HaTishma Koli

Voices of Biblical Women in Israeli Popular Music

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Mi Shebeirach Imoteinu
May the one who blessed our Mothers, our sisters, our daughters and our wives
The one who blessed our Prime Ministers and Prophets
Our Judges and poets
Our soldiers and songwriters, icons and leaders
Our sisters in resistance and in harmony

Bless us with passionate voices raised in both celebration and protest.
Grant us wisdom to know when to stay silent and when to be loud.
May we have continued opportunity to sing passionately, judge wisely, and love deeply.
And may we always lift our voices in pursuit of a world alive with song.

Baruch Atah Adonai Ha'Mitaneg b'Kolot Nashim
Blessed are you God who rejoices in the voices of women.

V'nomar, amen.

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of the Bible and of our day,
who have used their voices to repair and shape our world.

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Introduction

Reading the Bible as a feminist is not easy, though it certainly provides new perspectives and greater understanding of the texts themselves. As Jews, the words of the *Tanakh* are at the core of our value system. It is the foundation by which our tradition is understood and from which stem our deepest theological and spiritual pursuits. As both feminists **and** Jews, we cannot simply unravel the stories based on their feminist shortcomings – legitimate though they may be – and wind up with nothing. We as Jews must grapple with the text in order that we may live with it, learn from it, and acknowledge its enduring legacy.

So what is a Jewish feminist reader of the Bible to do? Can I continue to live with this tension and simply accept that my contemporary value system is at odds with that of the Bible? Must I abandon or disregard one or the other? Or is there, perhaps, a way to restore these texts based on my own perspective? I believe that there are indeed, modern interpretative approaches to the Torah that provide the Jewish community with opportunities to read a feminist narrative into these texts, give them new life and even a new voice.

In the following chapters, I will show how Biblical imagery around female characters has contributed to the establishment of a folk and popular music culture in the state of Israel, which itself is secular in character though derived from a religious context. This music, which began to surface even prior to the establishment of the State in 1948, spans genres and ethnic backgrounds. As I will demonstrate, this music – together with its performance by specifically female (and often *Mizrachi*) artists – provides a Jewish reading of female Biblical characters that though secular in its presentation, connects deeply to a Jewish collective consciousness. Israeli folk, pop, and rock music containing Biblical female characters, written and performed by women, provides a unique perspective on the role these characters play in the Jewish narrative

and in the collective memory of our people; one in which these women are afforded the authority and strength that is their due.

Part One

The Role of Women in the Biblical Narrative

> *The Bible itself…has largely been viewed as a predominantly male textual document, read for centuries as if it had been mostly composed and edited by males. It has been interpreted and transmitted as such within male-centered communities for thousands of years, and has been enlisted to promote and justify the social order it by and large reflects. Its interpretation and teaching have been performed almost exclusively by males, and exploited to further the gender-specific interests of their dominant social group. Retrieving a Biblical text by and for a woman reader is therefore a formidable task.*[1]
>
> *Atalya Brenner*

When reading the *Tanakh* through a feminist lens, one is faced with a series of challenges. As Dutch-Israeli Biblical scholar, Athalya Brenner notes in her article "On Reading the Hebrew Bible as Feminist Woman: Introduction to the Series," a reader must contend not only with "female types and stereotypes and their affairs, but also with the literary and social structure and texture that underlie the texts."[2] That is to say that the stories of the Torah are representative of both the female characters that lie within them as well as the broader context in which these women are understood to have existed. It is largely accepted that the Bible was written and edited by men; therefore, the experience of women reflected within it is almost exclusively presented through the male-gaze – that is, through the eyes and minds of the male authors. As S.D. Goitein wrote of women in the Biblical period, "she enjoyed the protection of being the weaker sex."[3] Women were both enclosed in a narrative that centered on men and their actions and subordinated for the most part to familial roles in relation to male protagonists. In other words, Biblical women are depicted foremost as companions, daughters, wives, and mothers. As one scholar succinctly put it: "The Bible, a product of this patriarchal society, is shaped by the concerns of the men of Israel who were involved in public life."[4] Women are

named in reference to their husbands and are ascribed value based on their ability to perpetuate the Jewish people.[1]

> Men owned almost all the land, which was passed on from father to son. The legal tribunals consisted of men: the judges at the central courts and the elders in their local councils. The army was composed of men, as was the administrative bureaucracy. Men also dominated public religious life, serving as officiants in local and national rituals and holding all the positions in the temple hierarchy. Women, while not physically confined to the home, expended most of their energies there. Economically dependent on the head of their households, they had a limited ability to determine events beyond their own families, and even within the family they ultimately had to conform to the wishes of the father or husband.[5]

This social structure is so deeply rooted in the society that women who stepped outside the accepted behavioral norm are often punished, demeaned, and even cast out. It is worth noting however, as Tikva Frymer-Kensky does in her book *Reading the Women of the Bible*, that "the role of woman is clearly subordinate, but the Hebrew Bible does not "explain" or justify this subordination by portraying women as different or inferior."[6] The *Tanakh* does not make explicit value judgments about women, they merely reflect the social structure out of which they were born. "The only misogynist statement in the Bible comes very late in Biblical development, in the book of Ecclesiastes, and shows the introduction of the classical Greek denigration of women into Israel."[7]

The idea that women could be "other" and "subordinate" and yet not "inferior" is a critical insight into the way that the nation of Israel saw itself as it "provided a paradigm for

[1] Examples can be seen in Genesis 26:24-26 when the lineage of Jacob's wives Leah, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah is listed not merely in birth order but in birth order by mother. (e.g. the songs of Leah, sons of Rachel, and so on.) Jacob's daughter Dinah is notably left out of this list altogether, though she is mentioned at other points in the story. This demonstrates that a woman's status is intrinsically linked to her husband and her ability to provide him a son. This extends even to the children whose status is further determined hierarchically by their mother. Thus, we learn that status as wife and mother affects not only the individual woman but the progeny she produces for her husband. This also explains the dismay we see repeatedly from women in the Bible who are barren or have difficulty getting pregnant due to infertility such as Sarah and Hannah or their status as a widow such as Tamar and Ruth. Without the ability to provide their husband a son, women are rendered peripheral; and, therefore, will go to great lengths to ensure their ability to reproduce or remain within the fold.

understanding powerlessness and subordination without recourse to prejudicial ideas."[8] Throughout its existence the people Israel was conquered and subjected to the more powerful empires in its midst. Just as women were subordinate in the patriarchal structure of Israelite society, so too was Israel vulnerable to the authority of more powerful nations surrounding it. Given the Biblical paradigm of power in the context of gender, it becomes possible for male members of the nation of Israel to maintain a powerful self-image despite their vulnerability and therefore, made it possible for Israel to fulfill its fate as the chosen people. As Frymer-Kensky writes, "These women are paradigms for individuals, groups, and nations who find themselves in such disadvantaged situations, a dramatic representation of how they can nevertheless rise to redeem themselves and others. Like these women, the men of Israel can persevere to preserve their destiny."[9]

This patriarchal structure assumed a society in which women were largely relegated to the domestic and private domain and therefore left behind little archeological evidence of their actions. Though certain events in the Bible are supported by archeological evidence, the text itself is not generally a factual document and cannot be corroborated as such. Though as a piece of literature the text surely reflects some aspects of contemporary reality, the characters and events therein are largely accepted by scholars as allegorical. As such, "the premise of our investigation cannot be a discussion of books explicitly devoted to women, such as the books of Esther, Ruth, and Judith."[10] In his article, *Women as Creators of Biblical Genres*, S.D. Goitein argues that women created literary genres that were oral in nature. Thus, the lack of female authorship in the Biblical narrative does not mean that women's voices were silenced; muted certainly, but not silenced.

In fact, women's voices have a critical function in the life of *Am Yisrael.* They articulate and bring about God's plan. The women of the *Tanakh* punctuate the Biblical narrative with reminders of God's omnipotence. Biblical foremothers such as Sarah and Rebecca are privy to God's divine plan. For example, in Genesis 21:12, Sarah seems to know God's intentions, and God instructs Abraham to listen to her. Rebecca, even more so, receives a Divine message about God's plans for her twin sons, Jacob and Esau. In fact, Rebecca goes so far as to intervene, seemingly with Divine sanction, to enact God's plan and allow Jacob to deceive his father and brother and inherit his birthright.

Both Miriam and Deborah are attributed victory songs that not only suggest their prophetic connection to God but confirm their authoritative voice within the communal structure. S.D. Goitein comments, "The two first prophetesses, Miriam and Deborah were *bards.* And perhaps we shall not be mistaken if we suppose that poetry was the original form of female prophecy."[11] If as he suggests, there is a distinct connection between female prophecy and the modality of song, this merits further exploration.

In fact, music and song are regarded as acceptable forms of female communal expression throughout the *Tanakh*.[2] In Ezekiel 8:14, the wailing women lament the infertile vegetation of Tammuz; and in Judges, they annually mourn the death of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11:30-40). In Jeremiah, women are dirge singers, skilled in their craft: "Summon the dirge-singers, let them come/ Send for the skilled women, let them come," (Jeremiah 9:16-19). Further examples of singing as a proper and celebrated form of female expression abound in the Song of Songs. It should come as no surprise then that when a Biblical woman delivers a prophecy, it is done so in the form of poetic song.

[2] Perhaps this suggests that though some authority was given to women in the *Tanakh*, it was stripped away in later contexts.

It is worth noting that this is not an exclusive female medium. Male prophets also deliver prophecy in the poetic form. "Almost without exception they gave forth their prophetic utterances in the common Hebrew measure; which was, of course, not our modern word-rhyme, but a sense-parallelism, or 'rhyme of idea,' in banked clauses."[12] However, these male prophets do not deliver their prophecy in this manner alone. It is an accepted though not requisite prophetic form. Male prophets need only *speak* their message to be a voice of prophetic authority. Female prophets, on the other hand, seem to deliver their words through song in order for them to be accepted and understood as of Divine origin. Frymer-Kensky further points out, "[The] underlying metaphorical understanding of Israel as a woman also explains why the historians bracketed Israel's history with the appearance of female oracles…the women as the voice of God demonstrate Israel's ultimate significance despite her size."[13] If even the marginalized members of society such as women can do such holy work, then Israel too can achieve the covenantal glory promised by God.

"And all the Women Followed Her": Miriam the Prophet

Miriam's epic act of song and dance at the Sea of Reeds must be understood in the larger context of the narrative in the Book of Exodus. Miriam, who will emerge as *Ha'Neviah* – the female prophet – is introduced at a young age and her relationship to her people evolves over time. Miriam is at once a brave and authoritative leader as well the embodiment of familiar characterizations of Biblical women, such as the rival, the jealous, the gossip, and the shamed. While Miriam's role is emblazoned in the Biblical narrative with prominent significance, the spotty biographical clues describing Miriam's life may suggest that her character was whittled

down to strip her voice of its rightful authority regarding or, perhaps, because of her prophetic connection to God.

Unlike many other Biblical women, Miriam is not a nameless female character left to midrashic interpretation; there is no shortage of rabbinic commentary on her. Miriam's character could have been omitted or left as another nameless female character in the lineage of the patriarchs. But she is named and her actions and significant role in the narrative are preserved. Perhaps this suggests that her role in the story was so large that she could not be omitted altogether. However, when she is initially introduced, she is Moses' nameless sister and her story is "brief, fragmentary, and scattered."[14] Throughout the text she is only defined as Moses' sister, suggesting that her significance is rendered in relation to her famous brother(s); this is often the case with female characters, as previously noted. Miriam comes onto the scene in Exodus 2:4 where she plays a crucial and widely-celebrated role in saving Moses from Pharoah's decree to kill all the baby boys born to the Hebrew people. Miriam hides her brother in the reeds of the Nile, watches over him and engenders a relationship between Pharaoh's daughter (Moses' adoptive mother) and Yocheved (Moses' [and Miriam's] birth mother). It is Miriam who enables her mother to become the wet nurse for her son, presumably laying the groundwork for Moses' return to his identity as the leader and liberator of the Jewish people. In her book *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach*, Ilana Pardes writes, "While Moses grows up at Pharoah's palace and exerts his burgeoning powers, first in slaying an Egyptian and later in bargaining with Pharaoh, we hear nothing of Miriam."[15] In fact, we hear nothing *of her* or *from her* throughout the story of Moses' childhood and the Exodus from Egypt until the Israelites cross the Red Sea.

It is on the shores of the sea that Miriam reappears as a leader of women, celebrating God's power. As Pardes puts it, "[Miriam] bursts out with a name and a title," and as the text describes, "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dances. And Miriam answered them, sing ye to the Lord" (Exodus 15: 20-21).[16] It is only once Miriam delivers her song that she is honored with a title of authority and becomes an autonomous, named character. She no longer needs her relationship to Moses; she is powerful in her own right. Perhaps the Biblical authors are suggesting here that her song confers status. It represents her unique and independent connection to the Divine.

The content of the song thus requires examination. George J. Brooke notes in his article "Power to the Powerless: A Long Lost Song of Miriam," that the Song of Miriam is "a mere half verse - Exodus 15:21b in length. Not only is it brief, but it simply reiterates the first lines of the Song of the Sea: "Sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously; Horse and rider he has thrown into the sea,"[17] (Ex. 15:21). Brookes describes how scholars generally regard the song as either a version shortened by the Biblical redactors or the "true song" that was "only later . . . put into the mouth of her brother Moses."[18] Dead Sea Scroll fragments even suggest that Miriam's song appeared before [Moses'] Song of the Sea.[19] The codified Biblical text may, therefore, have been reworked to diminish Miriam's authority and cast her as following in the footsteps of her brother, rather than a leader in her own right. If the Song of the Sea did in fact originate with Miriam, this could divert attention from Moses, who for much of the remaining narrative is cast as the primary leader of the Jewish people. To ascribe the song to another prophet, let alone his sister, might have threatened not only Moses' authority but the whole structure upon which the society was built.

Victory songs such as Miriam's become a metaphor throughout the Bible for the nation itself. Her song illustrates the potential of the weak to rise up and conquer stronger opponents. According to Brookes, Miriam's song, like other songs by authoritative Biblical women such as Judith and Hannah, attempts to strengthen "oppressed and weak people [who become] victorious with the Lord on their side."[20] As he contends, the text attributed to Miriam in the Dead Sea Scrolls extols God for elevating someone (the People Israel) of lowly status and allowing her to triumph. If this is true, he then concludes: "[T]his text should frighten not only the mighty outside the oppressor, but also the community insiders who would like to dominate the life of a community!"[21] After all, the suggestion that the weak may rise up and find victory in the face of the mighty (with the help of God) is a risky assertion for a society invested in the strict delineation of power between the sexes. Brookes asks whether "[the Israelites'] revolutionary celebration of God's victory for the weak through the weak is linked with various leading women in order not only to prove the point but also to tame the force of the message."[22]

Moreover, by associating the victory songs with women, men minimize the threat they pose to the status quo [to powerful enemies]. As the Israelites (and thereby their "history" embodied in their ancient text, the Torah) gained authority, the Biblical editors could feel comfortable editing out the woman's voice that had been a cover for the men's ambitions. Given their investment in the emerging authority of the Torah in the political context of the time, the Biblical authors and editors may have shortened Miriam's song, though not eliminated it altogether. The truncated version that ultimately appears in the text is a small victory for women even as it is an affront to female authority.

When she next appears in the Torah, Miriam is undermined once again (Num. 12). Though less celebrated, the final portion of her narrative is noteworthy vis-à-vis the power struggle

between her and her brothers. Miriam and her brother Aaron notoriously criticize Moses for marrying a Cushite woman and express jealousy toward their brother, God's favorite. Pardes chocks it up to a moment of sibling rivalry:

> "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only to Moses?" Miriam and Aaron ask, protesting against the privileged status of Moses' discourse. Their discourses too, they seem to claim, should be considered as authoritative and binding. They too, not unlike Moses have been speaking under divine inspiration. Moses does not reply. Instead, God intervenes in the drama of sibling rivalry.[23]

While both siblings react against Moses, Aaron is spared and only Miriam is punished (quite severely, in fact). Pardes suggests that she is stricken with leprosy not only for her behavior but for the fact of being a woman, as proven when God justifies the gendered differentiation of punishment by comparing Miriam to a shameful daughter who spits in the face of her father. According to Pardes, "Miriam's demand for greater expression seems to be synonymous with lewdness."[24] That a woman might claim agency and advocate on her own behalf is not only immodest but merits punishment. Time and again, Miriam pushes against the patriarchal paradigm, and each time she suffers for it.[3] In fact, shortly after this incident Miriam dies without another word recorded on her behalf. As Pardes sees it: "For in Moses' day a woman with the gift of prophecy would have had to be silenced and then buried in the wilderness for daring to demand a central cultural position."[25]

Despite the pitfalls of her leadership, Miriam – like Deborah after her — is crowned with the title prophetess and regarded as a central figure in the story of the liberation of the Jews. It is noteworthy and curious that the Biblical authors so clearly struggled with and disavowed Miriam's prophetic authority yet ultimately preserved it in the authoritative text of our people. It poses the question then of how strong and powerful her voice may have been before it was

[3] However, she does not suffer at the Sea of Reeds. Rather she triumphs. Does this suggest this snuck by the Biblical editors?

edited, redacted, and ultimately, silenced. How much more could Miriam have said or sung had she been given the freedom afforded to her brothers? One can only wonder.

Deborah the Prophet: An Unlikely Mother in Israel

The character of Deborah the Judge and Prophet whom we meet in the book of Judges is a hybrid of the siblings we see in the Exodus story. She has Moses' charisma, Miriam's temerity, and Aaron's steady leadership. "Like Moses, Deborah is not a battle commander, her role is to inspire, predict, and celebrate in song. Her weapon is word, and her very name is an anagram of 'she spoke' (*dibberah).*"[26] Her song gives voice to the history of the people and recounts the way Israel achieved victory over Canaan and is ultimately saved from destruction. The song further describes how Deborah claims victory atop Mount Tabor, and, though she does not join the men in battle, she sets the stage for the events that ensue.

Deborah is introduced as *Devorah eshet Lapidot,* which can be translated in one of two ways: It can be understood as "wife of Lapidot" or as "woman of torches" or "fiery woman".[4] In this case, Deborah is given a descriptor that as Frymer-Kensky writes in *Reading the Women of the Hebrew Bible,* "fits the image of Deborah and would fit the story in the manner of Biblical names."[27] Frymer-Kensky points out that "her role as leader began sometime before the events related in the narratives by which she is remembered, but how she became a leader is one of the many facets of her life that went unrecorded."[28]

Deborah, unlike Miriam, is accepted as an authority figure from the outset; she is described not only as a prophet but as a judge of the people Israel. The absence of explanation as to how

[4] Although the word "*Lapidot*" stands where a husband's name would have in the naming structure of the day, "*Lapidot*" is a strange and unlikely name for a man; and therefore, the suggested translation as "fiery woman" is better, especially given Deborah's behavior and strong personality.

Deborah rose to power and became a confirmed member of the leadership of the Jewish people may be a silent rebuke of such daring behavior by a woman and even perhaps a tactic to conceal from future generations how to accomplish such a deed. Yet her authoritative role is unquestioned – a unique circumstance in the Bible.

Like Miriam before her, Deborah possesses an eponymous song recounting the victory of the people Israel in the face of a foreign enemy. Deborah's song differs from Miriam's in length and content. In Deborah's case, it seems that credit is given where it is due. In fact, her song is a "memory of Israel's defeat of Canaan, a defeat in which Deborah played an important role."[29] As with Miriam, Deborah's role is so prominent that it seems she could not have been edited out. Yet Deborah's song seems to have been preserved in its entirety unlike the limited text attributed to Miriam. This perhaps suggests a shift in the attitude of later Biblical authors. The song recounts Israel's struggle to find order and Deborah's unique leadership role in this quest, filling in when Barak ignored God's call and leading to her prophetic initiation of battle.

The engendering of roles here is noteworthy as they align with those in Exodus. Barak, the male leader, is reluctant to accept his role and requires a woman not only to protect him but to reassure him of his own power. In Exodus 3:11, Moses does the same. God instructs Moses to approach Pharaoh and ask him to free the Israelites, and Moses balks stating, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" Similarly, Barak is resistant and ultimately insists that Deborah join him in battle, an unusual request in a world that labels women as the weaker and more submissive members of society. Barak, like Moses before him, is unsure of his own abilities despite God's call. Without Deborah or Miriam, one is left to wonder whether these heroes would have achieved greatness at all. How much does Miriam

overtly help with Moses' role as leader? While she saves his life, it is not clear whether she played a role in his leadership, as Aaron had.

Throughout Deborah's story, the fact that she is a woman is highlighted by the language used to describe her. "Both the story and the song emphasize the fact that Deborah is a woman. The story tells us that she was a prophetess-woman, adding the word "woman," *'ishah,'* when the feminine form of the noun, "prophetess" or *nebi'ah*, already conveys that information.[30] Whether she is a wife is left ambiguous, and the reader never learns whether she has children of her own. However, in Judges 5:7 she explains that after the battle "*Shakamti* e*m b'Yisrael* - I arose a mother in Israel." This statement refers not to biological motherhood but to her role as a mother of the nation. In a moment of national glory Deborah rises up and claims her rightful place as leader and matriarch, a central figure who helps produce the people Israel and their future. Her motherhood therefore, "goes beyond biology. It describes her role in preserving the heritage of Israel, in her case by advising battle…Deborah, the 'mother in Israel,' protected the people in time of danger."[31] This descriptor serves to tie Deborah's authority to an accepted and more traditional female role. We are to understand that her actions were consistent with those of a mother; the mother of a nation. Deborah is at once exceptional and yet, just like every other woman.

Shulamite and the Song of Songs

Of all the female voices in the *Tanakh*, that of the unnamed female character in the Song of Songs is arguably afforded the most autonomy and agency. If one reads the text literally, it is a rather explicit love poem describing a metaphorical game of cat and mouse between a woman and her lover who pursue each other through the fields and streets of the city. Throughout the

text, the reader also addresses a group of women in the tradition of a Greek chorus, who are referred to as the Daughters of Jerusalem. The female voice, referred to by scholars as the Shulamite, begins the poem and is quickly followed by a dialogue between the two lovers who seem to flirt and play. They exchange compliments in the form of metaphor, such as "my beloved is like a gazelle" (*Shir HaShirim* 2:9) or "as a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters" (2:2).

Many rabbinic scholars have struggled with the role of this text in Jewish tradition; its erotic nature makes it hard to explain. As such, rabbinic authorities have interpreted this text as an allegory for God and the people Israel, casting God in the role of the lover and *Am Yisrael* as the woman in perpetual pursuit of the Divine. In her book, *Dangerous Sisters of the Hebrew Bible,* Amy Kalmanofsky writes, "The Shulamite's pursuit of her male lover, which challenges the Bible's typical sexual dynamic, reflects the accepted dynamic of the relationship between God and humanity. Like the Shulamite, human beings long for God."[32] This need to explain away the sexuality in the poem can perhaps be attributed to the desire of the rabbinic tradition to curb female sexuality altogether. The outright acceptance of a woman claiming so much sexual agency is problematic when viewed in this framework; and therefore, the Rabbis need to reimagine the role of the woman in the song.[5]

However, while this interpretation does dim the eroticism of the poem, it does not eliminate the agency imparted to the female character in the Biblical text. If the poem is read as a love story the reader is presented with a presumably young, unmarried female protagonist who pursues her lover and explores her identity as a sexual and emotional being. Throughout the song

[5] We will see later how when set to music, the words of the song are often performed by non-Ashkenazi female singers perhaps as a method of further distancing the sexuality of the text from what was viewed as both "authentic" and "proper" in Eastern European Jewish culture.

she is accompanied by the Daughters of Jerusalem who cheer her on and provide her counsel, further demonstrating a sense of sisterhood and solidarity among women.

The song therefore, can be read in one of two ways: a strong feminist text, which demonstrates the agency and sexuality of an unhindered female voice, or a patriarchal elaboration of the damsel-in-distress tale, whereby a female protagonist seeks a male hero to rescue her. The song opens with the description of the Shulamite, whose dark complexion she attributes to time spent in the sun tending to her vineyard. In *Shir HaShirim* 1:6 she laments, "look not upon me for I am swarthy. The sun has tanned me. My mother's sons were incensed against me and made me the keeper of their vineyards but my own vineyard I have not kept!" In keeping with the God-Israel metaphor, the Shulamite is not able to tend her own land and so seeks a lover as redeemer/savior.[6]

Biblical Women and The Medium of Song

The songs of Miriam and Deborah illustrate the strength of female voices in the formation of the Jewish people in the Biblical narrative. Both women are connected to the Divine and bear authority as communal leaders. At the same time, the unique structure and delivery of their songs suggest that the female voice needs its own literary form to be heard and accepted as prophecy. This raises the question of whether their songs were indeed delivered as such or whether the Biblical authors felt the need to distinguish their prophecy when recording it in the text. The song, in other words, is used as a tool to soften the authoritative voices of Miriam, Deborah and, even the Shulamite of the Song of Songs.

[6] This reading can be easily applied to the untended land of Palestine which, according to the Zionist narrative, lay in wait for the Jewish people to settle it and fulfill its rightful destiny as the Jewish homeland.

Conclusion

The female voice plays a pivotal role in the Biblical narrative. Our matriarchs inform our history, shape our collective memory and celebrate our victories through song. Ultimately, however, their voices are muted because of the form they are given. It would seem that in this context, song is perceived as a lesser form of communication than the spoken prophecy of men. The female voice is thus a metaphor for how little power women were afforded in the time of the Bible. Even in our own day, we continue to struggle with women's role in society, including how their voices are heard and understood.

Nevertheless, Jewish women continue to sing. They carried on the legacy of their Biblical foremothers, as is powerfully evident in the twentieth century with the founding of the modern state of Israel. As will be illustrated in the next chapter, women sang the young nation into existence. They wove their voices into the fabric of the national sound by reclaiming and holding up female Biblical characters as exemplars of female power and models for their own actions.

[1] Athalya Brenner. *On Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Feminist Woman: Introduction to the Series*. (England: Sheffield Academic Press. 1993, 2001), 14-15.
[2] Ibid, 17.
[3] Michael Carasik and S.D. Goitein, "Women as Creators of Biblical Genres." (*Prooftexts* 8, no. 1, 1988), 4.
[4] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, Loc. 89.
[5] Ibid, Loc. 131.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid, Loc. 138.
[8] Ibid, Loc. 224.
[9] Ibid, Loc. 156.
[10] Carasik and Goitein, *Women as Creators of Biblical Genres*, 4.
[11] Ibid, 13.
[12] Edward B. Pollard "The Prophet as a Poet." *(The Biblical World* Vol. 12, No. 5, Nov. 1898), 327-332.
[13] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), Loc. 242.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ilana Pardes. *Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach.* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 7.
[16] Ibid.
[17] George J. Brookes. "Power to the Powerless - A Long Lost Song of Miriam." *(Biblical Archeology Review* Vol. 20 No. 3. 1994), 63.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid, 64.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible*, 9.
[24] Ibid, 10.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid, 49.
[27] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 49.
[28] Ibid, 48.
[29] Ibid, 47.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid, 50.
[32] Amy Kalmonofsky. *Dangerous Sisters of Jerusalem* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 141.

Part Two

Women's Voices in the State of Israel

But as I come to sing to you today,
And to adorn crowns to you
I am the smallest of the youngest
of your children
And of the last poet.[33]
Naomi Shemer

During the Biblical Period the texts demonstrates that women's voices were present in many areas of the life of the *Am Yisrael*. However, after the Bible was canonized and closed in 100 C.E., women are barely heard from at all. In fact, Rabbinic commentators go so far as to imply that women are not only inferior but congenitally problematic. For instance, in Bereshit Rabbah 18:2, the midrashist describes how God laments that despite best efforts, woman was created with manifold flaws that are inherently female. Moreover, the Rabbis of the Talmud begin to issue legal bans against the use of the female voice in public worship based on their understanding of the eroticism inherent in the female protagonist of the Song of Songs. While regnant during the medieval period, the Rabbis' negative view of the female voice was overturned in the modern era, as this chapter will show. Its reemergence in secular Jewish culture, particularly in the modern state of Israel, thrust women into the musical spotlight once again.

Rabbinic Denunciation of the Female Voice

According to *Halakhic* authorities, modesty impelled women to refrain from singing lest their voices lure men other than their husbands into sin. The following quote spoken by the male voice in the Song of Songs is used as evidence of the connection between sexual attraction and the sound of a women's voice: "Let me hear your voice for your voice is pleasant and your

appearance attractive," (2:14).[7] As such, it is all the more confounding that this quote provides the basis for the Rabbinic prohibition of "*kol isha ervah"* - "the lewdness of the female voice."[34] Multiple halakhic authorities – such as Rashi, the Rosh, and authorities in the *Shulchan Aruch* – debate the untoward nature of the female voice when heard by a man who is not her husband. Rashi suggests that because *Shir haShirim* indicates that a woman's voice is attractive to a man, he is prohibited from hearing it. While the Rabbis debate the times and places in which these restrictions apply, ultimately a restrictive paradigm pervades in halakhically-observant Jewish communities. As Orthodox rabbi and Yeshivah University professor, Saul J. Berman, concludes in his article *Kol Isha*:

> The identification of a woman's voice as a likely source of sexual stimulation has led many modern Halakhic authorities to ban, albeit with substantial dissent by other authorities, activities such as choirs of men and women together, women singing *Zemirot* in the presence of men other than their husbands, listening to records of women singing, and even women singing lullabies to their children in the hearing of men.[35]

Berman argues that the ban on women's voices became a means (unwittingly or not) for keeping women from domains seen as inherently male, such as worship and public ritual. As he put it: "It is clear that the central concern with hearing a woman's voice is not its intrinsic sensuousness, but the purely functional concern that it might distract a man from his concentration on prayer or study."[36] It was not, therefore, inherently wrong to hear a woman's voice but it was disallowed due to the fact that it would distract men from religiously-mandated obligations, which required their full attention.[37]

Despite Rabbinic prohibitions, we know that some women found ways to raise their voices nonetheless. For instance, poetry and prose attributed to women was later discovered in the Cairo Genizah, demonstrating the "ability of women to turn their marginal linguistic spaces

[7] Shir HaShirim, which we will examine in more detail later in this chapter, is perhaps the best example we have of women's agency in love.

into sites of resistance and growth."[38] These rebellious women were trailblazers for the scores of Jewish women who would make their voices heard in centuries to come.

The Female Voice Rises in the Development of Modern Hebrew and its Literature

The late nineteenth-century *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment movement), and the concomitant *Hibbat Zion* (love of Zion) phenomenon, ushered in a period of unprecedented robust literary production in secular Hebrew.[39] Though their numbers were far smaller, women too joined the Hebrew revival movement; and each subsequent wave of immigration to the Jewish homeland brought highly-educated, ideologically-committed female voices into the public realm. These female authors and poets broke the centuries-long silence as they sought to express their deep yearning for their new/old land:

> Here in Israel in the midst of a narrow and poor Jewish community, in the desolate atmosphere of a faraway wilderness removed from every cultural center…women arise with the desire to express themselves… and the stage is set for the participation of women in the literary life of the Land of Israel. (Yaffa Berlovitz)[40]

The establishment of the new State of Israel birthed a shifting consciousness toward egalitarianism and the role of women in society. While the religious nature of Jewish life in the Diaspora had mandated that women assume a role subordinate to men, the secularization of Jewish culture that accompanied the Zionist nationalist enterprise opened up the possibility for greater equality among the sexes. "The revolutionary and egalitarian ideology combined with the Zionist nationalistic consciousness brought women into the field of Hebrew letters and, ultimately, into the fabric of the newly established Israeli consciousness."[41] Jewish women in what was then known as Palestine desired equality in all areas of their lives, such as voting rights, equal pay, and occupational freedom. "They aspired to be full human begins and full partners in all fields of social creation."[42] Female poets and writers, such as Yokheved Bat-

Miriam, Rachel (Bluwstein), Lea Goldberg, Elisheva, Esther Raab, and Anda Pinkerfield Amir, entered the field; and their contributions remain an essential part of the canon of Israeli literature today.

The Appearance of Biblical Women in the Works of Female Hebraists

With the emergence of Zionism and the active quest for a Jewish homeland, Biblical imagery began to make its way into the work of secular musicians, lyricists, and poets; and female writers were no exception. While Biblical stories and characters had previously been refracted through a religious light, the same themes and narratives were now revisited through the lens of nationalism and collective memory. The Biblical stories that were rooted in the land took on an urgency and captivated the imagination of the new immigrants to the Land of Israel. The setting of the Biblical text provided a strong Zionist raison d'etre for the Jewish people's return to the Land. Therefore, many early Zionist artists who sought to paint a picture of the Jewish people in their native land used Biblical imagery to do so.

Dr. Wendy Zierler argues that the early Hebrew women writers experienced, and therefore approached, the authority of the Bible differently than their male counterparts. These women, she explains, wrote as outsiders looking in. Although they employed Biblical imagery in their poetry, they did not take the text as it stood. Rather, they reinterpreted the stories from the female perspective as they "attempted to draw parallels between their own contemporary experiences and those of Biblical women to create a chain of shared female tradition."[43]

Indeed, Zierler argues, Hebrew women poets offered alternative readings of the text that often displaced the Biblical patriarchs in favor of the matriarchs. Like their Biblical foremothers, many of these women had been born in a foreign land and emigrated to the Land of Israel to start

a new life. The use of this imagery and these characters in early Zionist poetry was, therefore, a way to reimagine and even emulate their foremothers and elevate them to a position of power. This provided a restorative feminist reading of the Biblical narrative, forgiving women of the sins attributed to them by the Rabbinic period, and turning them into paragons of strength and authority. Early Hebrew women writers asserted and inserted their voices into the new narrative of the birth of Israel and many of these poetic works would ultimately make it into the literary canon as well as that of Israeli folk music.

Music in Early Years of the State of Israel

In the early years of statehood, folk music was used as a "major cultural tool in the construction of modern national, ethnic, and other collectivities in the evocation of a sense of place."[44] What it meant to be fundamentally "Israeli" needed to be cultivated, and music became a key part of that identity formation. In order to understand how one song or another fits into the greater context of Israeli society, one must first understand the broader context of Israeli music. "Israeliness needed to be constructed or 'invented,' because for the early Zionist pioneers in Palestine, this culture had to be different from traditional Jewish cultures forged in the Diaspora."[45] Popular music was therefore, the cultural form that most strongly signified Israeliness, and we can break down Israeli pop music into several categories, based on variance in sound. They are:

- *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* (Songs of the Land of Israel - SLI)
- "Folk" music of Israel (also known as Hebrew song)
- Israeli rock

- *Musiqa Mizrahit* (Mizrahi music) - the major ethnic popular music of Eastern Jews[46]

The songs that made it into the canon of *Shirei Eretz Yisrael* (SLI) are recognizable by Israelis across generations. They share a timelessness in content and in spirit and are associated with Israeli culture in much the same way as American folk songs such as *If I Had a Hammer*[47] or *This Land is Your Land.*[48] Indeed, SLI was born of an attempt to "create a brand new Israeli identity and culture, a collective style of songs with which all Israelis, regardless of background could identify."[49] Songwriters would in fact, use the collective pronoun "we" to reflect their efforts to establish a collective, national identity. The songs encapsulate a nationalist agenda, together with the "pioneering spirit" characteristic of the early Zionist resettlement. Identifying with this repertoire became characteristic of the ethos of the paradigmatic Israeli as it was viewed as "convincing 'proof' of the existence of Israeliness as an indigenous cultural identity."[50]

Hebrew song, an offshoot of SLI, is understood as synonymous with the labels "Israeli" or "folk." The songs were written mainly by composers and poets well known to the public, such as Nahum Nardi (1901-1977), Yehuda Sharet (1901-1979) and Naomi Shemer (1930-2004). These songwriters expressed their understanding of their newfound "Israeliness" through the medium of song and their deliberate use of language.[8]

A noteworthy shift from SLI to folk music was embodied in the use of the pronoun "I" rather than "we" to represent a freedom from the collective and the emergence of a personal identity amid the whole. "In the case of Israeli folk music, the early Hebraist composers attempted to create a new musical style that would be perceived as ancient sounding, authentic to

[8] Some classic examples of songs that fit the category of SLI are *Shir Moledet* (Song of the Homeland) composed in 1934 by Natan Alterman with lyrics by Daniel Samburski and *Erev Shel Shoshanim* (An Evening of Flowers) written in 1956 with lyrics by Moshe Dor and music by Yosef Hadar.

the land, and thus distanced from the Eastern European musical style, which was seen as more sentimental."[51]

True "popular" music, as we understand it today, did not emerge in the State of Israel until the mid-1960s.[52] In the late 60 and early 70s, pop and rock music took on a new form, as triggered by a song contest. In the 1960s, *Kol Israel,* (Voice of Israel), now known as the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA), established a competition to encourage the writing and publishing of new Hebrew songs. The contest's original name was *Festival ha-Zemer ha-Yisraeli*, (Israeli song contest), and was modeled after European song festivals, such as those in Italy and France. The event was held annually in various iterations over the next forty years.

As Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi note in their iconic book, *Popular Music in Israeli Culture*, the two most memorable contests were held in 1967 and 1969. The winning song in 1967 was a sentimental love song that is long forgotten. Teddy Kolek, then Mayor of Jerusalem, commissioned one of the five songs submitted to the contest amid growing tensions on Israel's borders that ultimately led to the Six-Day War in June of that year. The song was *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav* (Jerusalem of Gold) written by Naomi Shemer and later performed by Shuli Natan. The song was the first secular song written about Jerusalem from a nationalist perspective rather than a religious one. Its impact was so great that song writer Dan Almagor is quoted as referring to *Yerusalayim Shel Zahav* as the song that "changed the country forever."[53] Natan accompanied herself on guitar and performed the lyrics with a longing and supplicatory sentiment that, though expressed in secular terms, felt prayerful on behalf of the Holy City. This performance captivated the national audience and became even more poignant in retrospect when the war broke out three weeks later, leading to the re-capturing of the Old City by Israel.

The 1970s brought what ethnomusicologists call the "Europeanization" of Israeli music. In 1973, Israel became the first non-European country to enter the European song contest known as Eurovision; and, in 1978, the Israeli Broadcasting Association (IBA) decided that the winner of the Israel Song Festival would from then on represent Israel in the Eurovision contest. Consequently, songwriters began to tailor their submissions to the styles most likely to gain traction in the European contest. The change paid off. In 1978, Israel took home first prize in the Eurovision contest with "*Abanibi*" *(*the word "me" or "I" as expressed through a Hebrew word game), lyrics by Ehud Manor and music by Nurit Hirsch. The win brought with it not only national pride but also the honor of hosting the festival the following year, when Israel would win again with the entry of "*Halleluyah*" performed by vocal ensemble *Halav u'D'vash* (Milk and Honey); lyrics by Shimrit Or and music by Kobi Oshrat.[54] The song took on all the characteristics of the Euro-pop formula. It was catchy with its sixteen-bar melody and repeated use of the word *Hallelujah*. The song veered away from the SLI and folk genres to appeal to a wider audience. It was short and catchy and reflected a universality rather than an Israeli nationalist sensibility.

While the SLI, folk, and pop genres are largely associated with the secular, Ashkenazi mainstream of the Israeli middle and upper classes, *Musiqa Mizrahit* is aligned with a different social group altogether:

> Music mizrahit (lit. Eastern or oriental music) is the popular music associated with mizrahiyut, the cultural variant of Israelites created by Jews who came to Israel from Arab countries in North Africa and the Near East.[55]

For decades, *Mizrahi* singers had been eager to enter the musical mainstream. But their lack of training in Western musical styles and reliance on oral tradition (rather than notated pieces) often excluded them from the SLI and other canons. The State sought to forge a "coherent national

identity by subsuming Diaspora ethnic traditions"[56] and the inherently Eastern nature of the *Mizrahi* sound ostensibly challenged that effort. Only certain performers with Western training made it into the Israeli musical establishment, such as Yemenite singer Bracha Zefira. Zefira was orphaned at an early age and taken in by a Sephardi widow at the age of six. She learned to sing in a Sephardi style from the women in her neighborhood of *Yemin Moshe* and later performed concerts extensively throughout the 1930s. Her music ultimately became the core of the Sephardi canon in Israel with pieces such as *Durme, Durme* and *Morena A Mi Me Llaman*.[57]

In the 1970s, influenced by the Black power movement and civil rights activism in the U.S., the *Mizrahi* community inserted its voice into the Israeli cultural arena. A surge of *Mizrahi* music followed, with rearrangements of Turkish, Yemenite and Kurdish music with rock beats and pop stylings. Singers emphasized *silsul* (vibrato) and often included a *muwal,* "a vocal prelude usually sung with simple utterance such as *yalel* or *lelele* to set the mood and introduce the scales in the forthcoming composition."[58]

Biblical Imagery in Israeli Popular Music

Since 1948, Biblical themes and characters have found their way into and taken root in Israeli popular culture. Naomi Cohn Zentner sought to "begin the work [of] summarizing [the] relevant research"[59] on the subject in her article "Singing the Bible with a Modern Inflection: Scriptural Events, Places and Personalities in Israeli Popular Music." In her estimation, popular music can be sorted into three general categories in relation to the Bible:[60]

(1) Biblical verses set to music,

(2) musical style of popular songs inspired by the Bible

(3) Biblical events and figures in the texts of Israel songs

Cohn Zentner argues that "the Zionist movement's larger cultural endeavor… saw the Bible as the cornerstone of an emerging Israeli culture."[61] And, she continues, since Israelis regarded *Musiqa Mizrahit* (and other Mediterranean and Arabic imagery) as more authentic to the land than East European-rooted music, composers often employed it, despite the large Ashkenazi population of the nascent state. Early Hebrew song with Biblical themes thus relied on contemporary Middle Eastern musical elements. So, for instance, vocally, a more guttural style of pronunciation typical of Yemenite singers was preferred. Because of their singing style, performers such as Shoshana Damari and Bracha Zefira rapidly rose in popularity both due to and despite their *Mizrahi* roots. "The female Yemenite voice was seen as an ideal vehicle for performing Hebrew songs; it was thought to convey an Oriental/Biblical sonority."[62] Instrumentation included recorders and other woodwinds, as well as hand drums, and cymbals to enhance the heavily rhythmic style inherent to this musical genre.

Musicologist Sarah Hafri-Aflalu divides Israeli songs on Biblical topics into two categories and periods. [63] The first is the early Zionist period through the 1960s, which she refers to as the "dream" era.[64] Music of this era focuses on seminal events in Jewish history dating to the Exodus from Egypt through the settlement of the land and the various waves of immigration or *aliyot*. Work of this period encompasses themes that could be associated with a nationalistic consciousness in general and the Zionist ethos in particular. This gave rise to a large body of work that quotes *Shir HaShirim* due to its focus on the land itself, including the relationship between humanity and nature.

Hafri-Aflalu dates the second period from 1960 to the present day and calls it "the awakening."[65] Rather than focusing on events, the songs of this era hone in on individual Biblical characters, particularly those formerly-marginalized, such as female protagonists. As we

will explore in the next chapter, early Zionist poets often reframed Biblical narrative against the backdrop of their time and worldview – one with a national consciousness and secular sensibility. As their poetry was set to music, this ethos made its way into the popular imagination of post-1960 Israel.

Extensive Use of Song of Songs in Early Israeli Music

As described above, *Shir HaShirim* is literally a song between lovers (*dod* and *ra'ayah*), which the Rabbis reinterpreted as an allegory representing the relationship between God and the people Israel. Popular musicians in the newly-formed state restored the literal interpretation of the poem and highlighted the luscious imagery of the natural habitat of the two singers. Images such as roses, pomegranates, and budding fields grounded the secular Zionist trope of the Jewish desire to return to the Land of Israel; the revitalization of the earth itself represented the "love and devotion of those who had longed for the land and returned to cultivate it."[66]

Secular Zionists embraced the Song with unbridled fervor. From the 1930s to the 1950s, musicians composed no fewer than 100 different musical adaptations based on verses from the Song.[67] Many rooted their compositions in a *Mizrahi* (Middle Eastern) musical style on account of the typical portrayal of the female persona in the poem as a person of color stemming from the Shulamite's self-description as "*shechora ani v'nava*" ("I am Black, but Comely,") (*Shir HaShirim* 1:5). As descendants of the so-called Arab countries, Israel's *Mizrahi* population tended toward a dark complexion in contrast to the "pale-faced" Ashkenazim.

Though not explicitly stated, the reference to a woman of color may have given rise to the trend of Yemenite women performing Israeli musical settings of the Song, as written mostly by composers of Ashkenazi descent, both male and female. "Today one cannot talk about Israeli music without mentioning Yemenite singers. From the 1950s to the 1980s they were integrated

into the dominant culture and performed Western material."[68] Examples are "*Ma dodekh mi-dod*" ("What is Thy Beloved More than Another Beloved"; 1943) and "*Dodi yarad le-gano"* ("My Beloved Is Gone Down into His Garden"; 1950) composed by Moshe Vilensky and sung by Shoshana Damari as well as "*Pithi-Li Ahoti Ra'ayati*" ("Open to Me My Sister, My Love"; 1943), which was composed by Nahum Nardi and sung by Chana Aharoni. Because of the performers' Yemenite backgrounds, these tunes were understood as "oriental" and "Yemenite" but were in fact, a blend of musical styles of both an Eastern and Western variety.[69]

Prolific composer and choreographer Sara Levi-Tanai (1911-2005) wrote perhaps one of the most renowned settings of the Song. Levi-Tanai was born in Jerusalem to Yemenite parents, but was sent to an Ashkenazi orphanage in *Me'ir Shfeya* after her mother's death.[70] She began her career in Tel Aviv as a teacher and tried to break into the male-dominated world of Israeli Art Song with her own compositions. She later moved to Kibbutz *Ramat HaKovesh* where she began composing works for various ceremonies in the kibbutz community. In 1944, she presented a production of *Shir HaShirim* using multiple art forms, such as music and dance, which included a cycle of her own settings of various excerpts from the Biblical poem. Among them was the song "*El Ginat Egoz"* ("Into the Garden of Nuts") (*Shir HaShirim* 6:11). This piece quickly gained popularity and momentum as it was accompanied by a folk dance that would soon become "foundational in the burgeoning realm of Israeli folk dance."[71] In 1957, Yemenite singer Chana Aharoni and the Emanual Zamir Band recorded the piece. The Israeli population was quick to make yet another association between Yemenite female singers and the Song of Songs as their piece gained in popularity. Its archetypal Israeli vocal sound was regarded as authentically Middle Eastern and a break with the norm of the European diaspora.

Significantly, its "accompaniment of recorders and drums on this recording was perceived as re-creating a Biblical atmosphere."[72]

Conclusion

As the musical trends of the nascent state show, composers employed the imagery of Biblical women as an effective metaphor for the underdog nation rising up against mighty enemies, poised for defeat and yet delivered to victory. The narrative repeats itself time and again thereby providing no shortage of Biblical images and characters from which popular musicians over the last six decades might draw. The female poets whose voices reentered the narrative and joined in the chorus of the Zionist enterprise sought to reclaim and reenvision the role the Biblical matriarchs played in the story of the Jewish people. Their work was noteworthy not only from a literary perspective but for their ability to weave the emotion and subtext present in the Torah into their art. They managed to maintain an authentic connection with the text while imbuing them with a secular quality therefore, providing a rich basis for later Israeli musicians to build upon.

[33] "Yerushalayim Shel Zahav" (A Song by Naomi Shemer)
[34] Masekhet Berachot 24a
[35] Saul Berman. "Kol Isha," in Rabbi Joseph Lookstein Memorial, Vol. 45, ed. Leo Landman (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1980), 45.
[36] Ibid, 48.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Wendy Zierler. *And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Writing*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004) 19.
[39] American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. Zionism: Hibbat Zion, accessed November 25th, 2016. http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/Hibbat_Zion.html.
[40] Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols*, 35.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid, 47.
[44] Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi. *Popular Music & National Culture in Israel*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 5.
[45] Ibid, 2.
[46] Ibid, 10.
[47] *If I Had a Hammer* was written in 1949 by Pete Seeger and Lee Hays.
[48] *This Land is Your Land* was written in 1940 by folk artist, Woodie Guthrie.
[49] Naomi Cohn Zentner. "Singing the Bible with a Modern Inflection: Scriptural Events, Places and Personalities in Israeli Popular Music." (Journal of Synagogue Music Vol. 34 Issue 1, 2009) 175.
[50] Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music & National Culture in Israel*, 2.
[51] Zentner, "Singing the Bible with a Modern Inflection," 175.
[52] Regev and Seroussi, *Popular Music & National Culture in Israel*, 55.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid, 120.
[55] Ibid, 191.
[56] Amy Horowitz. "Israeli Meditteranean Music: Straddling Disputed Territories." (*The Journal of American Folklore,* Vol. 112, No. 445, Theorizing the Hybrid Summer, 1999), 452.
[57] Joel Bressler. "Bracha Zefira." Sephardic Music: A Century of Recordings, (2008-2012): accessed November 14, 2016 <http://www.sephardicmusic.org/artists/Zefira,Bracha/Zefira,Bracha.htm>
[58] Horowitz, "Israeli Meditteranean Music," 458.
[59] Zentner, "Singing the Bible with a Modern Inflection," 171.
[60] Ibid, 172.
[61] Ibid, 175
[62] Ibid.
[63] Sarah Hafri-Aflalu. "Shir HaZemer HaYisraeli M'sohei'ah im HaMikra," ("Israeli song converses with the Bible"), (EitHaDatl, 1998), 129.
[64] Zenter, "Singing the Bible with a Modern Inflection," 185.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid, 173.

[67] Ilana Pardes. *Agnon's Moonstruck Lovers: The Song of Songs in Israeli Culture*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 47.
[68] Rachel Sharaby. "Yemenite Women in Israel: 1948 to the Present Day." Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. 20 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Accessed November 26, 2016) <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/yemenite-women-in-israel-1948-to-present-day>.
[69] Pardes, *Agnon's Moonstruck Lovers*, 47.
[70] Sharaby, "Yemenite Women in Israel: 1948 to the Present Day."
[71] Pardes, *Agnon's Moonstruck Lovers*, 47.
[72] Zentner, "Singing the Bible with a Modern Inflection," 173.

Part Three

Rachel: Daughter of Zion

> *Rachel is "daughter of Jerusalem...daughter of Zion," (Lamentations 2:13). Not only because she was the young love, the "partner" of the Lord (the accepted image throughout the Bible) but because she was also the wayward and capricious woman. Here again, Rachel has been the archetype of the people of Israel for most of its history, during the period of the Kingdom of Judah and Israel and at various times later.*[73]
> *Adin Steinsaltz*

As the State of Israel came into its national identity, music played a critical role in shaping the national consciousness. Biblical characters and imagery were used as a tool of cultural literacy and in the 1960s and 70s, it was not Miriam or Devorah but Rachel who took center stage. Whether yearning for her lover in a far off land, crying for her exiled children or simply as symbol of romantic love, Rachel's narrative seems to have a more dynamic connection with the work of early Zionist writers and ultimately, with Israeli musicians throughout the history of the modern State. In the following chapter, we will examine how the character of Rachel is used in Israeli poetry and music as a metaphor for the State itself and for key themes present throughout the Zionist enterprise.

Biblical Rachel

The Biblical Rachel is a complicated and powerful figure who is paradigmatic of other figures in the textual narrative, especially her husband Jacob. She is, for instance, the younger and yet favored child, not unlike her husband. She, like him, is used as a tool of familial manipulation and trickery when her father replaces her with her sister Leah as Jacob's bride.[9] Moreover, she is cast as the "chosen one" in the narrative, despite her initial inability to bear children. Like Jacob, she struggles with her role in the family and ultimately, one might argue,

[9] One might argue that this serves as retribution for Jacob's (and Rebekah's) betrayal of Esau in obtaining Isaac's blessing of the birthright.

wrestles with God to fulfill her destiny as a matriarch of the people Israel. That she eventually becomes fertile is a sign of Divine favor.

As Jewish history unfolds, it becomes apparent that Rachel is not only a counterpart to Jacob but a metaphor for the nation that will become his namesake. Although she faces initial shame around her inability to add sons to her husband's lineage, in the end, it is her legacy as a mother to the nation of Israel that endures. Indeed, with the founding of the modern State of Israel, mother Rachel is resurrected and becomes integral to the narrative myth of the country's national identity.

Rachel's story repeatedly mirror's Jacob's in her chosenness and relationship with the Divine. Through Rachel does not wrestle with God directly, she wrestles with her fate and her role in God's plan. Rachel struggles as the beloved, chosen wife who cannot provide her husband with a son. She struggles with her role in the family and ultimately, one might argue that she indeed wrestles with God. This is demonstrated through the language used to describe the birth and Rachel's naming of Naphtali, the son of Bilhah, the sister and concubine given to Jacob by Rachel herself.[10]

> That the rivalry between the sisters is meant to mirror the struggle of Jacob and Esau in the main plot becomes conspicuous upon Naphtali's birth: "With great wrestlings [*naftuley* Elohim, lit. a contest of God] have I wrestled [niftali] with my sister and have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali" (Gen. 30:8).[74]

The struggle she speaks of is not with God directly but with her sister. God however, by keeping her womb closed, demonstrates the paradoxical chosenness and rejection faced by this critical matriarch. Rachel ultimately cries out in a fit of emotion, "Give me children or else I will die!" (Gen. 30:1). According to the midrashic interpretation of this exchange, Rachel uses her voice to

[10] Even here we see that Rachel's elevated status as beloved wife is reflected in her role in naming Naphtali. The trope of naming is one that reoccurs throughout the Biblical text; and the fact that Rachel is the one to give Naphtali his name, despite not being his birth-mother, demonstrates her status in the family.

cast a shadow of blame on her husband Jacob, who despite his direct relationship with the Divine, never advocates on her behalf and prays for children from his most beloved wife as did his forefathers (Genesis Rabba 71:7).

> Given the examples of his paternal precursors, who prayed for the sake of their barren wives and succeeded in procuring divine intervention, Jacob should have tried to use his high position in relation to God to help bring about the opening of his wife's womb. [75]

Though her personal interaction with God is minimal, her ultimate fertility demonstrates that her chosenness is Divinely sanctioned and that God remembers and favors her (30:22) though it comes at a price.

In a strange and ironic twist, it is Rachel's death – which is mentioned twice in the Bible – that assures her profound influence on the Israeli nation's foundational myth. In Genesis 35:19, Rachel dies on the road to Bethlehem while in labor with her youngest son, Benjamin. The midwife tells her she is having a boy, and it becomes clear that Rachel's dream will ultimately become her demise. "She who desperately cried 'Give me children, or else I die' ironically dies upon bearing a son."[76] Rachel's death is revisited in the book of Jeremiah when the prophet invokes her in his prophecy promising the return of the Jewish people from Exile. In Jeremiah 31:15-16, the prophet proclaims,

> 15: So says Adonai: A cry is heard in Ramah— Wailing, bitter weeping— Rachel is weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, who are gone.
> 16: Thus Adonai says: Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from shedding tears; For there is a reward for your labor —Adonai declares:
> 17: They shall return from the enemy's land. And there is hope for your future —declares Adonai: Your children shall return to their country.

The image of weeping Rachel crying for the exiled children of Israel survives well beyond the text of the Torah. Since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the Jewish people had been estranged from their homeland for more than a millennium, and as waves of Zionists

return to the land as of 1882, it is the metaphor of Mother Rachel crying for her exiled children that gains currency. Poets and musicians of the new/old land will mine this fertile image as they draw parallels between the land being settled and the land promised to the Biblical Israelites.

Rachel HaMeshoreret (The Poet)

The many faces of Rachel as lover, wife, barren woman, and ultimately, mother to the people Israel were among some of the most popular Biblical metaphors used by early Zionist poets. This imagery would lay the groundwork for a long legacy of Israeli music that invoked and reclaimed Rachel's name and story in a modern context. One such poet was captivated by the character of the Biblical Rachel and used simply her given name to channel the biblical matriarch's voice.

Rachel Bluwstein (1890-1931) was known to most by her pen name, Rachel or *Rachel HaMeshoreret* (Rachel the Poet). Rachel was born in Russia and grew up in Ukraine, where she began writing poetry at the age of fifteen. She and her sister emigrated to Palestine in 1909 where they lived and studied near the Kinneret. After briefly returning to Europe during World War I, Rachel returned to Palestine in 1919 where she lived out the rest of her life. Health problems and a constant battle with tuberculosis prevented Rachel from her chosen field of agricultural work and thus, her writing provided a necessary outlet for creativity.

Rachel's first Hebrew poem was published in 1920 in *HaShiloah,* the leading Hebrew language journal between 1896 and 1926.[77] Because of her severe lung disease, she had to leave the area and over the next few years she lived mostly in cities such as Tzfat, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. She died at the age of 41 and was buried in a cemetery at the Kinneret, which was the subject of many of her poems. A book of her works can even be viewed at her grave. Rachel's

works have been continuously set to music and popularized across musical genre and style by a myriad of well-known composers and singers, including Chava Albertstein, Arik Einstein, Achinoam Nini, and Yosef Moustaki.

Though Rachel wrote many poems from a male point of view, her connection to the Biblical Rachel was one of "spiritual kinship."[78] Rachel the poet was childless herself and related deeply to the narrative of barrenness. In her poem "Rachel," the poet writes of the explicit parallels she sees between herself and the Biblical Matriarch.

> Surely, her blood flows in my blood,
> Surely, her voice sings in mine –
> Rachel who grazed Laban's flock,
> Rachel – Mother of mothers.
> **Example 1. *Rachel,* excerpt.[11]**

This excerpt from the eponymous poem demonstrates how Rachel (the poet) believes there is not only a textual connection between herself and Rachel (the Matriarch) but a physical and spiritual one as well. Through her writing, Rachel sought to embody the Biblical matriarch and reincarnate her voice in modern-day Israel.

"Zemer Nuger" (Sorrow Song) is a second poem evoking Rachel the Matriarch's voice and its echo through time.

> Will you hear my voice, my distant one,
> Will you hear my voice, wherever you are –
> A voice calling strong, a voice crying silently,
> And above time, commanding blessing?
>
> This world is wide, with many paths.
> They meet narrowly, part forever.
> A man seeks, but his feet fail.
> He cannot find what he has lost.
>
> Maybe my last day is already near,
> Already near, the day of tearful parting,

[11] Text: Rachel (Bluwstein); Translation: (Zierler 2004)

I shall wait for you until my life dims,
As Rachel waited for her lover
Example 2. "Zemer Nugeh" (Sorrow Song), 1968.[12]

Multiple composers have since set "Zemer Nugeh" (Sorrow Song) to music, however the melody composed by Shmulik Kraus[13] in the 1960s is perhaps the most recognizable. It is a very important song in the canon of Israeli music and has stayed relevant and recognizable throughout the generations. Kraus along with Arik Einstein and Josey Katz formed the trio "*Hachalonot Hagvohim*" (The High Windows) who performed Kraus' composition of *Zemer Nugeh* on a French television broadcast in 1968.

The poem describes a distant lover whose beloved calls out to him. While acknowledging their separation, she hopes that he can still hear her voice. The first stanza opens with a plea to the lover to hear her but is then complicated by the parallel construction of the voice: calling and crying, strong and silent. As Dr. Wendy Zierler points out, "Rachel's speaker vacillates between a tenacious desire to speak to and be heard by her distant one and resignation to the futility of her efforts."[79] The next stanza then directs the character outward to a world that is both temporal and spatial, as it speaks of the many paths the world holds. Through this explication of the world, we see two paths meet narrowly and then they part. The poem therefore tells of a quest, an unfulfilled search for a loved one. Despite the poem's intimacy, the first we hear of a personal pronoun is in the third stanza. This introduces a personal urgency: the end of her days is "already near," a descriptor repeated twice. We then learn that all the actions that came before (i.e. the crying, calling, and commanding) are ultimately encompassed in the waiting that will lead to her demise.

[12] Text: Rachel (Bluwstein), Music: Shmulik Krauss; Translation: Chana Shulamy (HebrewSongs.com)
[13] An Israeli songwriter, Krauss was also one of the first composers to introduce Rock into Israeli music.

It is also important to pay attention to the title of this poem, *Zemer Nugeh* (Sorrow Song). The title refers to the final moment of the poem when we are told that this act of waiting will last a lifetime. And it is only here that the poet evokes the Biblical matriarch: "as Rachel awaited her lover." As readers, we know that both the Biblical and the Poet Rachel are destined to die young—a fate the latter alludes to through the former.[14] The poignancy of the final line of this poem emphasizes Rachel's dreams unfulfilled, and we are left wondering which Rachel sang a sadder song; Rachel the Matriarch or Rachel the Poet.

Interestingly, the most famous musical setting of this piece is stylistically incompatible with the text. The longing and despair that are present in the poem are not reflected in the melody's major key, sweet harmonies and up-tempo rhythm. The evocation of Biblical Rachel fades to a mere whiff of an allusion. The musical setting excised the poem's melancholy, and, in so doing, created a wildly popular song that rose to fame and has been canonized as one of the most recognizable pieces of Israeli pop music.[15]

Rachel *HaMeshoreret* was not the only one to perceive of herself as a reincarnation of the Biblical Rachel. Remarkably, as her poetry has wended its way into the fabric of Israeli culture, Rachel the Poet herself has appeared as a character in the lyrics of popular songs. For example, in "*Rachel Shel Kinneret*"[16] performed by Yaffa Yarkoni, her many faces and voices become symbols of connection to the land in general and to the Kinneret in particular.

> The dawn dips in the waters of the Kinneret
> The light whisper of the winds and birds
> In the gold of the waters' margins

[14] Indeed, the poet Rachel would also die childless, seemingly carrying out the destiny her Biblical namesake had always feared.
[15] The song rose to popularity once again in recent years when Zemer Nugeh was broadcast from the Columbia Space Shuttle in 2003. It was played in honor of Ilan Ramon, first Israeli astronaut for NASA, who tragically died when the Shuttle was destroyed upon re-entry. Since then the song has taken on new meaning with regard to Ramon's wife who was indeed left waiting for her lover.
[16] Words: Dudu Barak Music: Effie Netzer

She moves alone
And yearns for the pruning basket.
Rachel from the Torah
Rachel from the Poetry
Rachel who moves in the waters of the Kinneret
The reflection of the dwelling place of dates is upon the waters of the Kinneret
Washing there in the bright afternoon.
With dragonflies on the water
She passes alone
Serene among the heavens and the mountains.
Rachel from the Torah
Rachel from the Poetry
Rachel who moves in the waters of the Kinneret
The evening longed for on the waters of the Kinneret
A boat isolated on the chilly waters
From an adolescent grace
She returns alone
Rachel from the Torah and the Poems…
Rachel from the Torah
Rachel from the Poetry
Rachel who moves in the waters of the Kinneret[17]

Example 3. "Rachel Shel Kinneret" (Rachel of the Kinneret).

The lyrics describe the serenity of the Sea of Galilee (*Kinneret*) and a scene in which an ambiguous female character floats by, in a ghostlike fashion. While she is unnamed, each refrain refers to the many Rachel characters found in Jewish history: Biblical Rachel, literary Rachel and finally, Rachel of the land, a spectral woman who moves across the waters of the Kinneret.

Although not named as such, Rachel Bluwstein's presence is readily apparent in the poem. The woman yearning for a pruning basket is, of course, Rachel as an early settler of the Galilee whose desire to work the land was thwarted by illness. The passing reference makes clear that this is an homage not only to the Biblical Rachel but, perhaps, even more so to Rachel the Literary Matriarch of the Modern State. In the final verse, the unidentified female character is unmasked as Rachel of "the Torah **and** the poems." It would seem that Rachel the Matriarch has

[17] Text: Dudu Barak, Music: Effi Netzer; Translated by Lucy Batterman.

merged with Rachel the Poet to become Rachel of the Kinneret as a result of their shared connection to the land and their monumental legacies.

In the end, the poem makes an argument for Rachel being the founding mother of modern Hebrew poetry. "In the thousands of years that elapsed between the poetry of Deborah the prophet and the early twentieth century, virtually no Hebrew poetry was composed by women."[80] Not only did Rachel revive the poetic tradition set forth by her Biblical foremother, Deborah (and also Miriam). But she inspired the reimagining and reclaiming of the voices of Biblical women in a modern context. Her reclamation of the Biblical Rachel was warranted and true. She mothered the state of Israel into a cultural rebirth and inspired additional female "reproducers" to follow in her footsteps therefore furthering the metaphor of motherhood and reproduction. Rachel Bluwstein breathed new life into the narrative of the Biblical Matriarchs and thereby inspired a rereading and reinterpretation of the text that allowed space for the voices of women in Modern Israel where they would only take root and continue to grow.

Mother Rachel

Rachel's importance to Israeli music was not limited to its founding. In the years of struggle during the late 1960s and 70s, Rachel's connection to her exiled children from the text of Jeremiah provided particularly rich material as the state of Israel attempted to establish its place on the world political stage. Effi Netzer and Shmuel Rosen wrote "*Shuv lo Neilekh"* (We Won't Leave Again) immediately following the Six-Day War. The song draws a connection between Rachel who cries for her exiled son's and the military action taken at Hebron, Bethlehem and Jericho during this brief and impactful period in Israel's history.

> See the road dust coming from the city of Shaleim,
> And the armored car roaring to your city;

An entire nation watches you as in a dream,
Airplanes circle above your tomb.
See Rachel, see
See the world's Sovereign
See Rachel, see
Your children have returned to their borders.
See the winds of Iyyar carry the lines of steel
Benjamin is here with us and Joseph too;
The star of Bethlehem twinkles trembling,
The *Halutz* and the *M'aseif* are with us.
See Rachel, see…
Rachel, stop your voice from crying,
Rachel, we're all here with our packs on our back,
Rachel, we'll never leave and you'll never leave,
Rachel, we'll never leave again
Leave the fields of Bethlehem.
See Rachel, see…

Example 4. "Shuv Lo Neilech" (We Won't Leave Again), 1967.[18]

The song references the *halutz* (vanguard*)* and *m'asef* (rear guard), names of fighting units in the time of Joshua. These references, along with the clear allusion to the "Rachel verses" in Jeremiah, implicitly suggest that the mission in 1967 was a fulfillment of the mission begun by their Biblical ancestors. The songwriter asserts that the "entrance of the Israeli army into [these places] was an act of national homecoming."[81] Through this piece we see once again how the Bible is used as evidence of what the artist believed was the Jewish people's rightful connection to the Land of Israel.

Aric Lavie performed and recorded the piece in 1967, directly following the war. He sings the piece with a triumphant confidence. As Naomi Cohn Zenter points out, "there is a noticeable difference in the performance practice between the refrain and the verses." The verses are recited in a speech-like free form style of singing with a deep sense of feeling and yet minimal accompaniment. Lavie even goes so far as to pause emphatically before the statement in

[18] Words: Shmuel Rosen, music: Effi Netzer, 1967; (Zentner 2009)

the final verse, “We’ll never leave again, leave the fields of Bethlehem!” In contrast, the refrain is sung in a strict rhythm with more of an upbeat and celebratory sensibility as though the performer is trying to cheer up the despondent Rachel by showing her the triumphant return of her exiled children.

In 2008 Idan Raichel wrote perhaps the most contemporary and well known piece of Israeli popular music inspired by the Biblical Rachel. Influenced by a lecture given by Rabbi Israel Lau about Rachel weeping over her sons who have gone off to war and have yet to return, Raichel wrote “*Mini Kolekh MiBechi”* (“Stop Your Voice from Crying”). The song was dedicated to Gilad Shalit, a soldier who had at the time been held in captivity for two years and has since been released.[82]

Idan Raichel rose to fame after the release of his first album in 2002. He is a “one-man show”: song writer and lyricist, producer and instrumentalist who now publishes under the artistic name The Idan Raichel Project. He was one of the first Israeli popular artists to feature an Ethiopian sound in his music as well as to introduce an electronic style of production. He wrote Min’I Kolech MiBechi for a performance at the *Yom Ha’atzmaut* (Israeli Independence Day) Celebration in 2008 marking the 60th anniversary of Statehood. Raichel has been quoted as saying that he feels a deep connection with the Biblical Mother Rachel, which contributed to the inspiration for this piece.

> For at night you cannot sleep
> Then put your ear to the silence
> All the merciful compassion
> Will come, here he comes.
> For you saved your soul for him
> For the time is nearing
> When he will fall into your arms
> At the end of the road,
> When they return to their borders.

Only stop your voice from crying
And your eyes from tears
For the gate will be opened
And he'll storm through it
When they return to their borders…

Example 5. *Min'i Kolech Mibechi*, 2008; excerpt.[19]

The lyrics capitalize on the longing commonly associated with Mother Rachel. "However, the use of biblical quotations evoking Jeremiah's scenario, Mother Rachel and the long-awaited return of her sons to their border – very familiar and relevant image to Israelis – transform it into a song about their current predicament."[83] As the Nation of Israel waited in fear for the return of their own captured son, Gilad Shalit, the words took on new meaning as the sentiments of Biblical Rachel were resurrected once again. Due to the gendered nature of the Hebrew language, the lyrics can also be understood as speaking to the State of Israel itself, which in the Hebrew appears in a feminine construction.

Conclusion

The many faces of Rachel that appear in the Biblical narrative render her character malleable and easily relatable. She is at once mother and daughter, sister and lover. Rachel seizes her own destiny by taking control at times when most women of her day would have remained subservient and demure. Her ability to rise above seemingly insurmountable odds and reclaim her rightful place in the narrative of the Nation of Israel makes her a powerful metaphor for the People. Jeremiah's depiction of the weeping Mother Rachel crying for her exiled children embodies a national sentiment that extends beyond the specifics of circumstance while the love story inherent to Rachel's narrative also provides a fruitful backdrop for songwriters looking to connect with popular culture and Jewish sentimentality. Whether she is brought to life by early

[19] Music and Text: Idan Raichel Project

Hebrew poets or contemporary composers, the figure of Rachel's presence in Israeli popular music endures even today.

[73] Adin Steinsaltz. *Biblical Images: Men & Women of the Book.* (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2010).
[74] Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible*, 65.
[75] Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss. *The Torah: A Women's Commentary.* (New York: URJ Press and Women of Reform Judaism 2008), 178-9.
[76] Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Bible*, 72.
[77] Avner Holtzman. 2010. Shiloaḥ, Ha-. YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Shiloah_Ha- (accessed December 28, 2016).
[78] Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols*, 82.
[79] Ibid, 85.
[80] Dana Omert. "Rahel Bluwstein." Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. March 1, 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/rahel-bluwstein (Accessed December 28, 2016).
[81] Ibid.
[82] Chana Shuvaly & Melissa Jacobs. Min'I Kolech Mibechi – Refrain Thy Voice from Weeping. Hebrew Songs. http://www.hebrewsongs.com/?song=minikolechmibechi (accessed December 28, 2016).
[83] Ibid, 196.

Conclusion

When I began this project I was interested in exploring the role of the female voice in Jewish text and tradition. I was fascinated by the rabbinic rulings around *kol isha erva*; the laws that name the women's voice as sexual/lewd/inappropriate. How could a people with laws such as these be rooted as well in texts and stories full of strong women whose voices are not only heard but raised in powerful, celebratory, meaningful expression? I was, and remain, transfixed by the relationship between authority and the use of voice, and I wanted to better understand the place that the female voice holds in our most ancient texts as well as our contemporary world.

As a woman and as a feminist I struggle deeply with the manner in how the Torah treats gender and voice as they pertain to women and how those norms reverberate even in our own world today. The Torah is a deeply meaningful and yet deeply flawed text. Throughout the narrative, women are characterized as deviant, doubters of God's power, and subverters of God's will. They are at once stripped of their authority and villainized when they reclaim it. The way the Bible is read and understood impacts the way that society has been formed. As such, how women are read and understood through the Biblical narrative can have great impact on the place of women in society today. While Biblical women have a voice in the tradition, to look at them only through the prism of the patriarchy is limiting and deeply problematic. I needed to find something more, something different. I needed a new way to read these characters. I needed to hear their voices with fresh ears.

My personal struggle with Torah stems from my investment in it and its primacy among the Jewish people. I, like many other Jews, have a commitment to upholding the role of Torah in Jewish life. If I did not, I could simply reject the document outright and move forward without it.

However, I accept that the Torah is one of the critical building blocks of Jewish tradition; and, therefore, I believe it is imperative that we read women back into the text in a way that is restorative and, thus, healing.

The challenge with the restorative approach is that we may not always find what we are looking for when we search for a feminist reading of the Biblical narrative. As Rabbi Rachel Adler writes, "the problems actually raised in the feminist critique, however, are systemic wounds too deep for liberal Band Aids."[84] The ultimate goal then, is to come to a place where we can not only forgive the text for its innate flaws but come to love it and live out its values by reframing the content against our own cultural backdrop.

As Adler explains, Jewish feminists contend that there is more to Jewishness and Judaism than patriarchy, we just have to find it. As she put it, "It is not about getting an equal slice of the Jewish pie. It is actually a question of how we bake a new pie altogether."[85] Traditional Jewish law was established at a time when women had neither agency nor authority. Therefore, it is not surprising that *Halakha* is restrictive in its attitudes toward women and neither acknowledges their authority nor protects it. That however, is not the world we live in. We need something more.

The goals that Adler states as being central to a feminist approach to the bible are twofold.

- Inclusion: Equal access for all people to communal power and the practices that connect Jews with God. This extends to synagogue participation, Jewish communal life, representation in liturgy, and *Halakhic* and interpretive authority.
- Transformation: Our texts and traditions are based on masculine dominant language. We cannot erase gender from the Jewish experience without reducing it in its entirety to an

abstraction. Therefore, we must find a way to create a space and use language that honors the human experience rather than a male-dominated one.

The music of the Modern State of Israel has done just that. It has taken old texts and made them new again. It has reframed old stories in modern contexts and imbued them with new meaning. It has brought the voices of the women that lurked in the background of our most central texts and placed them at the forefront of our history.

As a woman, a future cantor, and someone who deeply loves and is committed to the Land of Israel, the relationship between gender, voice, music, culture, and time reflected in this project inspires me deeply. Our voices provide us a unique power, and the way we use them affords us the opportunity to make our presence in the world not only felt but heard. As a Jewish leader, it is my deepest prayer that my voice will join the chorus of strong women who have sung this people into being. As a Jewish woman and an aspiring cantor, my prayer for myself and all of us doing this work is this: May we embody Miriam's keen instincts and always remain nimble in the face of adversity. May we have Deborah's wisdom and ability to lead and judge carefully. May we be blessed with the Shulamite's playful energy and always approach our relationships with an open heart and without fear of vulnerability. And may we always embody Rachel's fierce devotion and steadfast love for her partner, her people, and her God.

As a people, may our voices ring out in song in times of victory and may we lift our voices in support in times of defeat. May we never forget that there is a piece of the Divine in all of us and that though we have many old stories, it is always up to us to write new ones; to tell them, to sing them, and to teach them to our children so that the Nation of Israel may always be ready, at a moment's notice, to sing a new song unto God.

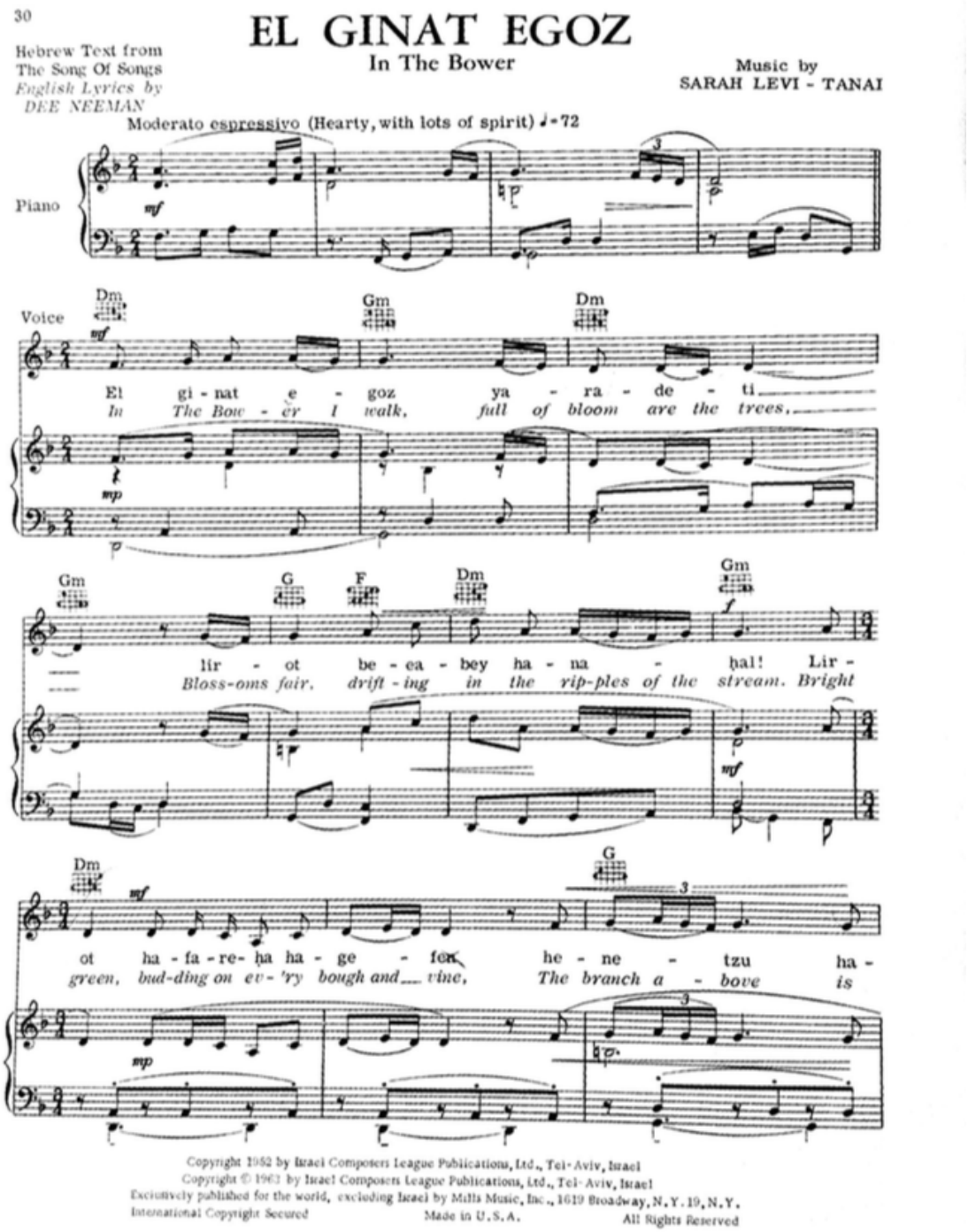
[84] Rachel Adler. Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society.), 48.
[85] Ibid.

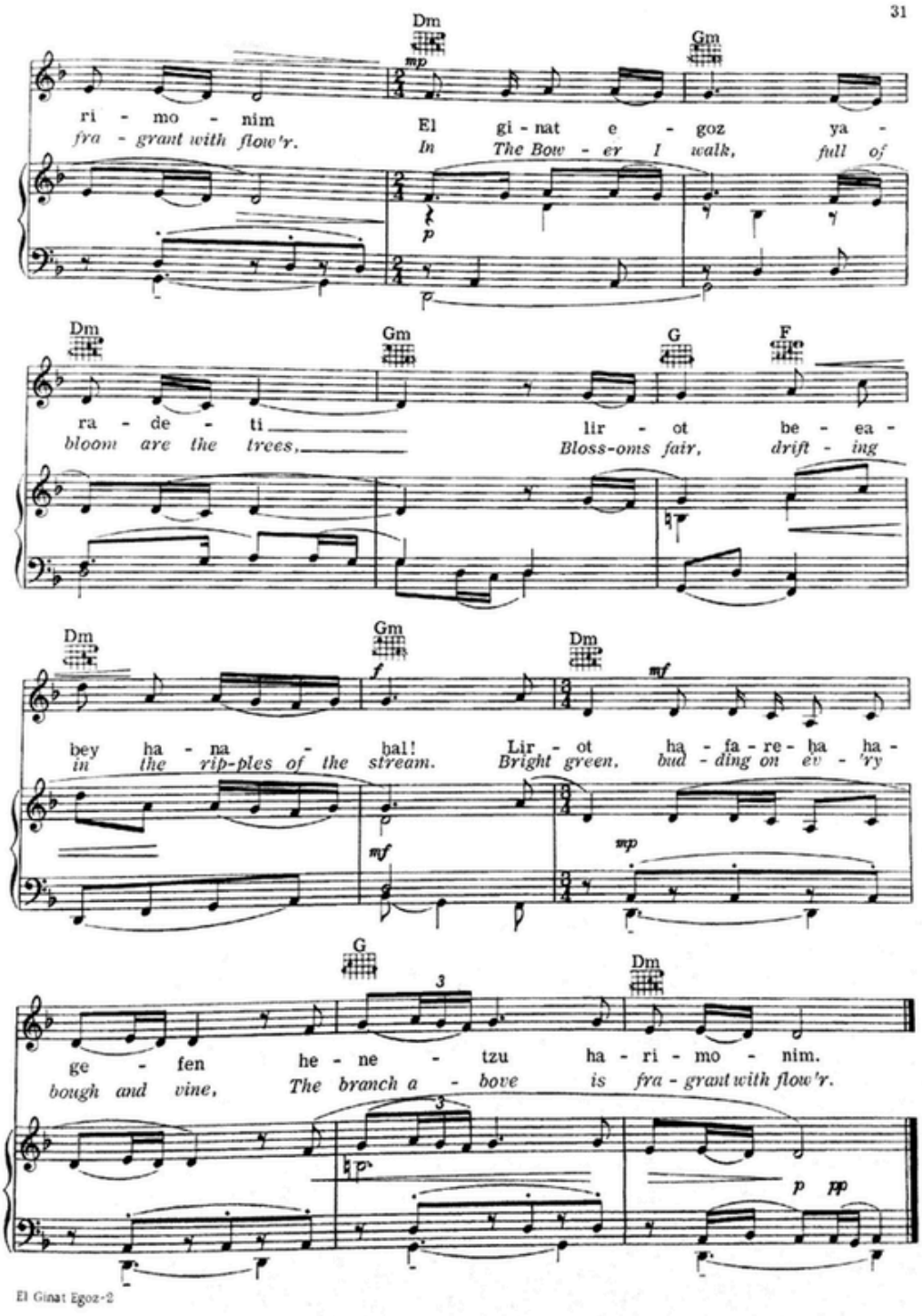
Appendices

Appendix A: El Ginat Egoz (Music)

Music: Sarah Levi-Tanai

Lyrics: Song of Songs





Source: Issachar Miron, ed. Famous Songs of Israel. (New York: Mills Music, Inc. 1963.), 30-31.

Appendix B: Zemer Nugeh (Music)

Music: Shmuel Kraus
Lyrics: Rachel

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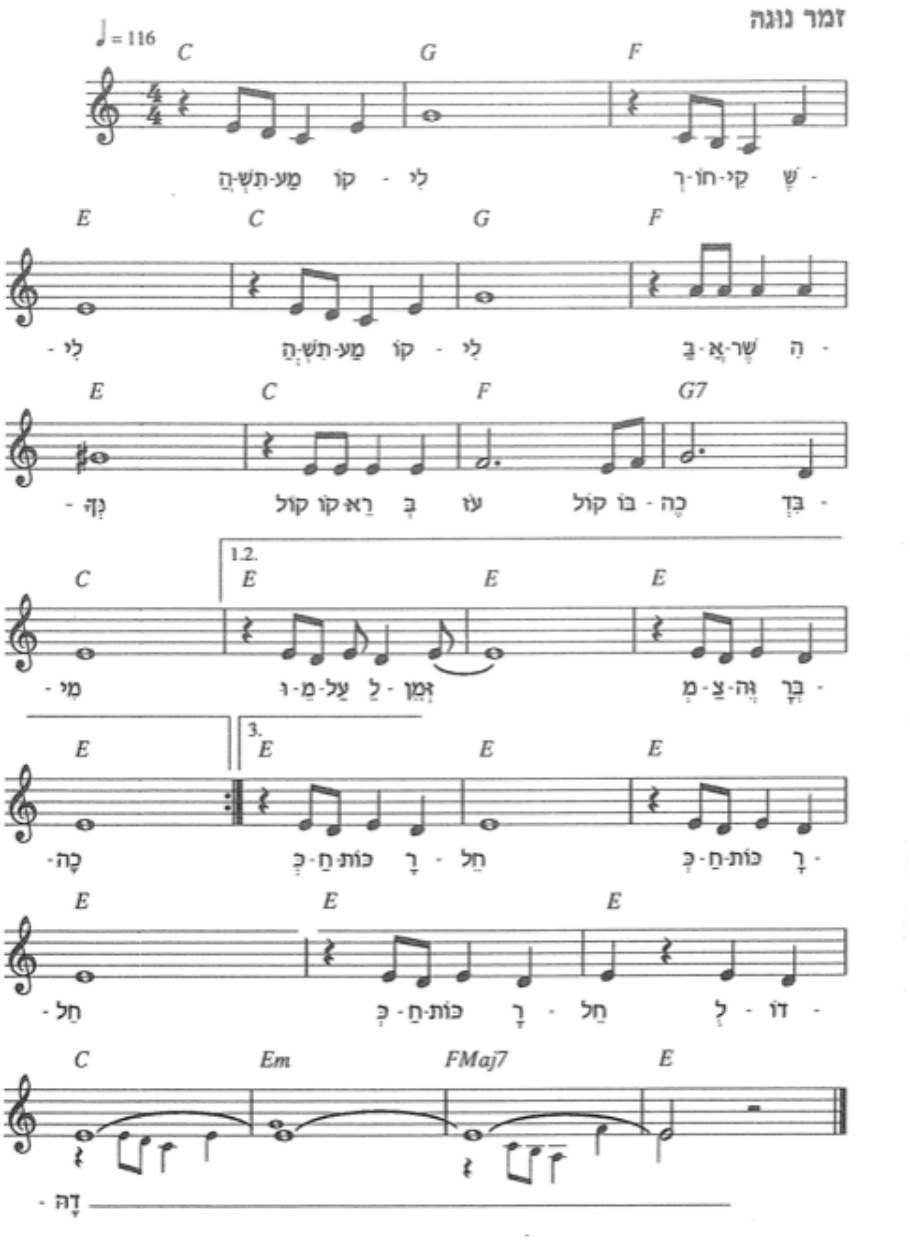
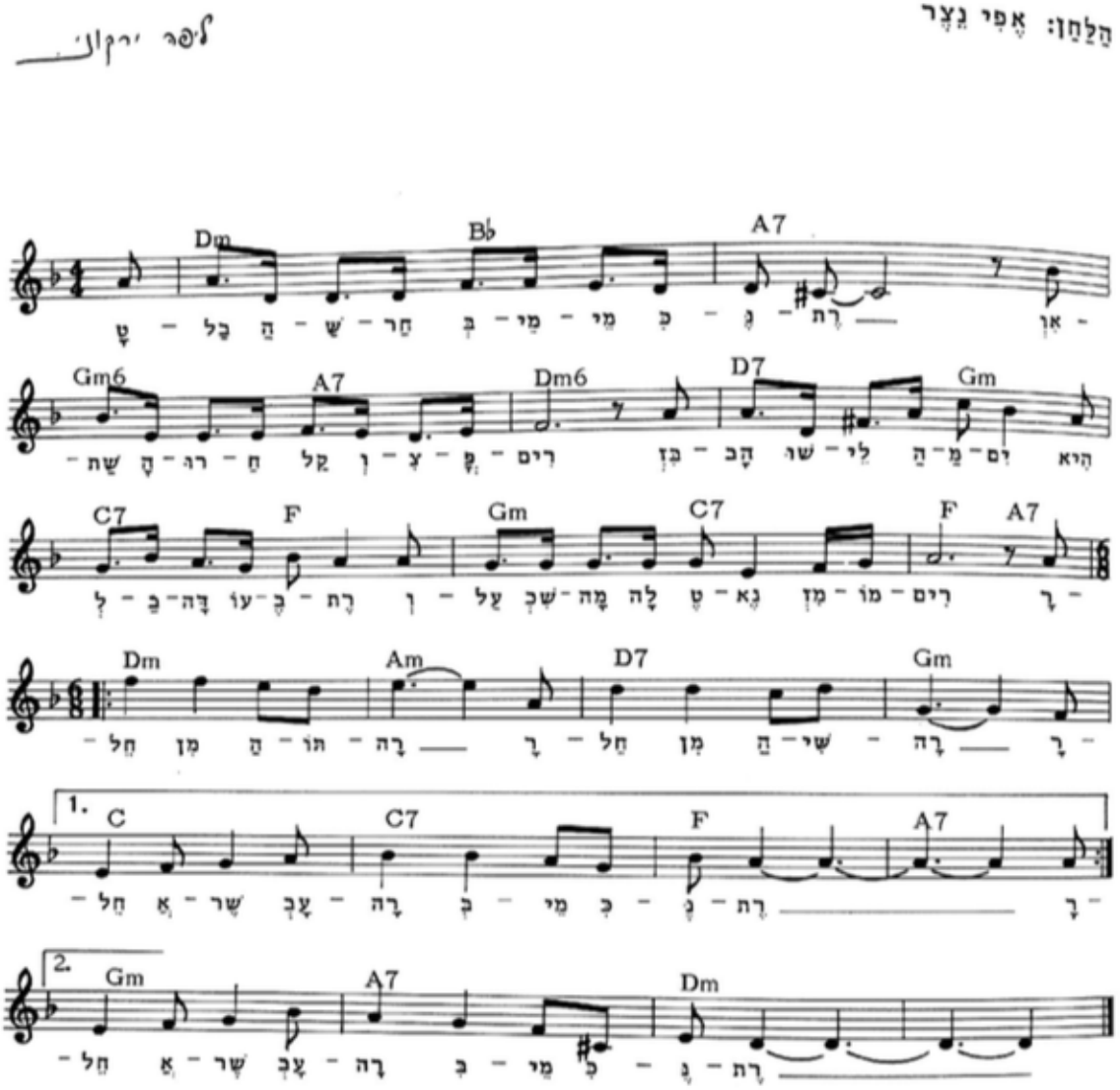


Source: Gil Aldema and Dr. Natan Shachar. *Sefer HaShirim l'Talmid.* (Israel Modan Publishing House. 2001.), 199.

Appendix C: Rachel Shel Kinneret (Music)

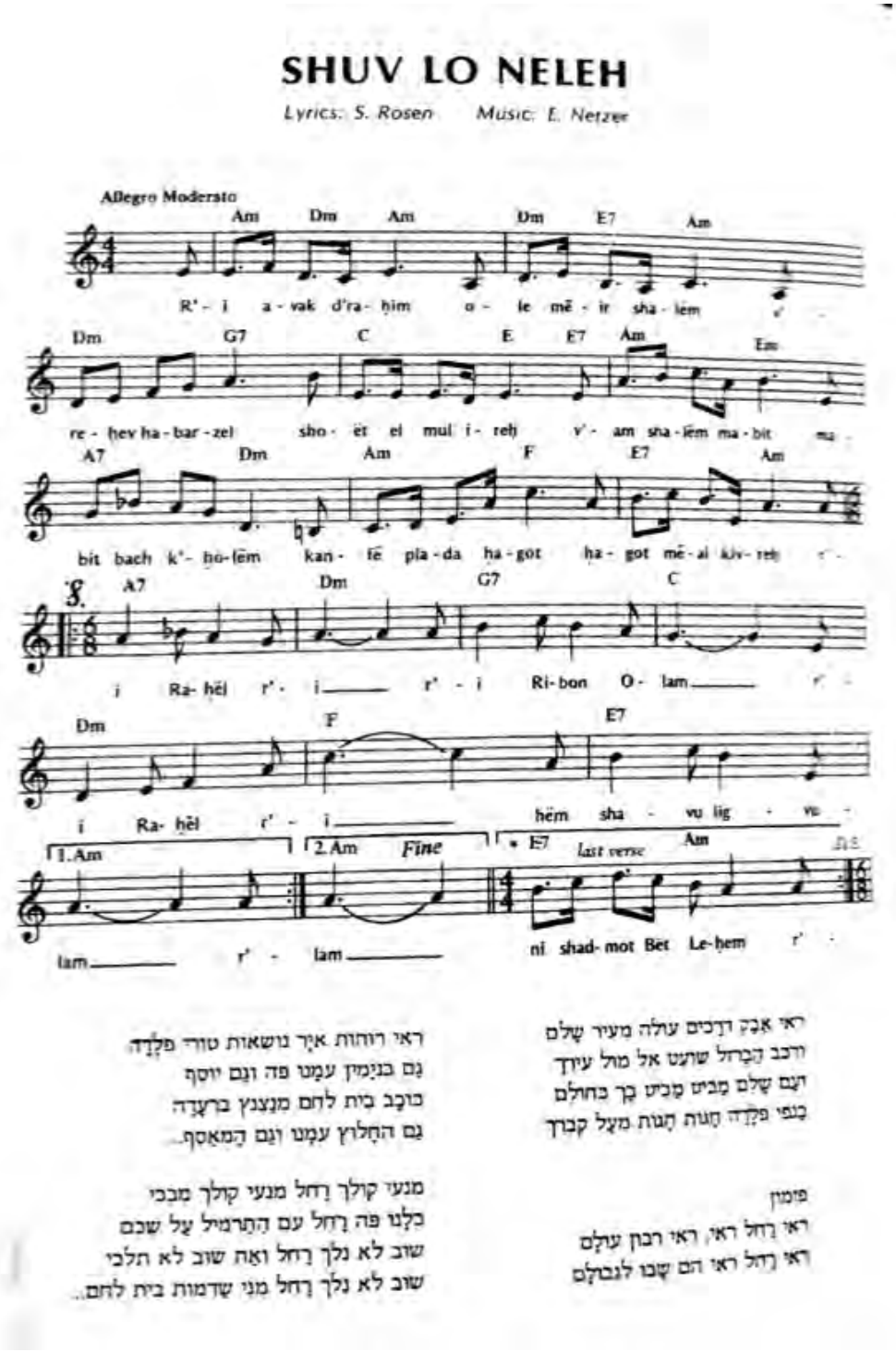
Music: Effi Netzer
Lyrics: Shmuel Rosen



Source: Effi Netzer. *Hava Nashira: Shirei Efi Netzer.* (Ramat HaSharon: Subar. 1970.), 72

Appendix D: Shuv Lo Neleh (Music)

Music: Effi Netzer
Lyrics: Shmuel Rosen



Source: Effi Netzer. *Hava Nashira: Shirei Efi Netzer.* (Ramat HaSharon: Subar. 1970.), 26

Appendix E: Min'I Kolech MiBechi (Text)

Music & Lyrics: The Idan Raichel Project

Min'I Kolech MiBechi	Refrain Thy Voice from Weeping
Baleilot sh'natech nodedet ki Vechol chalom hu lemora Teti az et oznech lasheket Kol chesed rachamim Od ya'aleh hineh hu ba	For in the nights your sleep wanders And every dream is of terror So tilt your ears to quiet The Almighty Source of Compassion Will rise, here it comes
Ki bishvilo nafshech nishmeret Harei k'reva hi hasha'ah Ad sheshadud bizr'utayich Yipol besof haderech K'sheyashuvu lig'vulam	Because your soul is kept for Him Indeed the hour is close until robbed in your arms he will fall at the end of the road When they return to their borders
Rak mini kolech mibechi Ve'einayich midim'ah Ki hasha'ar yipatach lo Veyavo bo bise'arah Ksheyashuvu lig'vulam (x2)	Just refrain your voice from crying and your eyes from a tear Because the gate will open and he will come storming through When they return to their borders (x2)
Ad el nachalei hamayim Derech she'erit kochech Im Yashivenu az nashuva Mini kolech mibechi Yesh tikva la'achritech	Up to the streams of water through is left of what your strength If he will return us then we will return Refrain your voice from crying There is hope for your end

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