pop, folk, and rock music, influenced by blues, jazz, Mizrahi music, and klezmer music. A secular Israeli, Gronich has set a handful of Amichai Poems to music. He has also written an album of music entirely set to texts from the bible and siddur.

In Gronich's setting of Amichai's El Malei Rachamim, released in 1980, we experience the poem with complete informality– the opposite of the dignified energy of a synagogue composer's setting of the traditional liturgy. In his recording, he speaks-sings, evoking religious recitation. Throughout the piece, Gronich uses straight tone with many slides and percussive consonants, reminiscent of jazz vocalists and American singer-songwriters of the 1960's and 70s. The song begins simply with piano and voice, as Gronich accompanies himself. He sings plaintively, before the violin enters with countermelody about two minutes in. Rhythmically, the piano maintains a quarter note pulse while the vocals are highly syncopated.

Between his cries, the piano maintains either a percussive or driving timbre. Intensity builds as Gronich harmonically illustrates the poem's explanation of what kind of person the poet is– not a hero. He evokes pain in his singing. The musical form could

be described as ABAB, with violin entering on the second A section. The violin evokes the image of a funeral. It also could be used here cynically, to text paint Amichai's pronounced sarcasm in criticizing Israeli public memorial ceremonies. In the second AB, there is an established trio between Gronich, the violin, and the piano. The inclusion of the violin in the repetition adds an entirely new dimension to the piece, drawing attention to the earnest expression of loss in the poem, despite the sarcasm it also holds. Gronich's El Malei Rachamim utilizes several striking commontone modulations to distant key areas using the 7th of the chord. He repeatedly employs a dominant "subtonic" chord (on the lowered 7th degree) for dramatic effect. This setting could be used in a sermon in song or a teaching about El Malei Rachamim, paired with a traditional setting of the liturgy and a discussion of their similarities and differences.

Yom Kippur [86] יוֹם כִּפּוּר

Yom Kippur without my father and without my mother is no Yom Kippur.	יוֹם כִּפּוּר בְּלִי אָבִי וּבְלִי אִמִּי הוּא לֹא יוֹם כִּפּוּר
All that's left of their blessing hands on my head is the tremor, like the tremor of an engine	מִבִּרְכַּת יְדֵיהֶם עַל רֹאשִׁי
That didn't stop even after they died	נִשְׁאַר רַק הָרַעַד, כְּמוֹ רַעַד מָנוֹעַ
My mother died only five years ago,	שֶׁלֹּא פָּסַק גַּם אַחַר מוֹתָם
Her case is still pending	אִמִּי מֵתָה רַק לִפְנֵי חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים
Between the offices up there and the paperwork down here.	הִיא עֲדַיִן בַּהֲלִיכִים
My father, who died a long time ago, has already risen to some other place, not in mine	בֵּין מִשְׂרָדִים שֶׁל מַעְלָה וּבִנְיָרוֹת שֶׁל מַטָּה
Yom Kippur without my father and without my mother is no Yom Kippur.	אָבִי, שֶׁמֵּת מִזְמַן, כְּבָר קָם לִתְחִיָּה
Therefore I eat in order to remember	בִּמְקוֹמוֹת אֲחֵרִים וְלֹא בְּמָקוֹמִי
And I drink so I won't forget	יוֹם כִּפּוּר בְּלִי אָבִי וּבְלִי אִמִּי
And I sort out the vows	הוּא לֹא יוֹם כִּפּוּר
And classify the oaths by time and size.	לָכֵן אֲנִי אוֹכֵל כְּדֵי לִזְכֹּר
During the day we used to shout "forgive us"	וְשׁוֹתֶה כְּדֵי לֹא לִשְׁכֹּחַ
And during the night we used to shout "open the gate for us"	וּמְסָדֵר אֶת הַנְּדָרִים וּמְמַיֵּן אֶת הַשְּׁבוּעוֹת לְפִי זְמַן וּמִדָּה
And I say forget us, forgo us, leave us alone when your gate closes and the day is gone.	בַּיּוֹם צָעַקְנוּ "סְלַח לָנוּ"
The last sunlight broke in the stained glass window of the synagogue.	וּבָעֶרֶב צָעַקְנוּ "פְּתַח לָנוּ"
The sunlight didn't break, we are broken, the word "broken" is broken.	וַאֲנִי אוֹמֵר שְׁכַח לָנוּ, שְׁלַח אוֹתָנוּ, הַנַּח לָנוּ
	לְעַת נְעִילַת שַׁעַר כִּי פָּנָה הַיּוֹם.
	אוֹר הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ הָאַחֲרוֹן נִשְׁבַּר בַּחֲלוֹן הַצִּבְעוֹנִי שֶׁל בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת.
	אוֹר הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לֹא נִשְׁבַּר,
	אֲנַחְנוּ נִשְׁבָּרִים,
	הַמִּלָּה "נִשְׁבֶּרֶת" נִשְׁבֶּרֶת.

This poem is difficult to classify (appropriate for a poem that talks about classification) as either a High Holiday poem or a memorial poem as these two experiences coalesce for so many each year. Jewish mourning is publicly observed four times a year in the synagogue: Yom Kippur, *Shemini Atzeret*, the 8th day of Passover, and the second day of *Shavuot*. Since the majority of non-observant Jews are only in

[86] "Yom Kippur" from *Gam Haegrof Hayah Pa'am Yad P'tucha v'Etzbaot, Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Volume 5, 119. English Translation: Bloch and Mitchell, trans., *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, 177.

synagogue on Yom Kippur, it is intrinsically linked with remembrance of the dead. The *Yizkor* service incorporates relevant psalms, musical settings, and readings– with specific meditations that address the individual loss of a parent, a sibling, a child. Individual loss is mourned in the physical presence of a supportive community. Even if one hasn't suffered a loss in the past year, the *Yizkor* service on Yom Kippur is a time set apart to feel the weight of our losses from years passed. This experience is what Amichai writes about in his poem "Yom Kippur." In it, he details that his father has been deceased for a long time and his mother died five years ago, but every year the holiday is painful without them. He cannot separate its observance from their absence.

יוֹם כִּפּוּר בְּלִי אָבִי וּבְלִי אִמִּי הוּא לֹא יוֹם כִּפּוּר
מִבִּרְכַּת יְדֵיהֶם עַל רֹאשִׁי
נִשְׁאַר רַק הָרַעַד, כְּמוֹ רַעַד מָנוֹעַ
שֶׁלֹּא פָּסַק גַּם אַחַר מוֹתָם

Yom Kippur without my father and without my mother is no Yom Kippur.
All that's left of their blessing hands on my head is the tremor,
like the tremor of an engine
That didn't stop even after they died

Amichai sets the somber tone for the poem by stating plaintively that Yom Kippur without his parents is not Yom Kippur. This supports the recurring theme in his work that the formal Jewish observance that continued into his adulthood was out of respect for his parents, who he loved deeply and wrote about fondly. He references the ritual of placing their hands on his head to bless him on Shabbat as one does on Erev Yom Kippur. All that remains for him from this experience is shaking– the trembling that one does before God on Yom Kippur, and the tremor of old age. Like a rattling car engine, the image of shaking hands never leaves his mind.

אִמִּי מֵתָה רַק לִפְנֵי חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים
הִיא עֲדַיִן בַּהֲלִיכִים

בֵּין מִשְׂרָדִים שֶׁל מַעְלָה וּבְנְיָרוֹת שֶׁל מַטָּה

My mother died only five years ago,
Her case is still pending
Between the offices up there and the paperwork down here.

Amichai continues to link his loss to Yom Kippur by poking fun at the disorganization of the Israeli Interior Ministry משרד הפנים *Misrad HaPnim*, which deals with changes of family status (death, birth, marriage). On Yom Kippur, God decides who will live and who will die. He frequently accuses God of being absent from human suffering, so who knows how far behind God is on paperwork. Between these two entities, his mother's case is still pending. He directly quotes the opening stanza of Kol Nidrei, which is declared by the chazzan and repeated three times:

בִּישִׁיבָה שֶׁל מַעְלָה וּבִישִׁיבָה שֶׁל מַטָּה
עַל דַּעַת הַמָּקוֹם וְעַל דַּעַת הַקָּהָל
אָנוּ מַתִּירִין לְהִתְפַּלֵּל עִם הָעֲבַרְיָנִים:[87]

In convocation of the heavenly court, and convocation of the lower court,
with the consent of the almighty, and the consent of this congregation,
we hereby grant permission to pray alongside transgressors.

The image of the courtroom is evoked throughout our Yom Kippur liturgy, with God portrayed as a judge and accountant of our moral failures. Amichai calls attention to this by using the same formula to suggest his mother's case is stuck between these two courts. He continues, describing his father's status:

אָבִי, שֶׁמֵּת מִזְּמַן, כְּבָר קָם לִתְחִיָּה
בִּמְקוֹמוֹת אֲחֵרִים וְלֹא בִּמְקוֹמִי
יוֹם כִּפּוּר בְּלִי אָבִי וּבְלִי אִמִּי
הוּא לֹא יוֹם כִּפּוּר

My father, who died a long time ago,
has already risen to some other place, not in mine
Yom Kippur without my father and without my mother

[87] Birnbaum, *Mahzor*, 490.

Is no Yom Kippur.

He writes that his father has already risen to some other place, not suggesting this with any certainty where he suspects that is. He knows that wherever it is, it isn't near him. The finality of the loss of his father weighs heavily on him, despite how much time has passed. He repeats the opening line of the poem as a refrain.

לָכֵן אֲנִי אוֹכֵל כְּדֵי לִזְכֹּר
וְשׁוֹתֶה כְּדֵי לֹא לִשְׁכֹּחַ
וּמְסָדֵר אֶת הַנְּדָרִים וּמְמַיֵן אֶת הַשְּׁבוּעוֹת לְפִי זְמַן וּמִדָּה

Therefore I eat in order to remember
And I drink so I won't forget
And I sort out the vows
And classify the oaths by time and size.

Amichai furthers his statement that Yom Kippur isn't Yom Kippur without his parents by now physically behaving as if the holiday doesn't exist. Jews are forbidden from eating and drinking on Yom Kippur, but he does anyway. Fasting is a vehicle for reflection, and in stating that he eats to remember and drinks so he won't forget is the opposite of what is intended by tradition. He eats and drinks, almost to relive the experience of his observant, deceased parents' past disappointment with his lack of religious commitment– they surely would have a strong reaction to this behavior. He organizes the vows, הַנְּדָרִים, and classifies the oaths, הַשְּׁבוּעוֹת– both quotations from Kol Nidrei:

נִדְרֵנָא לָא נִדְרֵי
וֶאֱסָרֵנָא לָא אֱסָרֵי
וּשְׁבוּעָתֵנָא לָא שְׁבוּעוֹת׃

Our vows shall no longer be vows
Our prohibitions shall no longer be prohibited
Our oaths are no longer oaths

While Amichai flagrantly disregards the prohibition not to eat or drink, he is

particularly concerned with the organization of his vows. According to the dry, legal formula of Kol Nidrei, all our vows are nullified with its recitation. In being concerned with them, Amichai mocks the language used in Kol Nidrei by meticulously categorizing vows that hold no meaning. Alternatively, as a poet, perhaps he finds words to hold more meaning than any of the halachot surrounding eating and drinking.

מְמַיֵן אֶת הַשְּׁבוּעוֹת לְפִי זְמַן וּמִדָּה

And classify the oaths by time and size.

Classifying his oaths and vows by time and size is a reference to the Mishnaic concept of *shiurim*, which literally means quantity or measured material that defines if a mitzvah has been fulfilled or a prohibition has been dishonored. The words זְמַן וּמִדָּה come directly from the *Mishnah* concerning this concept:

הַכֹּל לְפִי הַמִּדָּה, הַכֹּל לְפִי הַזְּמָן.[88]

All according to measure, all according to designation.

Throughout the poem, he departs from Jewish observance, but in referencing זְמַן וּמִדָּה he specifies that he will remember in the proper measure and forget in the proper measure. Though he breaks the prohibition of eating on Yom Kippur, he is committed to the classification of vows– perhaps in his own way, Amichai categorizes the promises he made to his parents while they were living according to how important they were to them, and whether or not he can keep them. He shifts back to the Neilah liturgy of "P'tach Lanu Sha'ar" to illustrate the darkness he associates with even the most redemptive service of Yom Kippur.

בַּיּוֹם צָעַקְנוּ "סְלַח לָנוּ"
וּבָעֶרֶב צָעַקְנוּ "פְּתַח לָנוּ"

[88] Mishnah Bava Metzia 3:7.

וַאֲנִי אוֹמֵר שְׁכַח לָנוּ, שְׁלַח אוֹתָנוּ, הַנַּח לָנוּ
לְעֵת נְעִילַת שַׁעַר כִּי פָנָה הַיּוֹם.

During the day we used to shout “forgive us”
And during the night we used to shout “open [the gates] for us”
And I say forget us, forgo us, leave us alone when your gate closes and the day is gone.

On Yom Kippur in synagogue with his parents, the community would shout “forgive us” at the conclusion of the Vidui which repeats throughout the holiday. As the sun descends on Yom Kippur and the Neilah service begins, the community pleads with God to “open the gates for us,” P’tach Lanu Sha’ar. Amichai then asks for God to do the opposite of what we ask of God on Yom Kippur. Our liturgy states the following refrain from the Viddui:

סְלַח לָנוּ. מְחַל לָנוּ. כַּפֶּר לָנוּ:

Pardon us, forgive us, grant us atonement.

To defamiliarize this, Amichai lists his own three requests of God, formulaically similar but opposite in intention:

שְׁכַח לָנוּ, שְׁלַח אוֹתָנוּ, הַנַּח לָנוּ

Forget us, forgo us, leave us alone.

In asking God to forget us, forgo us, and leave us, he affirms his disregard of the holiest day of the year– even though he himself “sinned” on Yom Kippur, he wants God to release the expectation that he still seeks forgiveness. He circles back to the liturgy of P’tach Lanu Sha’ar:

בְּעֵת נְעִילַת שַׁעַר, כִּי פָנָה יוֹם

At the time when the gate is closing, the day is coming to an end

Amichai concludes the poem with the image of the sun descending on Yom Kippur:

אוֹר הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ הָאַחֲרוֹן נִשְׁבַּר בַּחֲלוֹן הַצִּבְעוֹנִי שֶׁל בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת.

אוֹר הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לֹא נִשְׁבַּר,
אֲנַחְנוּ נִשְׁבָּרִים,
הַמִּלָּה "נִשְׁבֶּרֶת" נִשְׁבֶּרֶת.

The last sunlight broke in the stained glass window of the synagogue.
The sunlight didn't break,
we are broken,
the word "broken" is broken.

The experience of watching the sun descend while in synagogue on Yom Kippur is uniquely unifying and ethereal– everyone is physically and emotionally drained yet somehow renewed. Amichai specifies that even though Neilah ends with God forgiving us, and a completion of moral accounting, we are broken. This word hearkens back to the vows he so meticulously categorized– vows that are annulled before we make them, and the vows he made to his parents. To break your word is to betray a relationship– as Amichai feels he has done with his parents, and even God. The last sentence seems to be the thesis of the entire poem:

הַמִּלָּה "נִשְׁבֶּרֶת" נִשְׁבֶּרֶת

The word "broken" is broken.

The root ש-ב-ר doesn't only mean broken in the literal sense. It also means depressed or despondent, which is the sentiment expressed by Amichai in this poem. Brokenness continually reappears: broken religious practice of saying that the holiday can't exist without his parents, broken vows before we make them in Kol Nidrei, broken systems– both governmental and heavenly, broken rules of eating and drinking on Yom Kippur, broken promises to his parents, broken sunlight in the synagogue window, and broken us– broken hearted people, unrepaired by the holiday that is supposed to end with reparation.

What is the Correct Way to Stand at a Memorial Ceremony?[89]
וְאֵיךְ עוֹמְדִים בְּטֶקֶס זִכָּרוֹן?

What is the correct way to stand at a memorial ceremony? Erect or stooped, pulled taut as a tent or in the slumped posture of mourning, head bowed like the guilty or held high in a collective protest against death, Eyes gaping frozen like the eyes of the dead, or shut tight to see stars inside, And what is the best time for remembering? At noon When shadows are hidden beneath our feet, or at twilight When shadows lengthen like longings That have no beginning, no end, like God?	וְאֵיךְ עוֹמְדִים בְּטֶקֶס זִכָּרוֹן? זְקוּפִים אוֹ כְּפוּפִים מְתוּחִים כְּאֹהֶל אוֹ בְּרִשּׁוּל שֶׁל אֵבֶל, רֹאשׁ מֻשְׁפָּל כַּאֲשֵׁמִים אוֹ רֹאשׁ מוּרָם בְּהַפְגָּנָה נֶגֶד הַמָּוֶת, עֵינַיִם כְּעוּרוֹת וּקְפוּאוֹת כְּעֵינֵי הַמֵּתִים אוֹ עֵינַיִם עֲצוּמוֹת, לִרְאוֹת כּוֹכָבִים בִּפְנִים, וּמָה הַשָּׁעָה הַטּוֹבָה לִזְכֹּר? בְּצָהֳרֵי הַיּוֹם כְּשֶׁהַצֵּל חָבוּי מִתַּחַת רַגְלֵינוּ, אוֹ בֵּין הָעַרְבַּיִם כְּשֶׁהַצֵּל מִתְאָרֵךְ כְּגַעֲגוּעִים שֶׁאֵין לָהֶם רֵאשִׁית וְלֹא תַּכְלִית, כְּמוֹ אֱלֹהִים?

This poem is an example of how Amichai's poetry has been used in both American and Israeli memorial contexts. This section is the last in *Patuach Sagur Patuach*, so these poems about loss are the last of his published works. "Umi Yizkor et HaZochrim?" (And Who Will Remember the Rememberers?) appears at the end of the book, and is a critique of the fetishization of military related deaths in Israel and the subsequent public memorial ceremonies that follow. It describes how "rituals of memorialization replace authentic grief, as ordinary people try to play by the rules of public mourning, though they can't quite figure out what is expected of them."[90] Chana Kronfeld points out that the verbs used are collective and impersonal, present tense and plural: *omdim*, *kzufim*, *kfufim*, *metuchim*. These are all "possible poses of grief"-- which shows that the self consciousness of the right way to behave in these settings proves that public memorial ceremonies are not

---

[89] *"V'eich Omdim B'tekes Zikaron" (#3)* from "Umi Yizkor et HaZochrim: Patuach Sagur Patuach," *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 305.
English translation: Bloch and Kronfeld, trans., from Alter, *Amichai*, 523.
[90] Kronfeld, *The Full Severity of Compassion*, 69.

spaces for authentic grief or emotion. Inherent in these ceremonies is a "hierarchically sanctioned code of conduct"-- there is an institutional social order that must be upheld, and the expression of personal loss is not welcome. Kronfeld details the governmental use of this poem: websites and publications of the Israeli Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Public Security, community college curricula, and an official reading to be used in ceremonies on *Yom HaZikaron*. She argues that these uses erase the ironic tone of the poem, which repudiate or casts judgment on the very contexts in which they are being recited. Though his tone in these poems are censored by this use of them, Kronfeld suggests that Israeli readers can discern its cynicism nevertheless. She also argues that it is completely lost on American Jews who read this poem in the synagogue context. She accuses the American Jewish community of packaging Amichai as a "sweet singer of Israel," thereby ignoring the atheistic or cynical usage of biblical or liturgical sources. As explained in the introduction of this thesis, all of these statements present as generalized and simplified– inaccurately portraying the varying degrees of Israeli cultural knowledge and Hebrew literacy among American Jews. I think the atheistic label for Amichai is itself a simplification of Amichai's stance with respect to God; apart from this, she mischaracterizes Liberal Jews, the nature of their prayer services, and their capacity to understand irony and God-wrestling in (Hebrew) poetry. The idea of wrestling with God as means of religious practice and artistic expression is one Amichai identified with:

> I think my sense of history and God, even if I am against history and God, is very Jewish. I think this is why my poems are taught in religious schools. It's an ancient Jewish idea to fight with God.[91] -Yehuda Amichai

[91] "Yehuda Amichai, The Art of Poetry" from *The Paris Review*: Spring, 1992.

In this quote, he confirms that a struggle to believe in God is deeply Jewish. Given that much of his work is concerned with this idea, perhaps he understood the inherent religiosity of his work. If he himself understood why his poems were used in religious schools, he likely would understand his work being used for liturgical purposes, as well.

In Reform liturgy, *Mishkan HaNefesh* for Yom Kippur[92] utilizes an English translation of this poem, which is included in the Yizkor service entitled, "A Remembrance for Those Who Fell on the Battlefields of Israel."[93] These two selections are placed across from the prayer for those who have died in defense of the United States. "Those Who Died for the Sake of Your Name," is on the preceding page– in memory of those who have been killed in acts of hate against the Jewish people, the Jewish state, and human beings of every nation. While the use of this poem at Israeli public memorial services is ironic, incorporated into the experience is Amichai's irony and the sarcastic, cynical culture of Israel. In the United States, a Reform Jew reading this poem during Yom Kippur would likely understand the sense of impatience in the poem's message and the artificiality of many of these ceremonies. In adding these poetic renderings to the traditional t'filah, the Reform movement addresses American Judaism's desire for authenticity and individuality– a desire shared by Israelis who attend public memorial ceremonies. While an Israeli may acutely understand how these ceremonies gloss over their personal experiences of grief, an American reader understands that the unending loss of life in defense of Israel is heartbreaking. Despite his sarcasm, the overarching message gleaned from this poem is one of profound loss. Though an average Reform Jew may not

[92] *Mishkan HaNefesh* for Yom Kippur, 601.
[93] Kronfeld, *The Full Severity of Compassion*, 71.

read this as a criticism of Israeli memorial ceremonies, they certainly would read the sarcasm and pain in asking the unanswerable questions that Amichai does.

Chapter 4: Liturgy

תפלה

While the first three chapters of this thesis discuss the use of Amichai's poetry in prayer and vice versa, this chapter looks at three of his poems that directly allude to canonical liturgy. The first, "Elohai, Hanshama Shenatata Bi," takes its title from daily liturgy. The second, "Shir Leil Shabbat," weaves references to shabbat evening liturgy and texts with images of the secular Israeli experience. The third, "Ein K'Eloheinu," is an argument with the structure and text of the piyyut (Ein K'Eloheinu), sung on shabbat, interspersed with pieces of personal narrative. In all three of these examples, Amichai criticizes the traditional liturgy as a means to engage with it.

My God, the Soul that You have Given Me[94] אֱלֹהַי, הַנְּשָׁמָה שֶׁנָּתַתָּ בִּי

My God, the soul that you have given me is smoke From never ending burning of love's memories We are born and burn immediately And so until the smoke, like smoke, disappears.	אֱלֹהַי, הַנְּשָׁמָה שֶׁנָּתַתָּ בִּי הִיא עָשָׁן מִשְׂרֵפַת תָּמִיד שֶׁל זִכְרוֹנוֹת אַהֲבָה אָנוּ נוֹלָדִים וּמִיָּד מַתְחִילִים לְשְׂרֹף, וְכָךְ עַד שֶׁהֶעָשָׁן כְּעָשָׁן יִכְלֶה.

This short poem takes its title from the daily morning liturgy:

אֱלֹהַי נְשָׁמָה שֶׁנָּתַתָּ בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא
אַתָּה בְרָאתָהּ אַתָּה יְצַרְתָּהּ אַתָּה נְפַחְתָּהּ בִּי וְאַתָּה מְשַׁמְּרָהּ בְּקִרְבִּי
וְאַתָּה עָתִיד לִטְּלָהּ מִמֶּנִּי וּלְהַחֲזִירָהּ בִּי לֶעָתִיד לָבֹא, כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהַנְּשָׁמָה בְקִרְבִּי
מוֹדֶה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ
יְהוָה אֱלֹהַי וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי רִבּוֹן כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים אֲדוֹן כָּל הַנְּשָׁמוֹת:
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה הַמַּחֲזִיר נְשָׁמוֹת לִפְגָרִים מֵתִים:

My God! the soul which You bestowed in me is pure;

[94] "*Elohai, Hanshama Shenatata Bi*" from *Meachorei Kol Zeh Mistater Osher Gadol*, *Shirei Yehuda Amichai,* Volume 3, 261. English translation: Abramson, *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai*, 115.

> You created it, You formed it, You breathed it into me and You preserve it within me.
> You will eventually take it from me, and restore it in me in the time to come.
> So long as the soul is within me I give thanks to You, Adonai my God, God of my fathers, Lord of all creatures, Master of all souls. Blessed are You, Adonai, Who restores souls to dead bodies.

Elohai Neshama is recited when one awakens, before one dons tzitzit, and is considered a preparatory prayer. While intended as a statement of gratitude to God who allows us to wake up each morning, the notion that God restores our souls each morning references the soul's departure during sleep. The liturgy acknowledges the finality of life as a frame for gratitude– there will come a time where God will not restore the soul to the body, but will do so once again in the Messianic age to come. Neshama means both soul and breath, and the idea of God breathing into us comes from Genesis 2:7:

> וַיִּיצֶר֩ יְהוָ֨ה אֱלֹהִ֜ים אֶת־הָאָדָ֗ם עָפָר֙ מִן־הָ֣אֲדָמָ֔ה וַיִּפַּ֥ח בְּאַפָּ֖יו נִשְׁמַ֣ת חַיִּ֑ים וַיְהִ֥י הָאָדָ֛ם לְנֶ֥פֶשׁ חַיָּ֖ה׃

> The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

The dust of the earth from which God formed humanity represents both our dignity, having been created by God, and our insignificance. The image of God breathing dust into us to give us life is similar to Amichai's sardonic reinterpretation of the liturgy– the soul that you have given me is smoke.

> מִשִּׁרַפַת תָּמִיד שֶׁל זִכְרוֹנוֹת אַהֲבָה

> From never ending burning of love's memories

Amichai provocatively likens our souls to a puff of smoke from the continually burning fire of our memories of our loved ones, a fire that never goes out. This eternal flame of memories conjures up images of the victims of the Holocaust, some of whom

wwere Amichai's relatives and close friends. Synagogues were set on fire, and many loved ones were killed, their bodies burned. Amichai's reference to an eternal flame plays on the perpetual fire in the temple, as described in Leviticus 6:6:

אֵשׁ תָּמִיד תּוּקַד עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לֹא תִכְבֶּה׃

A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar, not to go out.

The priests were instructed to lay the burnt offerings on the perpetual fire so that the smoke would ascend, its scent pleasing God. The idea of the smoke from the Holocaust reaching God is deeply disturbing, but speaks to the experience of generations of Jews who felt God's absence during the devastation. In addition to the daily morning liturgy and the above reference to Leviticus, this short poem also alludes to the liturgy of the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Musaf services:

וּבְכֵן צַדִּיקִים יִרְאוּ וְיִשְׂמָחוּ וִישָׁרִים יַעֲלֹזוּ וַחֲסִידִים בְּרִנָּה יָגִילוּ וְעוֹלָתָה תִּקְפָּץ פִּיהָ. וְכָל הָרִשְׁעָה כֻּלָּהּ כְּעָשָׁן תִּכְלֶה כִּי תַעֲבִיר מֶמְשֶׁלֶת זָדוֹן מִן הָאָרֶץ׃

> And then the righteous will see [this] and rejoice, and the upright will be jubilant, and the pious will exult with joyous song; injustice will close its mouth, and all the wickedness will vanish like smoke, when You remove the rule of evil from the earth.

The High Holy Day liturgy refers to wickedness vanishing "*ke'ashan*," like smoke (כְּעָשָׁן תִּכְלֶה). which Amichai's poem quotes directly: כְּעָשָׁן יִכְלֶה.The "*ke'ashan tichleh*" from the High Holy Days is a simile in which wickedness will vanish like dispersing or diffusing smoke. Amichai's poem is centered between these two sections of liturgy– Elohai Neshama in the daily morning service and *Uvchein Tzadikim* in high holy day liturgy. The smoke that God breathes into us in Amichai's poem darkens the notion that the life we are given each day is a pure (*tehorah*) gift. Instead, there is the suggestion that our lives, our souls, are polluted in some way, like smoke polluting the air. This

metaphor also reflects the historical ubiquitousness of smoking in Israeli culture. In 1987, 50% of Israeli soldiers completed their army service addicted to cigarettes.[95] The tension and anxiety of living in a war-torn country coupled with much of the population being forced to accept the possibility of death in the army devalues concern for long term illness and lung damage. In this way, much of the secular population prioritizes day to day pleasure as they know from their own losses that the message of Elohai Neshama is true– living another day is not promised, so they might as well enjoy the cigarette while they are still alive. The reference to Uvchein Tzadikim adds another layer to the idea of the righteous soldier-smoker. God will one day vanquish the world's evils, like the smoke from a cigarette vanishes. For now, the evil is that death and "burn out" is inevitable. If we are born filled with love, each of us is like a love cigarette that God inhales until it is time for us to be put out.

Musical Analysis

"Aviv Kammay grew up in Tel Aviv, Israel. He studied composition and music education at Levinsky College of Education and Rimon School of Jazz and Contemporary Music, achieving various honors and awards for composition and academic excellence in both institutions. Aviv continued his music education studies at Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music in Evanston, IL, earning a Master of Music degree in 2010. Kammay spent many years working at URJ-OSRUI, a Reform movement summer camp in Oconomowoc, WI, where he directed the Tiferet Music Studio, a unique program for musically-inclined Jewish children and teenagers. *Ahava, Ashan, Chalom* (2009) is the

[95]Jocelyn Noveck, 1987, "To a Nation of Addicted Israelis, Cigarettes Taste Good Just Like They Should." Los Angeles Times. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-10-11-mn-13260-story.html

choral piece for which Aviv received the Guild of Temple Musicians Young Composer Award. The piece incorporates three very different Hebrew texts, chosen by the composer due to their common themes of love and pain. Aviv's music connects the three texts, interpreting them through a constant tension between anxiety and comfort."[96] The second piece, "*Ashan*," is a setting of Amichai's "*Elohai, Hanshama*."

This piece was written for soprano, alto, bass choir and keyboard. While the keyboard clearly establishes C as the tonic, the extensive chromaticism makes the mode ambiguous. At times, it appears to be in the minor mode with chromatic alterations (raised 4th scale degree), but at other times it is wholetone and octatonic. This chromaticism evokes the Ukrainian Dorian scale. The piano part is largely legato, and the rhythm is generally simple with occasional syncopation. This is made more effective by the unchanging and incessant eighth note rhythm in the keyboard part. Kammay uses non- western harmonies which implies a deeply Jewish sound. Its style is within the classical/contemporary liturgical music context. The keyboard part features an extensive ostinato, creating heightened drama when it suddenly drops out, leaving the vocalists a cappella in measure 85. There is a darkness that pervades the piece, illustrating the sardonic message of the poem. This being set for choir depicts the communal experience of love and pain. This piece could be used in a teaching about the traditional liturgy, in concert, or in a class about Amichai's use of liturgy in his poetry.

[96] "BSYCA 2009 Winner." n.d. Guild of Temple Musicians. Accessed January 30, 2022. https://templemusicians.org/ben-steinberg-young-composers-award/bsyca-2009-winner/.

Song for the Sabbath Eve[97] שִׁיר לֵיל שַׁבָּת

Will you come to me tonight? The laundry's already dried on the line. The war that never gets enough For now is out of mind. And the roads return alone unceasing Like a horse without a rider bestride And the house is sealed up at evening Upon the good and the evil inside. And we know well that the border is Near, and for us it is barred away. My father prayed, "Thus the heavens and The earth were completed in their vast Array." The earth and array have darkened Before long the light will be through. The command that the skies had started Must be done by the other two.	הֲתָבוֹאִי אֵלַי הַלַּיְלָה? כְּבָשִׁים כְּבָר יָבְשׁוּ בֶּחָצֵר. מִלְחָמָה, שֶׁאַף פַּעַם לֹא דַי לָהּ, הִיא עַכְשָׁו בְּמָקוֹם אַחֵר. וּכְבִישִׁים שָׁבִים בְּלִי הרף לְבַדָּם, כְּסוּס בְּלִי רוֹכְבוֹ וְהַבַּיִת נִסְגַּר בָּעֶרֶב עַל הַטּוֹב וְהָרָע שֶׁבּוֹ. וְיָדַעְנוּ הֵיטֵב, כִּי הַגְּבוּל הוּא קָרוֹב, וְאָסוּר לָנוּ שָׁם. אָבִי הִתְפַּלֵּל: וַיְכוּלּוּ- - הָאָרֶץ וְכָל צְבָאָם. צָבָא וְהָאָרֶץ הֶאֱפִילוּ, עוֹד מְעַט וְכָבָה הָאוֹר. הַמִּצְוָה בָּהּ שָׁמַיִם הִתְחִילוּ שׁוּב הַשְּׁנַיִם צְרִיכִים לִגְמֹר.

This poem is paired as a poetic reading with Psalm 95: "*L'chu Nerannah*" in Beit T'filah Israeli's shabbat *siddur.*[98] Though Amichai's "Shir Leil Shabbat" doesn't explicitly reference this psalm, it weaves images of the secular weekend with intertextual references to Shabbat liturgy. Amichai begins his "Song for the Sabbath Eve," with an intertextual reference to *L'cha Dodi,*[99] which concludes the *Kabbalat Shabbat* section of the Friday evening service before *Ma'ariv*:

הֲתָבוֹאִי אֵלַי הַלַּיְלָה?
כְּבָשִׁים כְּבָר יָבְשׁוּ בֶּחָצֵר.
מִלְחָמָה, שֶׁאַף פַּעַם לֹא דַי לָהּ,

[97] Yehuda Amichai, *Shirim 1948–1962* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1963), 111. English translation by Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler.
[98] *Siddur Erev Shabbat U'moed: Beit T'filah Israeli*, Tel Aviv, Israel, 2013.
[99] Rabbi Shlomo HaLevi Alkabetz (1500-1580), author of the mystical hymn *Lecha Dodi* (Come My Beloved).

הִיא עַכְשָׁו בְּמָקוֹם אַחֵר.

Will you come to me tonight?
The laundry's already dried on the line.
The war that never gets enough
For now is out of mind.

The poem's speaker asks, הֲתָבוֹאִי אֵלַי הַלַּיְלָה? This question mirrors the final line of L'cha dodi: בואי כלה בואי כלה. As the poem opens with his inviting his lover to come spend the night with him, the liturgy ends with the command for the Sabbath bride to enter. His asking his secular sabbath bride[100] instead of commanding her, as the liturgy does, subverts the power of the word and gives the woman he's talking to some autonomy.

This poem portrays an Israeli soldier on a weekend off from the army, which is a recurring theme in Amichai's work.[101] He washes his clothes and hangs them up (a traditionally feminine task), assuring his lover that he will be present with her over Shabbat, the war kept out of his mind. He uses the feminine of מִלְחָמָה, שֶׁאַף פַּעַם לֹא דַי לָהּ to sexualize the war. She gets all of the speaker's attention/energy– as if the speaker is assuring his Sabbath Bride that he won't be thinking about his mistress, מִלְחָמָה, while they're together. He shifts the focus from the intimate thoughts of his mind to the loneliness and loss associated with war.

וּכְבִישִׁים שָׁבִים בְּלִי הרף
לְבַדָּם, כְּסוּס בְּלִי רוֹכְבוֹ

And the roads return alone unceasing
Like a horse without a rider bestride

The speaker describing the roads as lonely also suggests an emptiness where people, perhaps who have died in war, should be walking. The image of the horse

[100] Idea from Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler's study of this poem.
[101] "The Travels of the Last Benjamin of Tudela," chapter 1 page 40 of this thesis.
"And That is Your Glory," chapter 1 page 25 of this thesis.

returning without a rider invokes the modern Israeli soldier on his weekend off, grateful to have the time with his beloved and painfully aware of his friends who will not make it home for Shabbat this week.[102] The word לְבַדָּם used to describe the riderless horse also has a biblical connotation from Genesis 2:18 that relates to the speaker's romantic relationship:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לֹא־טוֹב הֱיוֹת הָאָדָם לְבַדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה־לּוֹ עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ׃

> The Lord God said, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him."

The reference to Genesis 2:18 supports that he shouldn't be alone– as suggested above, he is either with the (feminized) war, or his lover. This same road taken to war also leads the soldier to the respite he finds at home:

וְהַבַּיִת נִסְגַּר בָּעֶרֶב
עַל הַטּוֹב וְהָרָע שֶׁבּוֹ.

> And the house is sealed up at evening
> Upon the good and the evil inside.

Hatov v'hara הַטּוֹב וְהָרָע is another reference to Genesis (2:9, 2:17) and the tree of knowledge, as well as the "twin notions of moral discrimination and carnal knowledge."[103] This notion of good and bad, specifically as it relates to Amichai referencing the recitation of kiddush with וַיְכוּלּוּ in the next stanza, comes from the *Talmud*, Shabbat 119b:3:

> כָּל הַמִּתְפַּלֵּל בָּעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת וְאוֹמֵר "וַיְכוּלּוּ"... שְׁנֵי מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת מְלַוִּין לוֹ לְאָדָם בְּעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת מִבֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת לְבֵיתוֹ, אֶחָד טוֹב וְאֶחָד רָע. וּכְשֶׁבָּא לְבֵיתוֹ וּמְצָא נֵר דָּלוּק וְשֻׁלְחָן עָרוּךְ וּמִטָּתוֹ מוּצַעַת, מַלְאָךְ טוֹב אוֹמֵר: "יְהִי רָצוֹן שֶׁתְּהֵא לְשַׁבָּת אַחֶרֶת כָּךְ", וּמַלְאָךְ רַע עוֹנֶה "אָמֵן" בְּעַל כָּרְחוֹ. וְאִם לָאו, מַלְאָךְ רַע אוֹמֵר: "יְהִי רָצוֹן שֶׁתְּהֵא לְשַׁבָּת אַחֶרֶת כָּךְ", וּמַלְאָךְ טוֹב עוֹנֶה "אָמֵן" בְּעַל כָּרְחוֹ.

[102] Idea from Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler's study of this poem.
[103] Idea from Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler's study of this poem.

> Two ministering angels escort a person from the synagogue to his home on erev Shabbat: one good and one bad. And when he comes to his house, if he finds that the candles are lit and the table is set and his bed is made, the good angel will say: "May it be the will of God that it should be this way next Shabbat as well." And the bad angel is forced to answer "amen" against his will. And if it isn't [like this], the bad angel will say: "May it be the will of God that it should be this way next Shabbat as well." And the good angel is forced to answer "amen" against his will.

These two angels, the good and the bad, being shut up together in the house with Amichai's speaker and his lover is entirely ironic– the secular soldier doesn't go to synagogue or meticulously prepare his house for shabbat. He does, however, have a routine for his weekends off, described in his hanging his clothes on the line and calling his lover. This reference to the religious upbringing of Amichai's childhood shows the role that Judaism played throughout his secular adulthood. Perhaps here he is asserting that he may not observe shabbat as the God of his childhood intended for him to, but he nevertheless observes it in his own way.

וְיָדַעְנוּ הֵיטֵב, כִּי הַגְּבוּל הוּא
קָרוֹב, וְאָסוּר לָנוּ שָׁם.

> And we know well that the border is
> Near, and for us it is barred away.

The words גְּבוּל and אָסוּר both speak to the war– the border between countries or territories is close by, and an aspect of life in Israel that walls and borders are not to be crossed. Similarly, the word אָסוּר connotes the prohibitions of *Halacha*, and in cosummating sexually, the speaker again is breaking the rules he was taught in his childhood. The word קָרוֹב references Deuteronomy 30:14, especially as it is applicable to the balance of religiosity and secularism that Amichai comments on:

כִּי־קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשֹׂתוֹ׃

The thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.

His placement of the word קָרוֹב followed by a comma suggests that the line could be talking about the speaker's closeness to any of the three topics that alternate in the poem– the Judaism of his childhood and Torah, the war, his lover, and the borders that delineate his closeness to any of these themes. All are kept at varying degrees of distance from him, for both physical safety and emotional self preservation. He is unable to hold all three simultaneously, and their weight shifts throughout this poem. He shifts again to the religious experience of Shabbat in his parents childhood home:

אָבִי הִתְפַּלֵּל: וַיְכוּלּוּ- -
הָאָרֶץ וְכָל צְבָאָם.

My father prayed, "Thus the heavens and The earth were completed in their vast Array."

On Friday evenings in observant Jewish homes, the man of the house recites Kiddush, which begins with the whispered utterance of Genesis 1:31, and continues with Genesis 2:1-3. This biblical quotation describes God's creation of the world and God's rest on the 7th day and the holiness of Shabbat. This intertextual reference hearkens back to the opening of the poem.

צָבָא וְהָאָרֶץ הֶאֱפִילוּ,
עוֹד מְעַט וְכָבָה הָאוֹר.
הַמִּצְוָה בָּהּ שָׁמַיִם הִתְחִילוּ
שׁוּב הַשְּׁנַיִם צְרִיכִים לִגְמֹר.

The earth and array have darkened
Before long the light will be through.
The command that the skies had started
Must be done by the other two.

The word צָבָא means both host and army– the name of the Israeli Army is צְבָא הַהֲגָנָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל. The poem began with the speaker inviting his lover over in the night, and he now anticipates the break of day– signifying a change. Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler analyzes this conclusion in asking unanswerable questions that both prayer and poetry frequently leave us with:

> If the divine heavens initiate the creation of the world, the other two partners in creation, the earth and its array (army) must complete the work. By analogy, *hashenayim,* the two, the speaker and his partner here on this earth, need to complete/consummate their love. But do they, actually? Does the beloved addressee ever come? Does the last line referring to the two needing to end (*ligmor*) refer to the consummation of the sexual act or the end of their love relationship? Does the whole stanza refer to the two warring parties in the Arab Israeli wars and the need somehow to bring an end (*ligmor*) to the conflict? Either way, this poem adds a doubtful, searching chorus to the Sabbath evening prayers…[104]

Like many of his poems, Amichai accesses God and liturgy through intimate interpersonal experiences. In his *Shir Leil Shabbat*, he portrays the "pause" that Shabbat provides as a state of in betweenness, instead of the conclusion of a week – he may hear from his lover, the war may never end, but for now he has hung up his laundry on the line, and so too hangs up the complexities of his life to dry out for 24 hours. In a modern context, we, too, treat Shabbat and the secular weekend this way. Shabbat is not always a blissful, prayerful day, but a brief respite from life.

<u>Musical Analysis:</u>

This poem was set to music by Polish-Israeli composer Moshe Wilensky (1910-1997), a Polish-Israeli composer, lyricist, musician, and Israel Prize winner. The musical setting was made famous by one of Israel's most beloved singers, Chava

[104] Idea from Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler's study of this poem.

Alberstein (born 1946). Like many Israeli singers, her stardom launched from her service as a musician in the Israeli Defense Force's band. Alberstein sings in Hebrew, Yiddish, and English, heavily influenced by the American folk genre. Her songs are reminiscent of Joan Baez and Pete Seeger. Having recorded 60 albums, her artistry now spans many genres: klezmer and Yiddish folk, American standards, to settings of Hebrew poets: Leah Goldberg, T. Carmi, Zelda, and Amichai.

Like Amichai, Alberstein has criticized the policies of her government– using her art as a vehicle to express her ethics. Her 1986 album *Mehagrim*, partly autobiographical, contains lyrics that criticize Israeli society. The Israel State radio banned her 1989 song *Chad Gadya*, based off of the traditional passover tune, for it's criticism of Israel's occupation of palestinian territories.[105] Similarly, Amichai criticizes Israel's post-1973 "endless cycle of war and memorialization"[106] as a "terrible Chad Gadya machine."[107] An additional similarity is their shared attitude toward their place as an Israeli in search of meaning beyond the bounds of religion. The following quote echoes sentiments frequently expressed by Amichai in interviews: "Even though I have lived in Israel nearly my entire life, I am constantly questioning my place in the world. Maybe this searching comes from being an artist, maybe it comes from being a Jew. I'm not really sure."[108] An immigrant from Poland, both Amichai and Alberstein weave their childhood experiences into their work– for Amichai, the memories of his religious childhood, and for Alberstein,

---

[105] Nathan Shahar, 2021, "Chava Alberstein." Jewish Women's Archive. https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/alberstein-chava.
[106] Kronfeld, *The Full Severity of Compassion*, 65.
[107] *An Arab Shepherd is Searching for His Goat on Mount Zion*, Bloch, trans., Alter, *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*, 274.
[108]Nancy Wick, 2011, "Popular Israeli singer to perform at Meany." University of Washington.https://www.washington.edu/news/2011/12/07/popular-israeli-singer-to-perform-at-meany/.

the yiddish songs she sang with her father as a child.

As mentioned in the beginning of this analysis, this poem is used liturgically and musically in the Israeli progressive community of Beit T'filah Israeli. In her article about Anthological Poetics,[109] Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler writes that Amichai's "Shir Shel Shabbat" is also included in other liberal Israel Kabbalat Shabbat services, such as that at the Masorti Tiferet Shalom congregation in Tel Aviv.[110] Alberstein first recorded this song on her 1975 album *Kmo Eitz Bar* (Like a Wildflower). This album, regarded as one of her finest, was recorded in the wake of the Yom Kippur war. Its songs are mostly optimistic commentaries on Israeli life, likely looking to create hope in the aftermath of loss.

The instrumentation for this setting uses voice, acoustic guitar, drums, upright bass, piano, flute, saxophone, and strings, including a cello solo at the beginning. Rhythmically, the piece is heavily swung. The percussion maintains a consistent, gentle groove. The vocal line is presumably rather simple rhythmically in notation, but in execution, Alberstein employs deliberate back-singing and improvisatory syncopation (a la Frank Sinatra, Edith Piaf, Ella Fitzgerald). This technique creates a more sophisticated rhythmic texture. The harmonies are rich, chromatic, and clearly come from a jazz idiom.

The piece begins with the guitar "comping" with the drums and bass. Eventually, the string section joins in, filling in the harmony with sustained chords. The piano, rather than providing harmonic support, sparsely fills in with individual notes. The saxophones, flute, and solo cellist take turns briefly soloing. Alberstein slides extensively and sings mostly straight tone. Stylistically, the sounds could be lifted directly from a mid-century

---

[109] Zierler, *Since 1948*, 64.
[110] Einat Libel‑Hass, *The Development of Liberal (Reform/Mitkademet and Conservative/Masorti Judaism in Tel Aviv: Organizational Patterns and Identities in the Congregations Beit Daniel and Tiferet Shalom (1991–2015),* PhD thesis, Department of Jewish History and Contemporary Jewry, Bar‑Ilan University (Sept. 2015), 152.

Parisian night club. The orchestration is also reminiscent of bossa nova. The melody is an ABAB form, sung through three times with an interlude between the first and second chorus. The B section features a surprising Neapolitan chord. This setting is haunting and wistful. The unsupportive, pliable nature of Alberstein's singing in it paints the idea mentioned in the above liturgical analysis that Shabbat is a transitory time. The sense of unresolvement in the poem is captured in the musical setting– mystery and longing are evoked in each of Alberstein's phrases.

Ein K'Eloheinu [111] אֵין כֵּאלֹהֵינוּ

"*Ein K'Eloheinu, Ein Ka'adoneinu,*" thus we pray. "*Ein K'Eloheinu, Ein Ka'adoneinu,*" we sing in a loud voice and he doesn't react. So we amplify our voices and sing, "*Mi K'Eloheinu, Mi Ka'adoneinu,*" and he won't move and won't turn toward us. And we add more to the force of our pleading, "*Atah hu Eloheinu, Atah hu Adoneinu,*" Maybe he'll remember us now? But he remains indifferent, he even turns to us with cold, alien eyes. So we stop singing and yelling, and in a whisper we remind him of something personal, something small: "*Atah hu sh'hikrivu avoteinu l'fanecha et k'toret hasamim*," maybe now he'll remember? (like a man who reminds a woman of their old love affair: don't you remember how we were buying shoes in that little store on the corner, and it was pouring outside and we laughed and laughed?) And it seems as if something begins to wake up in him, maybe he'll forget not his own, but too late: The Jewish people are gone.	"אֵין כֵּאלֹהֵינוּ, אֵין כַּאֲדוֹנֵנוּ" כָּךְ מִתְפַּלְלִים. "אֵין כֵּאלֹהֵינוּ, אֵין כַּאֲדוֹנֵנוּ" שָׁרִים בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל וְהוּא לֹא מֵגִיב. וְאָנוּ מַגְבִּירִים אֶת קוֹלֵנוּ וְשָׁרִים "מִי כֵּאלֹהֵינוּ, מִי כַּאֲדוֹנֵנוּ" וְהוּא לֹא זָז וְלֹא פּוֹנֶה אֵלֵינוּ. וְאָנוּ מוֹסִיפִים עוֹד בְּכֹחַ תַּחֲנוּנִים "אַתָּה הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אַתָּה הוּא אֲדוֹנֵנוּ". אוּלַי יִזְכֹּר אוֹתָנוּ עַכְשָׁו? אֲבָל הוּא נִשְׁאָר אָדִישׁ, אֲפִלּוּ פּוֹנֶה אֵלֵינוּ בְּעֵינַיִם זָרוֹת וְקָרוֹת. וְהָפְסַקְנוּ לָשִׁיר וְלִצְעֹק וְאוֹמְרִים לוֹ בִּלְחִישָׁה וּמַזְכִּירִים לוֹ מַשֶּׁהוּ פְּרָטִי, מַשֶּׁהוּ קָטָן "אַתָּה הוּא שֶׁהִקְרִיבוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לְפָנֶיךָ אֶת קְטֹרֶת הַסָּמִים" אוּלַי יִזְכֹּר עַכְשָׁו? (כְּמוֹ אִישׁ שֶׁמַּזְכִּיר לְאִשָּׁה אַהֲבָה יְשָׁנָה: אַתְּ לֹא זוֹכֶרֶת אֵיךְ קָנִינוּ נַעֲלַיִם בַּחֲנוּת הַקְּטַנָּה בַּפִּנָּה וְיָרַד הַרְבֵּה גֶּשֶׁם בַּחוּץ וְצָחַקְנוּ הַרְבֵּה?) וְנִדְמֶה שֶׁמַּשֶּׁהוּ מִתְעוֹרֵר בּוֹ וְאוּלַי זָכַר, אֲבָל הָעָם הַיְּהוּדִי כְּבָר נִגְמַר.

The liturgical piyyut *Ein Keloheinu* is typically recited toward the end of Shabbat morning services. First referenced in the writing of Rav Amram Gaon,[112] it repeats four titles for God: *Eloheinu* (our God), *Adoneinu* (our Lord), *Malkeinu* (our king), *Moshi'enu* (our savior). These four honorifics for God act as a review for the relationship between God and Israel as described in the Torah.[113] Each stanza cycles through each of these

[111] *"Ein Keloheinu" #11* from *Eilim Matchilim, Hat'filot Nisharot La'ad: Patuach Sagur Patuach, Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 151. English Translation adapted from: Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler's study of this poem, and Bloch and Kronfeld, trans., Alter, *Amichai*, 412.
[112] *Seder Rav Amram* (c. 860 C.E., Babylonia).
[113] Honorifics as a review for the relationship between God and Israel comes from: Rachel Scheinerman, "Ein Keloheinu: A Blessing Explosion." My Jewish Learning.

titles with the repetition of a proclamation. The first uses the word *ein*, saying that none is like our God, our Lord, our Father, our King. The second uses the question *mi*, meaning who is like our God (*Mi keloheinu*, etc.). The fourth stanza is *nodeh* (we give thanks to), the fifth uses *baruch* (blessed is), and the sixth is *atah hu* (you are). When sung as a hymn in synagogue, it typically is set to an upbeat, major melody and is sung with joyful exultation.

In his neo-midrashic interpretation of this poem, Amichai considers the reason for the piyyut's repetitive structure. Repetition is a common feature of Jewish prayer. A traditionalist understanding of this would assume that repetition increases the meaning of the prayer. For Amichai, the volume at which the song is sung increases, but the repetitions don't affirm devotion to God. They instead show that God is ignoring these prayers. In essence, he takes the rabbinic formula which uses repetition to extol God, and re-casts it as a tool to get the attention of a God who won't acknowledge God's people.

This is a hymn that the religious community of Amichai's childhood likely sang. Usually set in strophic (one melody) or binary (ABABAB) form, the repetitive nature of both the words, form, and melody of this song make it second nature– indicating that the end of services, with the celebratory *Kiddush* is impending, and not typically understood as evocative or meditative. Amichai takes this familiar experience and defamiliarizes the loud, happy singing of Ein Keloheinu as shouting to get the attention of God:

"אֵין כֵּאלֹהֵינוּ, אֵין כַּאֲדוֹנֵנוּ" כָּךְ מִתְפַּלְלִים.
"אֵין כֵּאלֹהֵינוּ, אֵין כַּאֲדוֹנֵנוּ" שָׁרִים בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל
וְהוּא לֹא מַגִּיב. וְאָנוּ מַגְבִּירִים אֶת קוֹלֵנוּ וְשָׁרִים
"מִי כֵּאלֹהֵינוּ, מִי כַּאֲדוֹנֵנוּ" וְהוּא לֹא זָז
וְלֹא פּוֹנָה אֵלֵינוּ.

Accessed January 13, 2022.
https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ein-keloheinu-a-blessing-explosion/.

"*Ein Keloheinu, Ein Ka'adoneinu,*" thus we pray.
"*Ein Keloheinu, Ein Ka'adoneinu,*" we sing in a loud voice and he doesn't react.
So we amplify our voices and sing, "*Mi Keloheinu, Mi Ka'adoneinu,*"
and he won't move and won't turn toward us.

There is a familiarity to the image of someone shouting to get someone's attention– the way a child would when they seek the attention of a parent who is otherwise occupied. Amichai depicts God here as being nearby– so close that those praying can actually see they are being ignored. This hymn is one of complete praise and so Amichai's revision thereof amounts to a kind of consummate critique. Amichai suggests that God's obliviousness to us is so complete that even flattery does nothing to provoke divine attention. In traditional synagogues, the chazzan faces the ark, and in his characterization of God not turning around, Amichai portrays God as the ultimate-clergy– a person who has power and followers but won't descend from the throne, or the bimah. We sing: Ein Keloheinu, Mi Keloheinu– nothing.

The words פּוֹנֶה אֵלֵינוּ can be seen as alluding to Lithuanian High Holiday liturgy:

כְּרוֹב רַחֲמֶיךָ פְּנֵה אֵלֵינוּ.[114]

In Your abundant mercy turn to us.

The High Holidays are a time when we atone and ask for God to forgive and acknowledge us, with penitential prayers and investigation of the self. In referencing High Holiday liturgy, Amichai is reminded of a time when God is most likely to turn toward us, and deflates that, too.

וְאָנוּ מוֹסִיפִים עוֹד בְּכֹחַ תַּחֲנוּנִים
"אַתָּה הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ, אַתָּה הוּא אֲדוֹנֵנוּ".

[114]The penitential prayers recited before and during the Ten days of Repentance from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, according to the Ashkenazi Lithuanian rite (S'lichot Nusach Ashkenaz Lita, Erev Yom Kippur 4), written c.1750 - c.1850 CE.

אוּלַי יִזְכֹּר אוֹתָנוּ עַכְשָׁו?
אֲבָל הוּא נִשְׁאָר אָדִישׁ, אֲפִלּוּ
פּוֹנֶה אֵלֵינוּ בְּעֵינַיִם זָרוֹת וְקָרוֹת.

And we add more to the force of our pleading,
"*Atah hu Eloheinu, Atah hu Adoneinu,*"
Maybe he'll remember us now?
But he remains indifferent, he even turns to us with cold, alien eyes.

His use of the word תַּחֲנוּנִים evokes the opposite of ecstatic singing. *Tachanun* (supplication, also called *n'filat apayim* נפילת אפיים, falling on the face) is part of the traditional morning and afternoon services, after the recitation of the Amidah, and a longer version is included on Mondays and Thursdays. It begins with introductory verses from II Samuel (24:14), and then continues with a short confession of sin and petition for God to answer us, followed by Psalm 6:2-11. This pattern is quoted in Amichai's poem– we praise, echoing the Tachanun's hope that God will answer us. In the presence of a Torah scroll, Tachanun is recited with the head leaning on the back of the left hand (or right if tefillin are wrapped on the left).[115] Laying the head on the ground symbolizes the original post-Talmudic practice, in which people prostrated on the ground to show humility and submission to God. The pose was also used by Moses and Joshua, who fell on their faces before God after the sin of the Golden calf. Because of this practice, Tahanun is also known as nefilat apayim (falling on the face).[116] Crying before God in search of forgiveness is reminiscent of Amichai's child and parent storyline in the poem– a child cries to seek attention from or display remorse to their parents.

As the volume of the singing, or wailing, grows, so too does the desperation for God to acknowledge it. Singing as a way to praise or connect to God is referenced

[115] Shulchan Aruch, *Orach Chayim* 131:1-2.
[116]"Jewish Prayers: Tahanun," Jewish Virtual Library, Accessed January 13, 2022. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/tahanun.

countless times through our sacred texts. Notably, shouting joyfully,[117] and singing "as long as I live,"[118]-- proving life through song. Amichai's speaker turns to someone around him to ask, "Maybe he'll remember us now?" or perhaps, he asks this question to himself. The word יִזְכֹּר adds an additional layer to the poem. Not only are the Jews trying to get God's attention, they fear that God has forgotten them completely. God does turn around, but has "cold, alien eyes." This coldness proves that despite all of their efforts, their persistence doesn't result in the closeness they seek. Additionally, the words cold and alien might be used to describe the honorifics used for God in the piyyut– these titles connote distance, formality, and submissive approach to God. The God that Amichai seeks in this poem is perhaps Avinu, God as our parent, so he describes the closeness of a parent-child relationship that he yearns for. This evokes the intimacy established in the beginning of the poem– shouting as an indication of familiarity. Amichai continues in this line of thinking:

וְהִפְסַקְנוּ לָשִׁיר וְלִצְעק וְאוֹמְרִים לוֹ בְּלַחִישָׁה
וּמַזְכִּירִים לוֹ מַשֶּׁהוּ פְּרָטִי, מַשֶּׁהוּ קָטָן
"אַתָּה הוּא שֶׁהִקְרִיבוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לְפָנֶיךָ
אֶת קְטֹרֶת הַסָּמִים" אוּלַי יִזְכֹּר עַכְשָׁו?

So we stop singing and yelling,
and in a whisper we remind him of something personal, something small:
"*Atah hu sh'hikrivu avoteinu l'fanecha et k'toret hasamim*,"
Maybe now he'll remember?

The Jews, or the child, stops singing and yelling, and tries a different approach to jog their God/parent's memory. They whisper "something personal, something small"-- a contrast to the communal yelling, they now try to remind God of something precious. Amichai's whisper sets up the intimate romantic memory described in the next section.

[117] Psalms 33:3, 95:1.
[118] Psalm 104:33.

First, he quotes the final line of Ein Keloheinu:

אַתָּה הוּא שֶׁהִקְרִיבוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לְפָנֶיךָ אֶת קְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים.

You are the one to whom our fathers offered fragrant incense.

This line, a lead up to the recitation of "pitum haketoret" prayer, describing the composition of the fragrant incense burnt in the Temple, is typically omitted from progressive prayer books[119] and departs from the piyyut's structure. Incense was an "especially important part of the sacrificial service. It served the utilitarian purpose of masking the odors of preparing animals for sacrifice, but was seen also as a valuable offering in and of itself (Psalm 141:2, "Take my prayer as an offering of incense")."[120] In the tabernacle, the incense could only be offered by the priests, who acted as mediators between God and the Jews. In Judaism, scent evokes memory and revives the soul.[121] Scent, as our prayers do now in its place, wafted up to God and was pleasing, reminding God of our commitment through sacrifice. Amichai whispers this final line of the piyyut as a last resort– a ritual we no longer perform, but perhaps we would if its mention would rouse recognition in God's cold eyes. "Maybe now he'll remember?" But he doesn't. Abstractly, he quotes the line from Ein Keloheinu about incense to show the oddness of its inclusion in the liturgy and his disconnection from it. In this vein, he shifts to a pattern

[119] "This final line is omitted in a number of non-Orthodox prayer books of all denominations. The Reconstructionist *Kol Haneshamah* (1996) succinctly summarizes the rationale for this deletion when it notes its "nostalgic reference to the temple worship [that] implies a longing for the reinstitution of sacrifices that we do not share." already in 1965, the Reconstructionist Sabbath prayer Book had omitted it. The liturgy of American Reform (from the 1895/6 *Union Prayer Book* to the 2007 *Mishkan T'filah*) and the (1982) Israeli Reform (*Ha'avodah Shebalev*) also excise this passage, as does the Israeli *Masorti Va'ani Tefillati* (1998)." David Ellenson, *My People's Prayer Book vol. 10: Shabbat Morning: Shacharit and Musaf*, Jewish Lights; 1st edition (2007), 156.

[120] Marc Zvi Brettler, *My People's Prayer Book vol. 10: Shabbat Morning: Shacharit and Musaf*, Jewish Lights; 1st edition (2007), 158.

[121] B'rachot 43b: "What doesn't benefit the body but benefits the soul? It is none other than scent."

used throughout his work and this thesis. His poems often feature an unsuccessful search for God, resulting in an experience of divinity found in a romantic relationship.

(כְּמוֹ אִישׁ שֶׁמַּזְכִּיר לְאִשָּׁה אַהֲבָה יְשָׁנָה:
אַתְּ לֹא זוֹכֶרֶת אֵיךְ קָנִינוּ נַעֲלַיִם
בַּחֲנוּת הַקְּטָנָה בַּפִּנָּה וְיָרַד הַרְבֵּה גֶּשֶׁם
בַּחוּץ וְצָחַקְנוּ הַרְבֵּה?)

> (like a man who reminds a woman of their old love affair:
> don't you remember how we were buying shoes in that little store on the corner,
> and it was pouring outside
> and we laughed and laughed?)

This is a sweet, romantic, and meaningful memory– an incident so specific and so intimate. It's almost saccharine. Perhaps Amichai is poking fun at his contemporaries who use such cliche expressions in their writing. This "memory" also could be mentioned in a plea from a lover asking their beloved to take them back– the secular version of the last-gasp whisper of *k'toret hasamim.* Don't you remember how good we were together? Amichai mentioning this meaningful story acknowledges that the grandeur of Ein K'Eloheinu, and the many prayers like it, are difficult for people to connect to. In so doing, he continues to share that his experience of God is in close relationships with others, and this secular memory may be holier than the King-God imagined by the Jews of medieval Europe. Perhaps, Amichai suggests here that prayer and God are wherever we can find them. He pivots from the visceral memory of the rain and the shoe store back to the larger experience of God's absence:

וְנִדְמֶה שֶׁמַּשֶּׁהוּ מִתְעוֹרֵר בּוֹ וְאוּלַי יִזָּכֵר,
אֲבָל הָעָם הַיְּהוּדִי כְּבָר נִגְמַר.

> And it seems as if something begins to wake up in him, maybe he'll forget
> not his own, but too late: The Jewish people are gone.

Finally, all of their efforts have been realized and it seems God is coming around, but it's too late– the Jews are gone. They are physically gone from the synagogue, but more sardonically, Amichai suggests that if God continues to be absent from human suffering, the Jews will find another God who responds. These lines also close the romantic storyline– frequently we love others, but they are not "ready". When they finally are, we are already with someone else.

Conclusion

"I think the first major influence [on my poetry] was the rhythm of prayer. My first encounter with the Hebrew language was through prayers, in my fourth or fifth year. I believe that every poem is a prayer, a private prayer, as much as every prayer is a poem. And the poem is also a sermon; I sometimes feel as if I'm a rabbi or a minister of the church who would like to move people with my verse and my preaching, to shape them, to make them better."-Yehuda Amichai[122]

The above quote summarizes why Yehuda Amichai understood his own poetry as influenced by and as engaged with religious material. In the progressive/Reform synagogue context, his poems are prayers– they are in our prayer books, they are quoted in sermons, and are set to music and sung. This thesis hopes to increase these uses of his poetry. It is my argument that Amichai's poems revise and reshape traditional Hebrew texts, turning them upside down, and connecting us to them in novel and contemporary ways. Amichai sought to disrupt pre-ordained order, to provide agency in his poems to those without it, and to scaffold his daily, secular life with Judaism. He never departs from his "intertextual egalitarianism"[123]: he balances traditional Jewish sources and components of everyday life. In doing this, he normalizes a Jewish consciousness that blurs these two binaries. Looking at our traditional texts differently and finding new ways to see ourselves in them are central to Reform Judaism. Through this thesis, I explore how Amichai references liturgy in his poems, how progressive communities use his poetry as liturgical material, and how his poetry has been set to music both for the American Synagogue and Israeli popular culture. Exploring potential use for modern Israeli poetry in the United States and vice versa builds on the continued ritual/liturgical overlap between two communities whose religious practice influences each other.

---

[122]Abramson, *A Kind of Lay Prophet*, 10.
[123] Kronfeld, *The Full Severity of Compassion*, 118.

Liturgical innovation takes place as a result of societal change, as discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis. As we continue to adapt, we depart farther from traditional, male-centric understandings of God and shift more towards the God Amichai sees in his poetry: a third worldly, personal, parental God– the God of his childhood, as well as a projection of the world as it ought to be. As our world continues to experience devastation– the current coronavirus pandemic, antisemitism, racism, baseless hatred, global warming– my hope is that we acknowledge our doubts and darkness but, like Amichai, remain ultimately hopeful. As younger generations of Jews reject the boxes society presents us with, Amichai's poetry can help to provide ways to meaningfully dwell between them. As leaders of Jewish communities, we can use Amichai's work to present alternative forms of textual engagement, as well as give permission to our congregants to see Judaism outside the synagogue– in the ocean, the airport, a flight of stairs, or their garage mechanic.

Appendix: Liturgical and Musical uses of Amichai's Poetry

Poem	Source	Liturgical Use	Musical Setting
1948-1962 שירים ***Shirim 1948-1962*** **Poems 1948-1962**			
אלוהים מרחם על ילדי הגן *Elohim Merachem Al Yaldei Hagan* God Takes Pity on Kindergarten Children	*Alter*: 6 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 1, 15		Mati Caspi/Shlomo Gronich https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYc6aIKdK-A
אָבִי *Avi* My Father	*Alter*: 16 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 1, 32	*Mishkan HaNefesh* for Yom Kippur, 562	
מות אבי *Mot Avi* My Father's Death	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 1, 33	*Tzidduk HaDin: Funeral Service*, 9	Mati Caspi/Shlomo Gronich https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCaseH5WtvQ
אהבנו כאן *Ahavnu Kan* We Loved Here	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 1, 57		David Deor/Erik Enstein דוד ד'אור ואריק איינ…
אֵל מָלֵא רַחֲמִים *El Malei Rachamim* God Full of Mercy	*Alter*: 26 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 1, 86		Shlomo Gronich https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbO0obLTjPA
מעין אחרית הימים *Me'ein Acharit Hayamim* Sort of an Apocalypse	*Alter*: 27 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 1, 87	*Kol Haneshemah: Prayerbook for the Days of Awe*, 584	
וְהִיא תְהִלָּתֵךְ *V'hi Tehilatecha* And That is your Glory	*Alter*: 28 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 1, 88	*Mishkan HaNefesh for Yom Kippur*, 221	
שִׁיר לֵיל שַׁבָּת *Shir Leil Shabbat* Song for the Sabbath Eve	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 1, 111	*Beit Tfilah Israeli Shabbat Umoed*, 41	Chava Alberstein

			https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9pm1AsV9mE
דרך שתי נקודות *Derech Shtey Nekudot* Between Two Points	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 1, 113		Shlomo Artzi https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCqGnplGdAY
בטרם *B'terem* Before	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 1, 234	*Mishkan T'filah for the House of Mourning*, 24b *Mishkan HaNefesh for Yom Kippur*, 641	Cantor Jonathan Comisar Cantor Alan Weiner https://cbbsb.org/layered-path/ Chanan Yovel https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWyw2HIQw3U
המקום שבו אנו צודקים *Hamakom Shebo Anu Tzodkim* The Place Where We Are Right	*Alter*: 66 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 1, 258	*Mishkan HaLev* for S'lichot, 132 *Beit T'filah Israeli Erev Shabbat Umoed*, 84	Yoni Rechter https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDS_WcgNK0k
עכשיו ברעש ***Achshav Baraash*** **Now in the Noise**			
ירושלים 1967 Jerusalem 1967 [ה]	*Alter*: 83 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 2, 13	*Mishkan HaNefesh* for Yom Kippur, 625	
[כא]	*Alter*: 88 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 2, 21	*Mishkan HaNefesh* Yom Kippur, 375	

		Seder Ha-T'fillot, Forms of Prayer- Daily and Sabbath Siddur, 566	
ילדי נודף שׁלום *Yaldi Nodeif Shalom* My Child Wafts Peace	*Alter*: 90 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 2, 23	*Mishkan HaNefesh* for Yom Kippur, 247	
כּל הדורות שׁלפני *Kol Hadorot Shelfanai* All the Generations that Preceded Me	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 2, 24	*Kol Haneshemah: Prayerbook for the Days of Awe*, 900	
אבי, מלכּי *Avi, Malki* My Father, My King	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 2, 34	*Tefilat Ha-Adam*, 112	
גורל אלוהים *Goral Elohim* God's Fate	*Alter*: 98 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 2, 42	*Mishkan HaLev for S'lichot*, 118	
ולא על מנת לזכור ***V'lo Al Manat Lizkor*** **Not For The Sake of Remembering**			
בבוקר *Baboker* In the Morning	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 2, 352		Yehudit Ravitz https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scOhhhhfqWE
מאחורי כל זה מסתתר אושׁר גדול ***Meachorei Kol Zeh Mistater Osher Gadol*** **Behind All This a Great Happiness is Hiding**			
שׁירי ארץ ציון ירושׁלים Shirei Eretz Tzion Yerushalayim Songs of Zion the Beautiful לד	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 3, 28	*Kol Haneshemah: Prayerbook for the Days of Awe*, 899	
שׁלווה גדולה: שׁאלות ותשׁובות ***Shalvah G'dolah: She'elot Utshovot*** **Great Tranquility: Questions and Answers**			
בערב ראשׁ השׁנה	*Shirei Yehuda*	*Mishkan HaNefesh* for Yom	

B'erev Rosh Hashanah The Eve of the New Year	*Amichai* Vol. 3, 228	Kippur, 303 *Seder Ha-T'fillot: Forms of Prayer, Prayers for the High Holy Days* (Erev Rosh Hashanah), 26	
אֱלֹהַי, הַנְּשָׁמָה שֶׁנָּתַתָּ בִּי *Elohai, Han'shama Shenatata Bi* My God, the Soul that You Have Given Me	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 3, 261		Aviv Kammay Ezra Donner Shulamit Ran
לִשְׁכּוֹחַ אדם *Lishkoach Adam* To Forget a Person	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 3, 267	*Tefilat Ha-Adam*, 50	
בגן מוקסם *B'gan Muksam* In an Enchanted Garden	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 3, 273		Yehudit Ravitz https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55O5FzEwdxc
תּוֹסֶפֶת לַחֲזוֹן הַשָּׁלוֹם *Tosefet Lachazon Hashalom* Appendix to the Vision of Peace	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 3, 294	*Mishkan T'filah* for Shabbat, 61 *Mishkan Hanefesh for Rosh Hashanah*, 215 *Siddur B'chol L'vavcha, Congregation Beit Simchat Torah*, 122	Jonathan Comisar Ezra Donner
בְּיוֹם שֶׁבּוֹ נוֹלְדָה בִּתִּי לֹא מֵת אַף אִישׁ *Bayom Shebo Noldah Biti Lo Meit Af Ish* On the Day my Daughter Was Born Not One Person Died	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 3, 306	*Mishkan HaNefesh* for Yom Kippur, 500	
חלון תמיד *Chalon Tamid* Eternal Window	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 3, 319	*Mishkan T'filah for the House of Mourning*, 34b	

באהבתנו *B'ahavateinu* In Our Love	*Shirei Yehuda* *Amichai* Vol. 3, 360		Yehudit Ravitz https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QBLiYxjt1M
שִׁיר אֵינְסוֹפִי *Shir Einsofi* Song Without End	*Alter*: 303 *Shirei Yehuda* *Amichai* Vol. 3, 369		Ezra Donner
גם האגרוף היה יד פתוחה ואצבעות *Gam Haegrof Rak Paam Yad P'tucha V'etzbaot* Even a Fist Was Once an Open Palm With Fingers			
יוֹם כִּפּוּר Yom Kippur The Day of Atonement	*Shirei Yehuda* *Amichai* Vol. 5, 119	*Mishkan HaNefesh* for Yom Kippur, 547 *Beit T'filah Israeli Siddur Shabbat Umoed*, 79	
פתוח סגור פתוח ***Patuach Sagur Patuach*** **Open Closed Open**			
אלים מתחלפים, התפילות נשארות לעד *Eilim Mitchalfim, Hat'filot Nisharot La'ad* Gods Change, Prayers are here to Stay			
#3 אני אומר באמונה שלמה *Ani Omer B'emunah Sh'leimah* I Declare with Perfect Faith	*Alter*: 410 *Shirei Yehuda* *Amichai* Vol. 5, 148	*Mishkan HaNefesh* for Yom Kippur, 490 *Beit T'filah Israeli*, 80 *Seder Ha-T'fillot: Forms of Prayer, Prayers for the High Holy Days* (Rosh Hashanah morning), 246	
#12 גם לתפלת יחיד צריכים שנים *Gam Lit'filat Yachid Tzrichim Shnayim* Even Solitary Prayer Takes Two	*Alter: 412* *Shirei Yehuda* *Amichai* Vol. 5, 152	*Beit T'filah Yisraeli*, 75	

#13 תפילה בצבור *T'filah B'tzibbur* Communal Prayer	*Alter*: 413 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 152	*Mishkan HaNefesh* for Rosh Hashanah, 66	
#19 מִי שֶׁהִתְעַטֵּף בְּטַלִּית *Mi Shehitateif B'tallit* Whoever Wraps in a Tallit	*Alter*: 414 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 155	*Mishkan T'filah* for Shabbat, 73 *Mishkan HaNefesh* for Yom Kippur, 3 *Tefilat Ha-Adam: Siddur Reformi Israeli*, 285 *Seder Ha-T'fillot: Forms of Prayer, Prayers for the High Holy Days* (Kol Nidrei), 12	Jack Gottleib
תנ"ך תנ"ך איתך איתך *Tanach Tanach Itach Itach* The Bible and You The Bible and You			
#3 תנ"ך תנ"ך איתך איתך *Tanach Tanach Itach Itach* The Bible and You The Bible and You	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 169	*Tefilat Ha-Adam: Siddur Reformi Israeli*, 305	
מלון הורי *Malon Horai* My Parents Resting Place			
#3 אמי היתה נביאה ולא ידעה *Imi Haita N'eviah v'Lo Yadah* My Mother was a Prophet and She Didn't Know It	*Alter*: 444 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 197	*Beit T'filah Israeli*, 79 *Tefilat Ha-Adam: Siddur Reformi Israeli*, 51	
#4 אבי היה אלוהים ולא ידע A*vi Hayah Elohim V'lo Yadah*	*Alter*: 445 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 197	*Beit T'filah Israeli*, 79	

My Father was God and He Didn't know It			
טיול יהודי: השנוי הוא האלוהים, המות נביאו *Tiyul Yehudi: Hashinui Hu HaElohim, Hamavet N'vioh* Jewish Travel: Change is God and Death is His Prophet			
#5 אברהם אבינו *Avraham Avinu* Abraham our Father	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 254	*Seder Ha-T'fillot: Forms of Prayer, Prayers for the High Holy Days* (Rosh Hashanah Morning), 120	
בחיי, בחיי *B'chayai, B'chayai* In my Life, On my Life			
#13 אני, עליו השלום *Ani, Alav Hashalom* I, May I Rest in Peace	*Alter*: 481 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 249	*Mishkan Hanefesh* for Rosh Hashanah, 71 *Siddur B'chol L'vavcha, Congregation Beit Simchat Torah*, 100 *Seder Ha-T'fillot, Forms of Prayer- Daily and Sabbath Siddur*, 570	
אני לא הייתי אחד משׁשׁת המיליונים. ומה משׁך חיי? פתוח סגור פתוח *Ani Lo Hayiti Echad Misheishet Hamilionim. Umah Meshech Chayai? Patuach Sagur Patuach* I wasn't one of the 6 million: And What Is My LifeSpan? Open Closed Open			
#3 ומה משׁך חיי *Umah Meshech Chayai* And What is my Lifespan	*Alter*: 492 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 262	*Mishkan T'filah* for Shabbat, 123 (241)	Dan Nichols https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfMYCyp58bo Noah Aronson https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJAzL61K97M
סתו, אהבה, פרסמת *Stav, Ahava, Pirsomet* Autumn, Love, Commercials			
#5 אני רוצה לשׁיר שׁיר הלל	*Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 302	*Beit T'filah Israeli:* 81	

Ani Rotzeh Lashir Shir Hallel I Want to Sing a Psalm of Praise		*Tefilat Ha-Adam: Siddur Reformi Israeli*, 237	
ומי יזכר את הזוכרים? *Umi Yizkor et HaZochrim?* And Who Will Remember the Rememberers?			
#3 וְאֵיךְ עוֹמְדִים בְּטֶקֶס זִכָּרוֹן? *V'eich Omdim B'tekes Zikaron?* And What is the Correct Way to Stand at a Memorial Ceremony?	*Alter*: 523 *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* Vol. 5, 305	*Mishkan HaNefesh* for Yom Kippur, 601	

Bibliography

Abramson, Glenda. *Amichai's God*. Prooftexts 4:2 (1984).

- *A Kind of Lay Prophet*. Jewish Quarterly 35:1 (1988).
- *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai: A Thematic Approach*. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1989.
- *The Experienced Soul: Studies in Amichai*. Oxford and Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997.

Alter, Robert. *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.

Berk, Eric and Cutter, William. *Opening and Closing with Qohelet: The Late Work of Yehuda Amichai: A Discussion of "Patuah Sagur Patuah".* Hebrew Studies, vol. 51. National Association of Professors of Hebrew: 2010.

Philip Birnbaum, *Mahzor Hashalem: High Holy Day Prayer Book* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1988)

Bloch, Chana and Kronfeld, Chana. *Amichai's Counter-Theology: Opening Open Closed Open*. Judaism 49:2 (2000)

Bloch, Chana and Mitchell. Stephen. *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*. Revised and expanded edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Cohen, Joseph. *Voices of Israel: Essays on and Interviews with Yehuda Amichai, A. B. Yehoshua, T. Carmi, Aharon Appelfeld, and Amos Oz*. New York: SUNY Press, 1990.

Elbogen, Ismar and Scheindlin, Raymond, trans. *Jewish Liturgy -A Comprehensive History.* Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1993.

Gold, Nili Scharf. *Yehuda Amichai: The Making of Israel's National Poet*. Hanover, New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 2008.

Hofstadter, Douglas. *I Am a Strange Loop.* New York: Basic Books, 2007.

Kapitulnik, Yaron. "The Liturgy and Ritual of Independent Congregations in Israel," Rabbinic Thesis, HUC-JIR, Jan 2010, p. 20, http://library.huc.edu/pdf/theses/Kapitulnik%20Yaron-NY-Rab-2010%20rdf.pdf

Kol Haneshemah: Prayerbook for the Days of Awe, Pennsylvania: The Reconstructionist Press, 2018.

Kronfeld, Chana. *The Full Severity of Compassion*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2016.

Lakol Z'man Vaeit, For Sacred Moments. New York, New York: CCAR Press, 2015.

Marder, Sheldon. *What Happens When We Use Poetry in our Prayer Books– And Why?* CCAR Journal, the Reform Jewish Quarterly, Summer 2013.

Mishkan Halev, Prayers for S'lichot and the Month of Elul. New York, New York: CCAR Press, 2017.

Mishkan Hanefesh, Machzor for the Days of Awe, Yom Kippur. New York, New York: CCAR Press, 2015.

Mishkan Hanefesh, Machzor for the Days of Awe, Rosh Hashanah. New York, New York: CCAR Press, 2015.

Mishkan Tefilah, For the House of Mourning. New York, New York: CCAR Press, 2010.

Mishkan Tefilah, A Reform Siddur for Shabbat. New York, New York: CCAR Press, 2007.

Milman, Yosef. *Sacrilegious Imagery in Yehuda Amichai's Poetry*. AJS Review, Vol. 20, pp. 99-121. Cambridge University Press, 1995.

My People's Prayer Book vol. 10: Shabbat Morning: Shacharit and Musaf, Jewish Lights: 1st edition, 2007.

Newberg, Adina B. *New Prayers, Here and Now: Reconnecting to Israel Through Engaging in Prayer, Poetry, and Song.* Israel Studies Forum, vol. 23, no. 2, Berghahn Books, 2008.

Petuchowski, Jakob J. *Prayerbook Reform In Europe/New* York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, Ltd., 1968.

Pinsker, Shachar. Never *Will I hear the Sweet Voice of God: Religiosity and Mysticism in Modern Hebrew Poetry.* Prooftexts, Vol. 30, pp. 128-146. Indiana University Press, 2010.

Seder Ha-T'fillot, Forms of Prayer- Daily and Sabbath Siddur, (The Movement for Reform Judaism) London: Beacon Press, 2008.

Seder Ha-T'fillot: Forms of Prayer, Prayers for the High Holy Days, (Erev Rosh Hashanah, The Movement for Reform Judaism) London: Beacon Press, 2014.

Seder Ha-T'fillot: Forms of Prayer, Prayers for the High Holy Days, (Rosh Hashanah morning, The Movement for Reform Judaism) London: Beacon Press, 2016.

Seder Ha-T'fillot: Forms of Prayer, Prayers for the High Holy Days, (Kol Nidrei, The Movement for Reform Judaism) London: Beacon Press, 2020.

Shirei Yehuda Amichai, Volumes 1-5, Tel Aviv: Schocken Books, 2002.

Siddur B'chol L'vavcha, Congregation Beit Simchat Torah. New York, New York, 2008. Pp. 100, 122

Siddur Erev Shabbat V'Moed: Beit T'filah Israeli. Tel Aviv, Israel, 2013.

Tefilat Ha-Adam: Siddur Reformi Israeli, Ed. Rabbi Dalia Marx, PhD and Rabbi Alona Lisitsa, PhD, 2021.

Tzidduk HaDin: Funeral Service, (The Movement for Reform Judaism) London: Beacon Press, 2009.

The Union Prayer Book for Jewish Worship, Newly Revised Edition, New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1940.

Wood, James. *Like a Prayer: Yehuda Amichai, The Secular Psalmist*. The New Yorker, 2015. www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/01/04/like-a-prayer

Zierler, Wendy. *Anthological Poetics*. Since 1948, Nancy Berg and Naomi Sokoloff eds. SUNY Press, 2020.