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Shabbat *Zemirot* and Their Commentaries

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
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Table of Contents

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Introduction

מִזְמוֹר שִׁיר לְיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת טוֹב לְהוֹדוֹת לַי־ה וּלְזַמֵּר לְשִׁמְךָ עֶלְיוֹן.

A Psalm. A song for the Sabbath day. It is good to praise the Eternal, to sing to Your name, O Most High. (Psalms 92:1-2)

As far back as the Biblical era, music has been a vehicle for celebrating the divine gift of Shabbat, a day of sacred joy, beautification of life, and tranquility. However, according to tradition, the use of musical instruments on Shabbat has been prohibited since the destruction of the Second Temple in 73 C.E. Therefore, during the last two thousand years, unaccompanied song has been the central means through which the Jewish people have celebrated the joy of this day. In addition to the synagogue liturgy, Jewish poets and composers have produced a body of songs intended for singing at Shabbat meals. These songs are known as *zemirot Shabbat*, Sabbath hymns. The majority of the *zemirot* texts were written between the tenth and seventeenth centuries. They contain a variety of themes which reflect the cultural, literary and theological trends of the societies in which their authors lived. As early as the twelfth century, the custom of singing *zemirot* became an integral part of Shabbat home ritual. In many Jewish communities it has continued to be an important aspect of Shabbat observance until the present day.

However, for a variety of reasons which will be discussed at the end of the first chapter of this thesis, the custom of singing *zemirot* has diminished considerably in the contemporary Reform Jewish community. In an effort to make the *zemirot* more accessible to Reform Jews, and thereby contribute to a revival of the practice of singing *zemirot*, this thesis offers an analysis of the texts of the Shabbat *zemirot* and their commentaries. The first chapter contains a discussion of the development of the practice of singing *zemirot*, an overview of the themes of the texts, a brief discussion of the poetic form and music of the *zemirot*, and an analysis of their liturgical function. The

second chapter contains my own translations of three well-known *zemirot*, דרור יקרא, יום שבתון, and יום זה לישראל. The third chapter contains a survey of the commentaries which have been written on the texts of the *zemirot*, and a close examination of four of these commentaries. The fourth chapter contains an original commentary written from a liberal Jewish perspective on the three *zemirot* mentioned above.

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Shabbat *Zemirot*

Historical Development

Scholars speculate that the practice of singing *zemirot* has existed since the time of the Second Temple. Philo mentions that the Essenes, a Jewish sect living in the first century of the Common Era, sang *zemirot*.[1] One other major piece of evidence for the practice of singing *zemirot* in the Second Temple period appears in Mishnah Sotah 9:11:

"משבטלה סנהדרין בטלה השיר מבית המשתאות שנאמר (ישעיה כ"ד) בשיר לא ישתו יין וגו'"

"When the Sanhedrin ceased [to function], song ceased from the places of feasting, as it is written, 'They drink wine without song,' (Isaiah 24: 9)."[2] It seems from this text that there was a custom of singing at festive meals which supposedly ended in mourning for the destruction of the Temple and the dissolution of the Sanhedrin. Neil Levin, who has written the most complete work on Shabbat *zemirot* in recent years, argues with the support of earlier scholars that this injunction against the practice of singing at joyous meals implies that the custom did exist.[3]

The next textual evidence we have for the practice of singing *zemirot* appears in *Shir Hashirim Rabbah*, a sixth century midrash. The text reads as follows:

כך כשישראל אוכלים ושותים ומברכין ומשבחין ומקלסין להקב"ה מקשיב לקולם
ומתרצה ובשעה שאומות העולם אוכלין ושותין ומחרפין ומנאצין להקב"ה בעריות

[1]Israel Abrahams. *The Annotated Edition of the Authorized Daily Prayerbook*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, Ltd, 1914, cclix. Other scholars, such as A. W. Binder and Herbert Loewe, comment on this as well. However, none of them give a citation in Philo's writings, so I was not able to check the original text. Although it may be the case that the Essenes sang songs at festive meals, there is no direct evidence that this practice was specifically connected to Shabbat.

[2]Hebrew text is taken from *The Responsa Project*, CD-Rom Version 7.0, Bar Ilan University, 1999.

[3]Neil Levin, with Velvel Pasternak. *Z'mirot Anthology: Traditional Sabbath Table Songs for the Home*. Cedarhurst, N.Y.: Tara Publications, 1981, vii.

שמזכירים, אותה שעה חושב הקב"ה אפילו להחריב לעולמו, והתורה נכנסה ומלמדת סניגוריא ואומרת רבונו של עולם עד שאתה מביט באלו שמחרפין ומכעיסים לפניך הביטה בישראל עמך שמברכים ומשבחים ומקלסים לשמך הגדול בתורה *ובזמירות ובשבחות*, ורוח הקדש צווחת, ברח דודי, ברח מאומות העולם והדבק בהם בישראל.

So when Israel eat and drink and praise and extol God, He listens to their voice and is appeased. But when the heathens eat and drink and curse and blaspheme the Holy One, Blessed be He, with the lewdness which they utter, at that moment God is ready even to destroy His world, but the Torah enters and pleads saying, 'Sovereign of the Universe, instead of taking note of these who blaspheme and provoke Thee, rather take note of Israel Thy people who bless and praise and extol Thy great name with Torah, and with *hymns and praises*'; and the holy spirit cries out, "Flee away, my beloved;" flee away from the heathens and cleave to Israel.[4]

Although this text does mention the practice of singing at festive meals, it contains no specific reference to Shabbat, or to songs composed specifically for this occasion. Since the term *zemirot* in Rabbinic literature often refers to the recitation of Psalms, it is quite possible that liturgical psalmody in general is what is meant by the "hymns" here.

In fact, we have no texts of Shabbat *zemirot* from before the 10th century. The one possible exception is the song צור משלו, which scholars such as Abraham Binder date to the early Tannaitic period, or even before the rabbinic academy was established in Yavneh.[5] However, Binder is contradicted by Abraham Idelsohn[6] and Herbert Loewe,[7] who maintain that no post-biblical *zemirot* have survived from before the 10th century, though they agree that the custom existed in this early period. In sum, although it seems likely that during parts of the first millennium Jewish communities sang praises of God at

[4]*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 8:15. Hebrew text is taken from *The Responsa Project*. The English translation is from *Midrash Rabbah*, Soncino Press, 1977.

[5]A. W. Binder, "The Sabbath in Music," in *Sabbath: The Day of Delight*, ed. Abraham Millgram. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1944, 303.

[6]Abraham Idelsohn. *Jewish Music: Its Historical Development*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1992 (reprint from 1929), 360.

[7]Loewe, Herbert. *Mediaeval Hebrew Minstrelsy: Songs for the Bride Queen's Feast*. London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1926, 15.

their festive meals, there is no direct evidence of this practice specifically on Shabbat, and no evidence of songs composed explicitly for this purpose.

The first conclusive proof of the practice of Shabbat *zemirot* as we understand it today appears in *Machzor Vitry*[8], the oldest extant European prayerbook. It was compiled by Rabbi Simchah ben Shmuel of Vitry (d.1105). Simcha's terse directives imply that singing *zemirot* was already an established custom in his time. In describing the laws of Shabbat, he states simply, but clearly, that "after the meal it is the custom to recite *zemirot*."[9] Further on in the work, he adds, "And these are the *zemirot* that are recited at the table before the conclusion of the meal."[10] *Machzor Vitry* includes the texts of several *zemirot* that are still sung today. Most scholars agree that the oldest of these, דרור יקרא, was composed by Dunash ben Labrat, who lived in Baghdad in the middle of the tenth century.[11] Other early medieval authorities agree with *Machzor Vitry* that singing *zemirot* is a meritorious act.[12] Judah Hechasid (d. 1217), for example, describes the *mitzvah* of sitting in the light of the Shabbat candles and singing praises to God.[13]

Jews like Dunash ben Labrat probably brought the custom of singing *zemirot* from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe in the early Middle Ages. With the onset of the Golden Age of the Jewish community in Spain, beginning in the eleventh century, there was a renewed interest in writing Hebrew poetry. Some of these poems were written explicitly as Shabbat *zemirot*. Others were only adopted as such by later

[8]In transliteration throughout this thesis, I have used the system given in guidelines from the *AJS Review*, with the exception of the letters ח and צ, which I have rendered as *ch* and *ts* respectively.

[9]מחזור ויטרי ed. R. Shimon Halevi Hurwitz, 1923, 146.

[10]ibid., 177.

[11]Loewe, *Hebrew Minstrelsy*, 15. See also Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*, 361.

[12]E.D. Goldschmidt, "Zemirot," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing Co., 1977, 987.

[13] סימן תרכב, *ספר חסידים*, ed. Wisnetski, Berlin 1891, 166.

generations.[14] For the Jews of medieval Europe, Shabbat celebration was the Jewish equivalent of the cathedral in that it was a main locus of divine-human interaction, and a major creative project.[15] Thus it is no accident that Hebrew poets of this period composed songs specifically to sing at the Shabbat table. Many of the most famous *zemirot* were composed during the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries, both by the courtier-rabbis of the Golden Age, and by Ashkenazi rabbis as well. A prime example of the first is Judah Halevi (1075-1141), perhaps the most important medieval Hebrew poet, who wrote יום שבתון, and exemplifying the latter is Mordecai b. Isaac of France (ca. 1305), who composed מה יפית.[16]

By the late Middle Ages, singing *zemirot* became widespread. We read accounts of families sitting and singing for hours on Shabbat. According to these accounts, the *zemirot* were sung by the men of the family, though the women sometimes joined in on the refrains. Women also had *zemirot* of their own, though we have no record of what they sang. In some communities, Jews even sung *zemirot* just before the beginning of Shabbat so that they could use instrumental accompaniment, which would otherwise have been prohibited.[17]

Medieval rabbis considered the *zemirot* a way of containing frivolous conversation and inappropriate hilarity on Shabbat. They saw Shabbat as a time for joy and geniality, but only within the context of holiness and spiritual elevation. Some rabbis opposed the singing of *zemirot*, because they were sung to non-Jewish melodies. However, the practice eventually gained consensus, since the rabbis recognized that it

[14]Levin, *Z'mirot Anthology*, viii.

[15]Michael Michlin, "The Sabbath Zemirot: Liturgy and Theology," unpublished paper, used with permission of the author, 1998, 4.

[16]Loewe, *Hebrew Minstrelsy*, 29. For a complete listing of common Shabbat *zemirot* and their dates, see Loewe, 29-30, and the introductions to each of the *zemirot* in Levin's *Anthology*.

[17]Israel Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1896, 133.

was better to sing Sabbath songs than to engage in purely secular singing at the Shabbat table.

As we saw before, it may also have been true that singing *zemirot* posed a means of escaping the drab and difficult life situation in certain places during the Middle Ages. Such singing would then have gained additional significance during times of persecution and demoralization. Some of the most convivial *zemirot* were composed during the Crusades and the expulsion from Spain, when they would have served to maintain an air of "obstinate festivity" on Shabbat.[18]

The practice of singing *zemirot* was further influenced by the flowering of medieval Jewish mysticism. The mystics emphasized the power of song as an effective means of elevating the soul to higher spheres and spreading blessings in the world. The *Zohar* states, "As the spiritual light [of the Sabbath] arises...they offer praises with songs and hymns. Their praises rise upward, and the higher and lower worlds join in delight and are crowned together."[19] In addition, the *Zohar* comments that "a Jew must honor God with the beauty of his soul and the beauty of his throat."[20] As time for meditation, the Sabbath was an ideal opportunity to actualize the power of song. Jewish mysticism also emphasized two Talmudic teachings that impacted upon the practice of singing *zemirot*. The first was that on Shabbat, a Jew gains an additional soul (BT Beitsah 16a), which the mystics believed could only be gained through song.[21] Second, the Talmud explains angels accompany us home from the synagogue on Shabbat (BT Shabbat 119b). The mystics expanded this idea of divine accompaniment, stating that angels are present in the home during all Shabbat meals. With the proper *kavvanah*, (spiritual intention)

[18]Levin, *Z'mirot Anthology*, viii
[19]*Zohar*, Vol. II, 205a. Translation from Nosson Scherman. *Zemiros and Bircas Hamazon*. New York: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1979, xiii.
[20]Zohar, Vol. II, 93a. Translation from Binder, 305.
[21]Levin, *Z'mirot Anthology*, xii.

acquired through song, meals can also be attended by the *Shekhinah* herself.[22]

The sixteenth century saw two major trends in Jewish life which impacted the custom of singing *zemirot*. First, because of the mass expulsions of Jews from parts of Western Europe during the previous century, the custom of singing *zemirot* migrated to new areas of Jewish settlement such as Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Second, a major development in Jewish mysticism took place during this time, inspired chiefly by the teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria of Safed (1534-72). Luria's teachings became instrumental in reinforcing the practice of singing *zemirot*. Lurianic *kabbalah* offered urgent messianism as a spiritual response to the profound despair in the Jewish world caused by the expulsion from Spain.[23] In order to hasten the arrival of the messiah, each individual Jew was required to participate in the act of *tikkun olam*, (repairing the world). According to Luria, this reparation could be accomplished through through the practice of specific *kavvanot* accompanying the performance of each *mitzvah*. The purpose of these *kavvanot* was to facilitate unification among the *sefirot*, different aspects of God. *Malkhut*, the lowest of the *sefirot*, was thought to have accompanied the Jewish people in their exile among the nations of the world. When *Malkhut* returned to her rightful place in the Divine sphere, God and the world would be perfected. The Jewish people would no longer be in exile or subject to the oppression of other nations. According to the Lurianic system, Shabbat was the most fruitful time for this reunification to occur. Isaac Luria himself wrote three *zemirot*, one for each of the Shabbat meals. He intended them as extended *kavvanot* for the *mitzvah* of rejoicing at the Shabbat meals, and effecting the unification of the *sefirot*.[24] Since every Jew needed

[22]ibid., viii.

[23]There is actually a substantial scholarly debate as to whether the power of the kabbalistic teachings were the real impetus for the spread of messianism, or whether the experience of the expulsion was the cause for its popularity.

[24]Levin, *Z'mirot Anthology*, xiii.

to participate in this process of *tikkun olam*, Luria's followers saw the need to spread Kabbalistic teachings everywhere. Recognizing Shabbat *zemirot* as the perfect vehicle through which to popularize his teacher's doctrines, Israel Najara (1550-1620) wrote many *zemirot* to be sung to simple popular tunes that could be easily disseminated.[25]

Another new proliferation of *zemirot* occurred during the aftermath of the Sabbatean messianism in the 17th century. Once again there was mass demoralization in the Jewish community, and the *zemirot* had the potential to offer comfort. The messianic messages of some of the Lurianic *zemirot* were also in line with Sabbatean thought, and so assuaged those who were still partial to this religious influence.[26]

Although few *zemirot* texts were composed after the 17th century, the practice of singing *zemirot* again acquired renewed popularity through the Hasidic movements of the 18th and 19th centuries. Hasidism emphasized music as a primary means for participatory spiritual experiences. Both the act of singing *zemirot* and the texts themselves provided the message of a joyous affirmation of life, which was a central tenet of Hasidism.[27]

The practice of singing *zemirot* has continued in traditional Jewish communities, and in some liberal ones, too, up until the present day. Since the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language and the creation of the state of Israel, some communities have also replaced the traditional *zemirot* with modern Hebrew songs. I will offer further discussion of the role of *zemirot* in modern life at the end of this chapter.

[25]ibid., xiii.
[26]ibid., viii.
[27]ibid., viii.

Transmission

The texts of the *zemirot* were transmitted in two basic forms. In the medieval period, *zemirot* were published in congregational collections called *diwans*. These *diwans* sometimes contained new songs by a particular writer, and sometimes contained songs that had already gained popularity. They were also often shared between congregations, comparable to modern photocopies of song sheets or *birkonim*. Following the model of *Machzor Vitry*, the *zemirot* were also incorporated both into manuscripts and printed editions of prayerbooks. The specific *zemirot* included in these prayerbooks were based on editorial selection and local custom. These two forms of publication, small pamphlets of *zemirot*, and inclusion in Shabbat prayerbooks, have lasted until today.[28]

There are variant readings for many of the *zemirot*. For example, דרור יקרא appears in *Machzor Vitry* with an additional stanza which is not included in other early versions of this song. The existence of multiple versions of the *zemirot* is not surprising considering the long distances they have traveled. In many cases there is no original text. Sometimes changes were made in order to "correct" the text without being marked as such. For example, the publishers of the *diwans* were often ignorant of the Arabic meter in which some of the songs were written, and so emended the texts in accordance with what they thought was correct.[29]

In most publications, the *zemirot* were divided up into three groups of songs, each group to be sung at one of the three Shabbat meals. The order of the *zemirot* as they appear today in most publications was not crystallized until the 19th century in *Siddur Avodat Yisrael*, edited by Seligmann Baer. The present order in which the *zemirot* appear does not seem to be entirely casual. The cycle for each meal includes one of the mystical

[28]ibid., xii.
[29]ibid., xii.

poems by Luria to set a spiritual tone. This song is then followed by a meditative poem, and, subsequently, more festive songs which eventually lead to the recitation of *Birkat Hamazon*, the Grace after Meals. In addition, the selections for each meal are also based around the mood that they invite. The cycles for the first two meals of Shabbat contain the most joyous songs. However, the songs for the third meal, meant to be sung as Shabbat is slowly fading away, are more serious, and are characterized by hope and supplication for Divine favor in the coming week.[30]

[30]ibid., xii.

Themes

The themes of the *zemirot* are extremely varied and reflect the experience of Shabbat in its fullness. In 1925, Rabbi J. H. Hertz, the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, commented in his introduction to a collection of *zemirot* that these songs are a "mirror of the soul-life of Universal Israel."[31] Despite the heterogeneity of the *zemirot* literature, there are several themes which occur with some frequency. These themes are often based on ideas which appear in the Bible and early rabbinic literature, and are thus evidence of the common literary heritage of the authors despite their geographical and chronological distances from one another.

The Talmud teaches that one should make Shabbat a delight by having three meals of delicious foods. (BT Shabbat 118b) As table songs, the *zemirot* celebrate this practice. Perhaps the most vivid example of the emphasis on culinary enjoyment is the song מה ידידות, written by Menahem b. Makhir of Ratisbon, ca. 1080. The second verse reads as follows:

מֵעֶרֶב מַזְמִינִים כָּל מִינֵי מַטְעַמִּים.
מִבְּעוֹד יוֹם מוּכָנִים. תַּרְנְגוֹלִים מְפֻטָּמִים.
וְלַעֲרוֹךְ עַמָּה מִינִים שְׁתוֹת יֵינוֹת מְבֻשָּׂמִים.
וְתַפְנוּקֵי מַעֲדָנִים. בְּכָל שָׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים:

From Sabbath Eve they prepare all manner of delicacies,
While yet day, were readied fattened chickens.
To arrange on it many varieties-drinking of scented wines
and luxurious delicacies on all three occasions.[32]

The refrain, which often becomes the most important liturgical force in the song, reads "לְהִתְעַנֵּג בְּתַעֲנוּגִים. בַּרְבּוּרִים וּשְׂלָיו וְדָגִים" "To indulge in delights, fatted fowl, quail and fish."

[31]Loewe, *Hebrew Minstrelsy*, 2.

[32]The Hebrew texts of all of the *zemirot* quoted here are taken from *Dagesh*, Cliptext *Siddur*, CD-Rom, 2000. The translations are from Scherman's *Zemiros and Bircas Hamazon*, unless otherwise noted.

In the *zemirot* material concerns are expressed side by side with spiritual ones. The Psalms teach that Jews should "Praise God with joy" (Psalms 95:1). *Zemirot* are a means to obey this commandment, and so contain much praise for God as the creator and ruler of the world.[33] One of the most well-loved zemirot, יה רבון, written by Israel Najara in the 16th century, is a good example of this theme.

יְהֹה רִבּוֹן עָלַם וְעָלְמַיָּא.
אַנְתְּ הוּא מַלְכָּא מָלֶךְ מַלְכַיָּא.
עוֹבָד גְּבוּרְתֶּךְ וְתִמְהַיָּא.
שְׁפַר קֳדָמָךְ לְהַחֲוָיָא׃

O Creator, Master of this world and all worlds,
You are the King who reigns over kings--
Your powerful and wondrous deeds
It is beautiful to declare before You.

The *zemirot* specifically offer thanks to God for the gift of Shabbat. This theme of Shabbat as a Divine gift is also taken directly from the Babylonian Talmud. (BT Shabbat 10b). It finds expression in many of the *zemirot*,[34] but a clear example appears in the one of the earliest songs, כל מקדש.

בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת שִׂישׂוּ וְשִׂמְחוּ
כְּמַקְבְּלֵי מַתַּן נַחֲלִיאֵל.

On the Sabbath day rejoice and be glad!
Receiving the gift of God's inheritance.

Aside from the explicit praise of God and gratitude for the gift of Shabbat, there is also implicit in all of the poems a profound expression of joy. Levin comments that Judaism contains a theological notion that God desires human enjoyment. He states that this concept is derived from the idea that "in a contented state, man is more likely to praise God and join willingly in the theological partnership."[35] The fundamental Jewish concept of the covenant between God and Israel is discussed in many of the *zemirot*. Shabbat is understood as an expression of this covenant. God offers care for Israel

[33]Levin, *Z'mirot Anthology*, ix.
[34]ibid., ix.
[35]ibid., ix.

through this gift, and Israel expresses care for God through accepting the commandments of God's Shabbat. The covenant is also sometimes expressed as a plea for protection. If the Jews keep Shabbat, God will keep them from harm.[36] The clearest expression of this theme and its variation appears in the first few lines of the song כי אשמרה שבת, written by Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164.)

כִּי אֶשְׁמְרָה שַׁבָּת אֵל יִשְׁמְרֵנִי.
אוֹת הִיא לְעוֹלְמֵי עַד בֵּינוֹ וּבֵינִי

If I safeguard the Sabbath, God will safeguard me.
It is a sign forever and ever between Him and me.

In addition to the general offer of protection, the *zemirot* also emphasize two dimensions of the reward for keeping Shabbat. The first dimension is the immediate delight and peace granted to the individual through observing this day of rest. Shabbat observance is its own self-fulfilled reward, a divinely granted refuge from normal weekday concerns and a time for spiritual rejuvenation. Shabbat is also portrayed as refuge from external persecution and collective suffering. It is the time to forget, even for a day, the painful political, economic, and physical oppression of the Jews in the Middle Ages. In his song יום שבתון, Judah Halevi (1075-1141) writes, "On it [Shabbat] the exhausted ones shall rest."[37] The second dimension of this reward is that through Shabbat observance the individual will gain a place in the "world to come."[38] In the *zemirot* as in rabbinic literature generally, this expression refers both to life after death and to redemption at the end of time. The experience of observing Shabbat in life was considered to be a "semblance of the world to come" (BT Berakhot 57b) so it is no surprise that this theme appears in the *zemirot*. The final verse of מה ידידות explicitly makes this connection.

[36]ibid., ix.
[37]This is my own translation.
[38]Levin, *Z'mirot Anthology,* ix.

מֵעֵין עוֹלָם הַבָּא. יוֹם שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה.
כָּל הַמִּתְעַנְּגִים בָּהּ. יִזְכּוּ לִרְוֹב שִׂמְחָה.
מֵחֳבָלֵי מָשִׁיחַ יֵצָלוּ לִרְוָחָה.
פְּדוּתֵנוּ תַּצְמִיחַ וְנָס יָגוֹן וַאֲנָחָה׃

A semblance of the World to Come is the Sabbath day of contentment,
All who delight in it will merit much gladness
From the birth pangs of the Messiah they will be rescued to relief.
Make our redemption flourish that grief and sighs may flee.

The *zemirot* also contain many details of the laws of Shabbat, particularly with regard to what one is permitted to discuss on Shabbat. They served to remind the singers to stay within appropriate conversational boundaries at the table. For example, the first verse of כי אשמרה שבת reads:

אָסוּר מְצֹא חֵפֶץ. עֲשׂוֹת דְּרָכִים
גַּם מִלְּדַבֵּר בּוֹ דִּבְרֵי צְרָכִים.
דִּבְרֵי סְחוֹרָה אַף דִּבְרֵי מְלָכִים
אֶהְגֶּה בְּתוֹרַת אֵל וְתַחְכְּמֵנִי׃

It is forbidden to seek mundane desires or to engage in such pursuits,
Even to converse concerning necessary matters: commercial or political talk.
I shall meditate in the Torah of God--it shall make me wise.

Love is also a central theme in the *zemirot*. The texts contain expressions of the love between God and Israel, and a general love of Shabbat itself. Some *zemirot* are specifically love poems, complete with expressions of adoration, respect, excitement, praise for beauty and intense longing.[39] For example, one of the later *zemirot*, יה אכסוף, begins, "God, I long for the sweetness of the Sabbath..." Many songs contain joyful reference to preparations for Shabbat which are easily compared with the anxious waiting and detailed preparation for the arrival of a loved one. The authors of the *zemirot* write of their wishes to honor and beautify the Sabbath with their best food and clothing, even beyond their means. They mourn Shabbat's departure, and express desire for it to linger. In general, the *zemirot* contain expressions of the full range of moods related to intimate love. Levin comments that they are evidence of "the hold of Shabbat

[39]ibid., x.

over the Jewish heart."[40] But the expression of love goes deeper than Levin imagines.

The *zemirot* generally reflect the religious thought and fashions of the periods in which they were written. The theme of love, for example, initially occurs in the *zemirot* composed during the Golden Age in Spain, and refers to love between God and Israel. Although this idea had been part of Jewish literature since the earliest interpretations of the Song of Songs, it now enters *zemirot* and poetry in general, where it represents a unique development because of the individuality and intimate relationships the poems portray.[41] The *zemirot* of this period were also influenced by Arabic poetry. Raymond Scheindlin points that Arabic love poetry was an especially fruitful source of inspiration for the Hebrew poets:

> "As we have seen, even in the comfortable Spain of the courtier-rabbis and the great Hebrew poets, the communal status of the Jews was defined by the reality of exile, subjugation and the feeling of separation from God. God's love for Israel and Israel's for God were ancient themes of rabbinic doctrine and liturgy, in use for centuries before the Andalusian rabbis discovered Arabic love poetry. What was new in the Arabic poetry was the habitual idealization of a love that endures the lovers' separation and the hostility of the environment, a love nurtured by dreams of the past and expressing itself in prayers for satisfaction in the future. For Jews brought up on Arabic literature and sharing its outlook, there must have been considerable comfort in the analogy it provided with their national status, an analogy that enabled them to express their national tragedy in terms that made sense in their own--Arabic--culture."[42]

In addition to using frustrated passion as a means to describe the relationship between God and Israel, the poets of this period reflected other cultural and intellectual developments of the Golden Age in their writings. Although they drew largely from the Bible, Talmud, midrash and earlier liturgical poetry, they also drew from Greco-Arabic philosophy and science. These were considered valid sources of truth by the enlightened

[40]ibid., x.
[41]Raymond Scheindlin. *The Gazelle: Medieval Hebrew Poems on God, Israel, and the Soul.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 23-4.
[42]ibid., 38.

thinkers of the age. These two systems of thought, rabbinic and philosophical, were often synthesized in the mind of the poet, and are similarly portrayed in the poetry.[43] For example, the love expressed in the *zemirot* sometimes refers to the desire of the soul, imprisoned in the body, to return to its Divine source. This Neoplatonic idea appears in the opening lines of Abraham Ibn Ezra's poem, צָמְאָה נַפְשִׁי.

צָמְאָה נַפְשִׁי לֵאלֹהִים לְאֵל חָי.
לִבִּי וּבְשָׂרִי יְרַנְּנוּ לְאֵל חָי:

My soul thirsts for God, for the God of life,
My heart and flesh will sing joyously to the living God.

The theological developments of Jewish mysticism in the 13th through the 16th centuries which influenced the practice of singing *zemirot* generally, also brought a deeper understanding of the theme of love through the mystical theology of the *sefirot*. Love between God and Israel is read through mystical symbolism as the unification of the sefirot *Malkhut* and *Tiferet*, which takes place on Shabbat. *Malkhut*, usually described as feminine, and represented by the people of Israel, couples with *Tiferet*, the masculine side of God. Joyful singing on Shabbat facilitates this union, and the *zemirot* are portrayed as wedding songs at the divine marriage feast for these masculine and feminine aspects of God.[44] As is evident from the Zohar passage above (p.7), the union of *Malkhut* and *Tiferet* in the Divine world causes blessings to pour down upon the people of this world. These are the blessings of observing Shabbat.

Lurianic Kabbalah also contributed other themes especially in the *zemirot* for the third Shabbat meal. As I discussed above, Luria expanded upon the notion that the *Shekhinah* returns from exile on Shabbat. He also invented the concept of *Tsimtsum*, God's withdrawal from existence in order to create the world. In the *zemirot*, this concept

[43]ibid., 42.
[44]Sarah Zemel. "Zemirot Shabbat: An Exploration of Sabbath Table Songs." HUC-JIR Cantorial Thesis, 1998, 39.

is presented as parallel to the withdrawal of Shabbat during the third meal, which paves the way for creation to begin again. In addition, the Luria's emphasis upon messianic redemption is expressed in pleas for Elijah to come, heralding the onset of the messianic era.[45]

Since most of the *zemirot* we have today were written before the 18th century, the ideas of Hasidism did not directly influence the themes of the *zemirot*. However, some themes reflect important tenets of Hasidism, and therefore the *zemirot* received renewed popularity in Hasidic circles. For example, the *zemirot* express a hallowing of human passions, including the pleasure and comfort sought on Shabbat. They also emphasize an elevation of these corporial elements of life to a higher sphere: honoring Shabbat. The delight in the details of Shabbat observance that the *zemirot* express harmonizes well with the Hasidic ideology of performing the commandments with joy, not just tacit acceptance. In addition, the *zemirot* make explicit the emotional dimensions of religious experience, a theme that is central to Hasidic culture. In sum, the texts of the *zemirot* reflect almost every aspect of the experience of Shabbat, from rest and fine food to spiritual yearnings and religious contentment.[46]

[45]Levin, *Z'mirot Anthology*, xiii.
[46]ibid., viii.

Form and Style

Shabbat *zemirot* reflect a wide range of literary styles, depending on the fashions of the times and cultures in which they were written. Most of the *zemirot* are in Hebrew, although a few, such as אתקינו סעודתא and יה רבון are in Aramaic. Although Aramaic was no longer a common language for Jewish literature in the Middle Ages, it had special significance as the language of the *Zohar* and the Babylonian Talmud.[47] The poets of the Golden Age, the first period in which the tradition of writing *zemirot* really began to flourish, attempted to write in pure biblical Hebrew. They used simple, direct language, and broke with rabbinic vocabulary and syntax. They also consciously rejected the flowery style of the *piyyutim*, the common form of liturgical poetry until the tenth century. However, the poets of the Golden Age did continue to draw liberally on biblical quotations and allusions. During this period, Hebrew was learned largely by memorizing the Bible, so the authors could depend on learned audiences catching their allusions.[48] Later *zemirot* are often more complex, and contain elaborate metaphors and imagery. They are replete with allusions to rabbinic literature and mystical teachings as well as to the Bible. There are often rapid changes of tense, speaker and subject within a single poem. The subject and object alternate freely--between God and Shabbat, the speaker and God, the speaker and Shabbat, and so on.[49]

Although a few *zemirot* are written in a prose-like style, most are strophic poems that vary in rhyme scheme, meter, and numbers of lines and feet. Some have repeated refrains between stanzas. Others are sung now using the first stanza as the refrain, but since we do not know the melodies for which the poems were written, we have no way of knowing whether this custom of repeating the first stanza was the author's intent. Most of the *zemirot* included in collections for the first two Shabbat meals have refrains, while

[47]ibid., xi.
[48]Scheindlin, *The Gazelle*, 19-20.
[49]Levin, *Z'mirot Anthology*, ix.

those for the third do not. It is possible that songs with refrains were considered more compatible with a jovial tone in communal singing.[50]

Many of the *zemirot* contain acrostics, which were a traditional form of Hebrew poetry dating from the Bible. Biblical poetry contains only alphabetical acrostics, which are also used in *zemirot*. However, as in classical and medieval *piyyutim* generally, the *zemirot* often have acrostics bearing the names of their authors.[51] In particular, the Spanish courtier-rabbis added long acrostics with their names, and sometimes began the poem with אני ("I") and ended them with חקטן ("the small one"), as testimonies to their own humility. Sometimes the poems contain long elaborate acrostics with family names, places, and even the occasions for which the songs were written.[52]

Rhyme was an important element in the *zemirot*. The schemes and types of rhyme vary in level of refinement. Metrical structure is also a basic feature of the *zemirot*, which often contain loose mixtures of various meters. Levin points out that medieval poetry followed a general development in both Arabic and Romance languages toward a stress-accent basis, unifying rhyme with syllable count. These were blended with the quantitative elements, such as the number of syllables in the meter. *Zemirot* offer examples of both Arabic and Provencal meters. Historians speculate that the poets wanted to satisfy popular desire for Jewish songs in these meters.[53]

[50]ibid, ix.
[51]ibid., ix.
[52]Leon Weinberger. *Jewish Hymnography: A Literary History.* London: Vallentine Mitchell & Co. Ltd., 1998, 96-7.
[53]Levin, *Z'mirot Anthology,* ix.

Literary Analogues

The *zemirot* are essentially products of Jewish culture, and have no known literary analogues in other cultures.[54] Their unique character stems largely from the fact that they blend such seemingly disparate elements as geniality and piety, and juxtapose physical with spiritual concerns. *Zemirot* praise good cheer, food and wine, and thus perhaps could be compared to drinking songs from other cultures. However, in the *zemirot* these things are praised as a manifestation of Divine bounty and a vehicle for sanctification of Shabbat. Similarly, the element of gratitude and praise for God is found in religious hymns of other cultures, but these are usually intended for singing in church and not for family meals. For example, the English Hymnarium, which contains about 500 Christian hymns from the 11th century for various uses, has only one to be sung after meals. It is possible to find a parallel to the *zemirot* in the metrical graces of some Christian writers. Such texts exist written by Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (b. 348, Spain), Albinius Flaccus Alcuin (b. 804), a monk of Canterbury, and Robert Herrick (1591-1674). However, Levin contends, as did Loewe before him, that "neither in function nor essence do these examples exhibit anything like the true synthesis of material and spiritual themes found in the *zemirot*."[55]

Perhaps the closest analogy in function to the *zemirot* are Christian carols, since they are religious songs of a cheerful nature intended to be sung in the home. In some early Anglo-Norman carols there is even a hint of blending culinary delights with religious expression. However, overall, the religious element in these early songs is superficial, and does not at all display the complex theological depth of the *zemirot*. Later carols are closer to the *zemirot* in their tone, but even when theology is present there are no complex theological concepts, biblical allusions, or legal references. These

[54]For a detailed discussion of the issue of literary parallels to the *zemirot*, see Loewe, *Hebrew Minstrelsy*, 121-134.

[55]Levin, *Z'mirot Anthology*, x.

later carols are also for home use, but have no connection to sacred meals, and do not function like the *zemirot* with regard to spiritual elevation. Thus the *zemirot* are a "fundamentally unique product of the Jewish spirit."[56]

[56]ibid., x.

Music

There are many different melodies for each of the *zemirot*. The melodies are heterogeneous musical compositions, which contain various folk and art influences of the host cultures in which the Jews lived. There are multiple contributing influences to the musical traditions of the Ashkenazi *zemirot* alone: prayer modes, German, Bohemian, and western Slavonic secular song; Eastern European secular song, western Sephardi hymnody, synagogue song traditions, Hasidic musical traditions, and individual family traditions. Most melodies that we have today date from early 17th to the 21st centuries. The oldest of these reflect some Arabic influences. In no cases do we have the original melodies for which the texts were written. The oldest continuous musical traditions are probably those of the Spanish and Portuguese communities.[57]

The melodies of the *zemirot* are usually metric, featuring common and easily sung meters such as duple, triple, and quadruple. *Zemirot* are predominantly sung in unison with occasional harmony. Many of them have musical refrains which accompany the refrains in the text.[58] As Levin points out, the *zemirot* present a wealth of material for ethnomusicological study. Through their transmission they demonstrate the links between Eastern and Western Europe, as well as European and American traditions. For example, some Hasidic melodies found their way into the general populace of both Eastern and Western European communities, and even have become popular in the United States among families and communities with no Hasidic affiliation.[59]

The tremendous Hasidic interest in *zemirot* provided for great musical developments in that particular tradition. As was previously stated, the foreign elements of the melodies were opposed by some rabbis of the middle ages, but interestingly,

[57]ibid., xiii.
[58]Macy Nulman. *Concise Encyclopdia of Jewish Music*. New York: McGraw Hill, Inc, 1975, 270.
[59]Levin, viii-ix.

among the Hasidim there was positive reinforcement for the practice of singing *zemirot* to foreign melodies. They believed that using secular melodies for *zemirot* redeemed the Divine nature of that particular melody, thereby releasing its sparks to return to their Divine source.[60] This was considered part of the process of *tikkun olam* as it came to be reinterpreted in Hasidic tradition. One additional interesting feature of the music of the *zemirot* is that some of the most cheerful songs have sad tunes, possibly to reduce the hilarity and retain decorum during singing. Levin speculates that it also could have been reflective of the general Jewish custom of combining joy and sorrow.[61]

[60]Zemel, *Zemirot Shabbat*, 35.
[61]Levin, *Z'mirot Anthology*, viii.

Liturgical Function

In the traditional Jewish world, the home is the primary atmosphere of Shabbat. It supersedes even the synagogue "in its impact upon the family spirit."[62] The table is like an altar, and Shabbat meals are elevated beyond social and physical pleasure to become conduits for religious expression. They take on "the aura of a sort of Divine service in themselves--analogous to congregational worship and equal in importance."[63] Shabbat *zemirot* therefore continue in the tradition of the *piyyutim*, the type of synagogue liturgical poetry which was central in the historical period preceding the one in which most of the *zemirot* were written. Similar to the *piyyutim*, *zemirot*, by definition, were intended as an element of spontaneity and private devotion in worship.[64] Although the *zemirot* function as part of the *mitzvah* of celebrating Shabbat, they do not comprise a legally mandated ritual. Particularly since they were to be sung at the meal, they were out of the realm of what tended to be fixed. Instead, they became a vehicle for the development of special family and community traditions.[65] Despite the fact that the *zemirot* appear in a specific order in most *siddurim*, no actual order for singing them has been fixed by religious prescription. Even if one does not change the language of the *zemirot*, there is a flexibility in form and feeling provided by multiple melodies for each of the songs. Thus the custom of singing *zemirot* represents one of the few areas of practice in traditional Judaism in which there is choice and individual expression.[66]

The practice of singing *zemirot* is very much alive today in traditional Jewish communities. *Zemirot* are learned from many sources--family culture, community leaders, rebbes, teachers/rabbis, summer camps and guests at Shabbat meals. New

[62]ibid., vii.
[63]ibid., vii.
[64]Michlin, *The Sabbath Zemirot*, 7.
[65]ibid., 7.
[66]Levin, *Z'mirot Anthology*, xi-xii.

melodies are introduced all the time, and singing *zemirot* is still considered an important means of reaching the Divine.[67] In my personal experience, many young Jews looking for spiritual fulfillment have been drawn to traditional communities partially because of the beauty of this specific tradition.

However, in the Reform world, the practice of singing traditional *zemirot* has dwindled considerably. Following a general trend of the transference of home rituals to the synagogue, the *zemirot* have become part of the Friday evening liturgy. For example, יום זה לישראל, יה רבון and שלום עליכם are listed in *Gates of Prayer* as opening songs for Services VII, VIII, III respectively. A popular closing song for Shabbat services is כי אשמרה שבת, printed in the song supplement in *Gates of Prayer*. In addition, special melodies for the *zemirot* have been composed which include solo and choir parts. These are not at all appropriate for home, but intended for synagogue use only. If songs are sung at all at Reform Shabbat tables, they are usually common Jewish folk songs, or songs in both Hebrew and English such as those by Jeff Klepper and Debbie Friedman.[68] As Sarah Zemel, a cantorial student at HUC-JIR, comments in her 1998 thesis,

> There is a danger, though, that in changing the content of *zemirot Shabbat* too much, modern Jews will no longer be familiar with the *zemirot* tradition that has been passed down to them and that this tradition will, in effect, be lost to them. I see this trend occurring in the Reform movement today. Most Reform Jews are not even familiar with the majority of the "traditional" *zemirot* texts or the melodies that accompany them. At many Reform Shabbat tables, Jewish folk songs, such as "*Hine Mah Tov*" and "*Mah Yafeh haYom*" have replaced *zemirot* such as "*Menuhah v'simha*" and "*Zur Mishelo.*" In 1997, the CCAR published a booklet entitled *Birkon le-Shabbat: Blessings for the Table*, in which there are seven songs listed as *zemirot* for all of Shabbat; out of these, only two, ("*Ki Eshmerah Shabbat*" and "*Yom Zeh le-Yisrael*" [of which only the refrain is printed] are what may be considered traditional *zemirot*. While I do not object to the addition of new songs to the *zemirot* repertoire, I feel that the Reform movement should be careful not to deprive its adherents of the rich

[67]Zemel, *Zemirot Shabbat*, 40.
[68]ibid., 45.

collection of *zemirot Shabbat* that has been sung by generations of Jews and is part of their heritage.[69]

Their lives were precarious and difficult, especially following the expulsion from Spain. Past generations used these songs to forget their weekday burdens, worries and sorrows. They provided mental and physical relaxation for people whose lives did not contain these elements on a daily basis. Through the act of singing *zemirot*, Shabbat became framed as a contrast to the darkness of everyday life. The texts both explicitly acknowledged this darkness, and described the comfort that Shabbat could offer. The *zemirot* functioned well as liturgy because of this intentional expression of opposites.[70]

Part of the difficulty with singing *zemirot* at Reform Shabbat tables stems from the texts themselves. Firstly, they are long songs written in medieval Hebrew or Aramaic, which makes them inaccessible to Reform Jews who have little or no facility with these languages. Secondly, the contents of the *zemirot* are often difficult for Reform Jews to relate to. Some of the *zemirot* include theologically problematic concepts, such as references to the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Reconstructionist Movement has solved this problem by simply excising those parts of the *zemirot* which are troubling.[71] However, I see the major difficulty in singing *zemirot* as a result of the fact that they stem from a specific historical context.[72] Liturgy comes alive only when it

[69]ibid., 45.

[70]Michlin, *The Sabbath Zemirot*, 12.

[71]See, for example, the text of צור משלו as it appears in *Kol Haneshamah*, the Reconstructionist prayerbook, p. 831. The final verse, which expresses hope for the rebuilding of the Temple, is left out.

[72]The fact that the *zemirot* were written in a medieval context has not substantially effected their popularity in the traditional Jewish community. I would speculate that this is the case for two reasons. First, there is narrower gap between the values of the Orthodox world and those expressed in the *zemirot* than is the case in the liberal world. Second, traditional Jewish communities place a much higher value than liberal communities on understanding and submitting to the authority of the past.

intersects with real life experience. The *zemirot* grew out of the life experience of Jews in the Middle Ages.In order for the *zemirot* to once again function as living liturgy, not only do the songs need to be taught as much as possible at communal and family meals, but they must be reinterpreted to address the experience of liberal Jews in the modern world.

Chapter 2

Zemirot Texts and Translations

In this chapter I will offer translations of three specific *zemirot*, accompanied by brief historical introductions. They are יוֹם זֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, יוֹם שַׁבָּתוֹן and דְּרוֹר יִקְרָא. These three *zemirot* represent the early and middle periods in the development of this genre. Although there is more than one version of each of these *zemirot*, I have translated the text that is most commonly sung today. I have presented them here according to the order of the traditional Ashkenazi groupings of the *zemirot*. The first of these is intended to be sung at the Shabbat evening meal, while the latter two are to be sung at the Shabbat noon meal. I will include all Biblical references and comments on the themes of the *zemirot* in the commentary in chapter four of this thesis.

About the Translation[1]

My goal in writing these translations is to make the content of the *zemirot* accessible to modern English readers. Therefore, I have not attempted to replicate the poetry of the Hebrew, particularly with regard to the rhyme or meter. Rather, I have tried to render the poems in simple, contemporary language. As I noted above, the speakers of the poems often change within a single verse, as do the person and tense of the verbs. In translation I have sometimes changed the person or tense of the verbs for the sake of clarity. Occasionally I have also changed the word order to reflect common English usage. In addition, I have distilled Hebrew idioms to the essence of their meaning, and translated them as such. Where I have significantly changed the language in translation, I

[1]In addition to the Hebrew text, I have used two relatively recent translations for assistance. They are contained in Scherman's *Zemiros and Bircas Hamazon*, and in *Mizmor Shir*, edited by the *Mizmor Shir* Birkon Committee. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1992.

will include a literal translation in the commentary on the *zemirot*. I have also attempted to reflect some aspects of the Hebrew text in the translations. For example, I have preserved repeated words as much as possible. I have also used common translations of biblical quotations in order to retain the feel of the biblical allusions.

In these translations I have also used gender-neutral God-language. In order to do this, I have occasionally changed the "He" of the text to "God." In the case of these particular *zemirot*, God's masculinity is not an essential aspect of the poems. Therefore portraying God in gender-neutral terms does not significantly change their meanings. Although the texts will probably not be recited aloud, they are intended to serve as active liturgy in a liberal Jewish community. Therefore, I wanted them to reflect contemporary liberal sensibilities as much as possible. The goal in offering gender-neutral translations is simply to remove a barrier for the modern reader who is trying see his/her own theology reflected in these poems.

יוֹם זֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

Despite regularly expressed doubts about the authorship of this poem, almost every critical and traditional source attributes it to Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-72), the famous mystic of Safed.[2] In fact, he did write three other *zemirot*, which I discussed briefly in the first chapter. The main source of doubt concerning Luria as the author is the fact that his other *zemirot* were written in Aramaic, while this one is in Hebrew.[3] It also differs significantly in style and content from Luria's other *zemirot*. The most recent scholarship attributes יוֹם זֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל to Rabbi Isaac Handali (15th century) of Kaffa (Crimea).[4] Little is known about R. Handali himself, other than that he seems to have been a gifted writer, and an important enough person in his community to have three of his *zemirot* published. יוֹם זֶה has been preserved in the manuscript of *Machzor Kaffa*, edited by Rabbi Moses ben Jacob of Kiev (1449-1520) This manuscript clearly attributes the song to R. Handali. Although the whole of the manuscript has not been published, excerpts of it, including יוֹם זֶה, appear in an article by Shimon Bernstein. Interestingly, this original version of יוֹם זֶה also became popular in the nearby Karaite community, and is preserved in their prayerbook as well.[5]

There are actually three extant versions of the text of יוֹם זֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל. The original, as it appears in *Machzor Kaffa*, contains only the first four verses. The first letter of the refrain and the beginning three verses form the acrostic יצחק.[6] The second version, which is the one I have translated here, contains one additional verse. This changes the acrostic to יצחק ל ח. The third version contains a total of eleven verses, three inserted

[2]This attribution appears in the works of Naftali Ben-Menahem, Israel Davidson, Herbert Loewe, Neil Levin, and Nosson Scherman.

[3]Scherman, *Zemiros*, 84.

[4]Weinberger, *Jewish Hymnography*, 348.

[5]Shimon Bernstein, "המחזור כמנהג כפא תולדותיו והתפתחותו" in *Festschrift in Honor of Samuel Mirsky*. New York, 1958, 466.

[6]ibid., 487.

after the fourth verse, and two added to the end. Together, they contain the acrostic יצחק לוריא חזק. This acrostic is obviously the source of the attribution of the song to Luria. Both the second and the third versions appear in contemporaneous sources, so at present it is impossible to decipher which of these versions came first. If I were to speculate, it seems likely that the second version predated the third one, since it is the more difficult reading of the text. The two letters at the beginning of the third and fourth verses, which were left out of the acrostic, may have sparked the imagination of someone who wanted to believe that it was written by Luria. However, it is also possible that the third version appeared first, and then was shortened into the second version for facility in singing and memorizing.

The song itself is in the form of a pseudo-*muwashshah*.[7] The *muwashshah* is a specific form of medieval Arabic poetry in which the rhyme is variable in the strophes of the poem, but constant in the refrain. The original *muwashshah* contained tercet strophes in variable rhyme, and distichs in monorhyme versets. It was easily sung because the distichs could become the refrain. This form was first adopted by Hebrew poets in the 11th century, and became very popular by the 12th century. However, the Hebrew poets did not always want to be constrained by the strictures of the form, and so made slight changes such as variations in length of syllables. The poems written with these alterations in form are called pseudo-*muwashshahs*.[8] יום זֶה contains an uncommon rhyme scheme: aa, bc, bcc, aa/ de, dee, aa/ fg fgg/aa, and so on.[9] The first three lines of each verse contain 12 syllables each, while the fourth line contains 10 syllables. In the version of the text which appears in *Machzor Kaffa*, the refrain was only the word מְנוּחָה.[10] However, today the entire first line commonly serves as the refrain.

[7]Weinberger, *Jewish Hymnography*, 348.
[8]ibid., 92-3.
[9]ibid., 348.
[10]Bernstein, *המחזור* 87.

יוֹם זֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

1. יוֹם זֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אוֹרָה וְשִׂמְחָה שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה׃

2. צִוִּיתָ פְּקוּדִים, בְּמַעֲמַד הַר סִינַי,
שַׁבָּת וּמוֹעֲדִים, לִשְׁמֹר בְּכָל שָׁנַי,
לַעֲרֹךְ לְפָנַי, מַשְׂאֵת וַאֲרוּחָה,
שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה׃

יוֹם זֶה...

3. חֶמְדַּת הַלְּבָבוֹת, לְאֻמָּה שְׁבוּרָה,
לִנְפָשׁוֹת נִכְאָבוֹת, נְשָׁמָה יְתֵרָה,
לְנֶפֶשׁ מְצֵרָה, תַּסִּיר אֲנָחָה,
שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה׃

יוֹם זֶה...

4. קִדַּשְׁתָּ בְּרָכָתָ, אוֹתוֹ מִכָּל יָמִים,
בְּשֵׁשֶׁת כֵּלִיתָ מְלָאכֶת עוֹלָמִים,
בּוֹ מָצְאוּ עֲגוּמִים, הַשְׁקֵט וּבְטָחָה,
שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה׃

יוֹם זֶה...

5. לְאִסּוּר מְלָאכָה, צִוִּיתָנוּ נוֹרָא,
אָזְכָּה הוֹד מְלוּכָה, אִם שַׁבָּת אֶשְׁמְרָה,
אַקְרִיב שַׁי לַמּוֹרָא, מִנְחָה מָרְקָחָה,
שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה׃

יוֹם זֶה...

6. חַדֵּשׁ מִקְדָּשֵׁנוּ זָכְרָה נֶחֱרֶבֶת,
טוּבְךָ מוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ, תְּנָה לַנֶּעֱצָבֶת,
בְּשַׁבָּת יוֹשֶׁבֶת, בְּזֶמֶר וּשְׁבָחָה,
שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה׃

יוֹם זֶה...

Yom Zeh L'yisrael

1. This is a day of light and gladness for Israel--Shabbat, the day of peace.

2. You commanded the details as we stood at Mount Sinai
   To keep Shabbat and holidays all of my life
   To set before me a portion of food, even a full meal--
   Shabbat, the day of peace.

   This is a day...

3. Beloved in the hearts of a broken nation
   For aching spirits, an extra soul
   It casts away the sigh of the depressed spirit--
   Shabbat, the day of peace.

   This is a day...

4. You sanctified and blessed it from among all the days
   In six days you finished the work of the world
   On it the melancholy find tranquility and security--
   Shabbat, the day of peace.

   This is a day...

5. You commanded us with awe in the prohibition of work
   I will deserve the glorious kingship if I keep Shabbat.
   I will offer tribute to the Awesome One, an offering of aromatic spices--
   Shabbat, the day of peace.

   This is a day...

6. Renew our Temple, remember its destruction
   Give Your goodness, our Deliverer, to those who are saddened,
   Who sit on Shabbat in song and praise--
   Shabbat, the day of peace.

   This is a day...

יוֹם שַׁבָּתוֹן

Recent scholarship attributes this poem to Judah Halevi (1075-1141).[11] Born in either Toledo or Tudela, Halevi was a prosperous doctor, businessman, and courtier, as well as an enormously popular secular and liturgical poet. In addition to over 800 poems, Halevi wrote the apologetic philosophical treatise *The Kuzari*, which is primarily a polemic against Aristotelian philosophy, Christianity, and Islam. In 1140, against the wishes of his family and friends, he went on a pilgrimage to Palestine. He died before reaching Jerusalem.[12]

There are two extant versions of יוֹם שַׁבָּתוֹן. What seems to be an original version appears in a *diwan* attributed to Judah Halevi. It contains entirely different texts of the third and fourth verses.[13] The version presented here is the one published in all contemporary editions of the *zemirot* that I have found. In the present version, the third and fourth verses are replaced with texts which were probably not written by Halevi. Since the original verses speak of "stomping out enemies," Baer suggests they were changed to promote "ways of peace."[14] The complete text of the original version and notes regarding slight textual variations are contained in Ben-Menahem's collection of *zemirot*. יוֹם שַׁבָּתוֹן has eight syllables per line, and the first letters of each verse form the acrostic יהודה. The poem itself does not contain a refrain, but it is often sung using the last two lines of the first verse as the chorus.

[11]Ben-Menahem, *זמירות*, 171.
[12]Eliezer Schweid. "Judah Halevi," in *Encyclopedia Judaica, CD-Rom Edition*, Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 1977.
[13]Ben-Menahem, *זמירות*, 171-2. The original version of the text is printed on pp.60-1.
[14]Seligmann Baer, ed. *סדר עבודת ישראל* Jerusalem: Schocken, 1936. Originally published in Reidelheim in 1868, 255.

יוֹם שַׁבָּתוֹן

1. יוֹם שַׁבָּתוֹן אֵין לִשְׁפוֹחַ,
זְכָרוֹ כְּרֵיחַ הַנִּיחוֹחַ.
יוֹנָה מָצְאָה בוֹ מָנוֹחַ,
וְשָׁם יָנוּחוּ יְגִיעֵי כֹּחַ׃

יוֹנָה מָצְאָה...

2. הַיּוֹם נִכְבָּד לִבְנֵי אֱמוּנִים,
זְהִירִים לִשְׁמְרוֹ אָבוֹת וּבָנִים.
חָקוּק בְּשְׁנֵי לוּחוֹת אֲבָנִים,
מֵרוֹב אוֹנִים וְאַמִּיץ כֹּחַ.

יוֹנָה מָצְאָה...

3. וּבָאוּ כֻלָּם בִּבְרִית יַחַד,
נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמַע אָמְרוּ כְּאֶחָד.
וּפָתְחוּ וְעָנוּ יְ־ה אֶחָד,
בָּרוּךְ הַנּוֹתֵן לַיָּעֵף כֹּחַ.

יוֹנָה מָצְאָה...

4. דִּבֶּר בְּקָדְשׁוֹ בְּהַר הַמּוֹר,
יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי זָכוֹר וְשָׁמוֹר.
וְכָל פְּקוּדָיו יַחַד לִגְמוֹר,
חֲזֵק מָתְנַיִם וְאַמֵּץ כֹּחַ.

יוֹנָה מָצְאָה...

5. הָעָם אֲשֶׁר נָע כַּצֹּאן טָעָה,
יְזְפּוֹר לְפָקְדוֹ בִּבְרִית וּשְׁבוּעָה.
לְבַל יַעֲבוֹר בָּם מִקְרֵי רָעָה,
כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ עַל מֵי נֹחַ.

יוֹנָה מָצְאָה...

Yom Shabbaton

1. Do not forget the Sabbath Day
   Remembering it like a delicious fragrance
   The dove found rest on it,
   and there rest those who are exhausted.

   The dove found rest...

2. This day is glorious for the faithful ones
   Parents and children are careful to guard it.
   It was engraved on the two tablets of stone
   By the One of great vigor and bold strength.

   The dove found rest...

3. All entered into the covenant together
   "We will do" and "we will hear" they said as one.
   And they opened their mouths and answered "the Eternal is One"
   Blessed is the One who gives strength to the weary.

   The dove found rest...

4. God spoke in holiness on the mountain of instruction
   "Remember and "Keep" the seventh day.
   All of God's commandments are to be equally learned
   Gather your courage and strength.

   The dove found rest...

5. The people who wandered like a lost sheep
   God will remember to watch over them in covenant and oath
   And will not transgress them and cause evil to happen
   As You swore upon the waters of Noah.

   The dove found rest...

דְּרוֹר יִקְרָא

Herbert Loewe cites דְּרוֹר יִקְרָא as the oldest poem in the collections of *zemirot* we have today.[1] It appears in *Mahzor Vitry* (12th century), attributed to Dunash ben Labrat (ca. 920-986 C.E.)[2] Labrat was the son of a noble family in Baghdad. Although he lived most of his life there, he also studied for a time in Fez. Labrat was a disciple of Saadiah Gaon, and eventually became a well-known rabbinic authority of his day. In addition to being a poet and a linguist, he wrote several legal works, and served as a judge in his community. Rashi cites him a few times in his commentary on the Talmud.[3] Several scholars state that Labrat was the first to write Hebrew poetry using Arabic poetic forms.[4] Idelsohn even credits him with instituting the practice of singing *zemirot*.[5] It must also be noted that some scholars doubt whether דְּרוֹר יִקְרָא was actually written by Labrat, and state that it could have been written by an unknown poet named Dunash, or by Dunash bar Tamim of Iraq (ca. 900-960 C.E.)[6]

Like the other *zemirot* included in this chapter, דְּרוֹר יִקְרָא appears in two different versions. The version contained in *Mahzor Vitry*, which may or may not be the original, includes two final verses which are not found anywhere else. In all other versions, including the one presented here, these two verses are replaced with the final verse from another of Labrat's *piyyutim*, דלה שבב.[7]

The first three verses and the sixth each contain the acrostic דונש, spelled out in the first letter of each line. The meter of this poem is more exact than that of the other

[1]Loewe, *Hebrew Minstrelsy*, 15.
[2]*מחזור ויטרי* ed. R. Shimon Halevi Hurwitz,1923, 178.
[3]Rabin, Chaim M. "Dunash Ben Labrat" in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 1977.
[4]ibid. This is also supported by Loewe, Ben-Menahem, and Weinberger.
[5]Abraham Z. Idelsohn. *Jewish Music: Its Historical Development*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1992 (reprint from 1929), 361.
[6]Levin, *Z'mirot Anthology*, 93.
[7]Israel Davidson. *אוצר השירה והפיוט* New York: Ktav, 1970, 113.

two *zemirot*. It consists of eight syllables in a line, the first short, followed by three long, then another short, and three long. In Arabic this meter is referred to as *hazaj*, while in Hebrew it is called הַמַּרְנִין.[8] דְּרוֹר יִקְרָא does not contain a refrain, but is occasionally sung using the first verse of the poem as the refrain.

[8]Weinberger, *Jewish Hymnography*, xxii.

דְּרוֹר יִקְרָא

1. דְּרוֹר יִקְרָא לְבֵן עִם בַּת,
וְיִנְצָרְכֶם כְּמוֹ בָבַת.
נְעִים שִׁמְכֶם וְלֹא יוּשְׁבַּת,
שָׁבוּ וְנוּחוּ בְּיוֹם שַׁבָּת׃

2. דְּרוֹשׁ נָוִי וְאוּלָמִי,
וְאוֹת יָשַׁע עֲשֵׂה עִמִּי.
נְטַע שׂוֹרֵק בְּתוֹךְ כַּרְמִי,
שְׁעֵה שַׁוְעַת בְּנֵי עַמִּי׃

3. דְּרוֹךְ פּוּרָה בְּתוֹךְ בָּצְרָה,
וְגַם בָּבֶל אֲשֶׁר גָּבְרָה.
נְתוֹץ צָרֵי בְּאַף וְעֶבְרָה,
שְׁמַע קוֹלִי בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָא׃

4. אֱלֹהִים תֵּן בַּמִּדְבָּר הַר,
הַדֵּס שִׁטָּה בְּרוֹשׁ תִּדְהָר.
וְלַמַּזְהִיר וְלַנִּזְהָר,
שְׁלוֹמִים תֵּן כְּמֵי נָהָר׃

5. הֲדוֹךְ קָמַי אֵל קַנָּא,
בְּמוֹג לֵבָב וּבְמִגְיָנָה.
וְנַרְחִיב פֶּה וּנְמַלְאֶנָּה,
לְשׁוֹנֵנוּ לְךָ רָנָּה׃

6. דְּעֵה חָכְמָה לְנַפְשֶׁךָ
וְהִיא כֶתֶר לְרֹאשֶׁךָ.
נְצוֹר מִצְוַת קָדוֹשֶׁךָ,
שְׁמוֹר שַׁבָּת קָדְשֶׁךָ׃

Dror Yiqra

1. God will proclaim freedom for man and woman
   And safeguard you like the apple of God's eye.
   Your name will be beautiful, and not be forgotten
   Sit and rest on the Sabbath day.

2. Seek My dwelling, My hall,
   Give a sign of salvation to my people
   Plant a branch in my vineyard,
   Accept the cry of my children

3. Tread the wine-press in Bozrah
   And in Babylon, who overcame us.
   Bring down my enemies in rage and fury
   Hear my voice on the day I call.

4. God, make myrtle, cypress, fir, and pine
   bloom on a desert mountain.
   And for those who caution others, and those who are cautioned,
   Let tranquility flow like the waters of a river.

5. Zealous God, stamp down those who rise over me.
   Cause their courage to fail and them to come to grief.
   We open our mouths wide, and we fill them
   Our words ring out in joy to You.

6. Know: such is wisdom for your soul
   and it will be a crown upon your head.
   Safeguard the commandment of your Holy One
   Keep God's holy Shabbat.

Chapter 3

Commentaries on the *Zemirot*

As I stated in chapter one, the custom of singing *zemirot* was widespread by the sixteenth century. As is the case with most well-loved works of Jewish literature, a group of commentaries slowly grew up around the texts of the *zemirot*. In this chapter I will offer a survey of these various commentaries, and then analyze four of them in greater detail. I will focus specifically on the authors' stated purposes for writing their commentaries, and the particular religious perspectives they portray as they discuss the *zemirot*.

There are over 40 extant commentaries on the Shabbat *zemirot*. With several notable exceptions, the majority of them were written in the twentieth century. While most are in Hebrew, there are translations of the *zemirot* accompanied by commentaries in Yiddish, Judeo-Arabic, and English. Almost all of the commentaries are intended as popular literature, serving to make the *zemirot* accessible to a wide audience, and provide a vehicle for communicating the religious values of the commentators.

The oldest commentaries on the *zemirot* that we have were written in the middle of the seventeenth century. They offer explanations of Isaac Luria's three mystical poems and do not address any of the other *zemirot*. Of these three commentaries, two were written by Luria's disciples, Hayyim Vital (1542-1620) and Israel Sarug (ca.1540-1630). Interestingly, Viital claims in the introduction to his work that he is presenting Luria's own interpretations of his songs.[2] Neither Vital's nor Sarug's commentaries were printed until about a century after their authors' deaths, but it is likely that they circulated in various forms shortly after they were written.[3] Rabbi Ya'akov ben Rafael Levi wrote a

[2]*פרוש לזמירות שבת*, Chayyim Vital. Korzec, 1782. Reprint 1970, 48.
[3]Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah. Jerusalem, Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 1974, 445.

third commentary on Luria's poems entitled *מנחת יעקב*. It was first printed in Prague in 1641.

The first commentary covering all of the well-known *zemirot*, entitled *מטה יהודה*, appeared in Germany around 1721. It was written by R. Yehudah Livva b. Shmuel Oppenheim, about whom little is known. However, Oppenheim's introduction offers an interesting insight into the beginning of this genre.[4] He works very hard to justify the need for writing a commentary to the *zemirot*. First, he states that he decided to write the commentary after he wondered why there were no explanations of the *zemirot* similar to those of the *siddur* or other collections of *piyyutim*, especially since the texts of the *zemirot* are often difficult to understand. Second, he notes that many corrupt versions of the *zemirot* are being circulated in his time, both in manuscript and print. Therefore, he decided to collect as many as possible, and correct the mistakes made by printers who were ignorant of the meter or language of the poems. Third, he states that he has included the references to biblical and rabbinic sources as an educational tool.

Despite having provided these reasons for the commentary, he is self-conscious about having written a work which is not particularly sophisticated and is geared toward a popular audience. "Young people," he says, "and even more so their parents, will laugh at me. They will say, 'What ignoramuses we have as rabbis these days--I could have done the same thing.'" However, from the description of the care with which he compiled this work, it does seem that Oppenheim saw a serious need for a commentary on the *zemirot*.[5]

Two other commentaries to the *zemirot* were written in the twenty years following Oppenheim's work. The first of these is *פרחי שושנים*, which was probably written by R. Moshe ben Eliyahu from Kushet, and published in 1734.[6] Like

[4] *שלושה ספרים נפתחים* ed. Yitschak Slimovitz, Pietrikov, 1910, 5-6.
[5] ibid., 6.
[6] The author's name does not appear anywhere in his work. This attribution is from *בית עקד ספרים*, 1951.

Oppenheim, Moshe b. Eliyahu wrote an elaborate introduction to his commentary. However, his justification for writing the commentary is mystical. He explains that our purpose in life is to strive to reach God. We accomplish this through raising our spiritual levels and ascending through the four worlds of existence. When more people improve their spiritual levels, then more divine blessings will flow into the world. However, only the righteous of a given generation are actually capable of raising their spiritual levels on their own. Therefore, in order to raise his spiritual level, the common person should acquire a teacher and study *aggadah*, not *halakhah*, since it satisfies the soul. He goes on to say that the gates of heaven are open on Shabbat so it is a particularly auspicious time to study. Moshe concludes by stating that *פרחי שושנים* is intended as a tool for this spiritual goal of spiritual elevation.[7]

The second commentary following Oppenheim's is that of R. Jacob Emden (1697-1776). A famous and controversial figure in his life-time, Emden was considered one of the great intellectuals of his generation. He was an anti-Sabbatean polemicist and a harsh critic of his society.[8] His comments on the *zemirot* are included his *siddur*, *בית יעקב*.[9] Unlike *מטה יהודה* and *פרחי שושנים*, Emden's commentary is not specifically intended for a popular audience.

Following Emden's work, there was a hiatus in the production of commentaries to the *zemirot*. With the exception of Seligmann Baer's *זדר עבודת ישראל* (1868), there were none written in the nineteenth century. However, several commentaries were published in the beginning of the twentieth century in Eastern Europe, such as *עת הזמיר* by R.

[7] *שלושה ספרים נפתחים*, 7-8.

[8] M. Samuels, "Jacob Emden" in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 1974.

[9] *בית יעקב*, 1745-1748. New edition, Lemburg, 1904.

Ya'akov Dov Berkovitz (1910).[10] Most of these commentaries are along the model of *מטה יהודה*. They offer explanations of the plain sense of the poems, and a collection of references to biblical and midrashic literature. In addition, *מטה יהודה*, *פרחי שושנים* and *מנחת יעקב* were published together in a collection entitled *שלושה ספרים נפתחים*, which went through several printings over the following fifty years.

The next central work on the *zemirot* was written in Israel in 1949 by Naftali Ben-menachem. His is a critical commentary, and so includes variant readings of the *zemirot*, biblical and rabbinic references, and a brief biography of each of the authors of the *zemirot*. Although Ben-menahem's commentary is largely presented from the perspective of the dispassionate scholar, his introduction, and occasionally his commentary, betray that it is intended as part of a religious Zionist endeavor. He writes in his introduction that the publication is in honor of the first Israel Independence Day, and that the goal of his work is to participate in returning Israel to its former glory through recovering the history of the *zemirot*.[11] In addition, when commenting on the third verse of דרור יקרא, (...דרוך פורה), he interprets the references to *Botzrah* and *Bavel* as the Christian and Muslim nations, respectively. In this way, he gives a nationalistic twist to Dunash ben Labrat's request for God to crush Israel's enemies.[12]

Since 1975, there has been a proliferation of commentaries on the *zemirot*. The majority of them have actually been published in the last decade, either in Israel or the United States in ultra-Orthodox communities.[13] Most of these commentaries are collections of comments by Hasidic rebbes of the last two centuries culled from their writings or passed down orally, and then edited and published by their present followers.

[10]There are three other early twentieth century commentaries: *עונג חיים לשבת* R. Rafael Leifman Halpern, Vilna, 1900; *אוצר התפלות* 1906; and *ספר שלחן שבת* Bulgaria, 1911.

[11]Naftali Ben-menachem. זמירות של ישראל. Jerusalem: *Dfus Merkaz*, 1949, 5.

[12]ibid., 177.

[13]I have appended a list of these Hasidic commentaries at the end of this chapter.

Because of this redaction process, there is no way to actually know when most of the material originated. All of these commentaries are written in Hebrew, with the exception of Nosson Scherman's *Zemiros and Bircas Hamazon* (1979). Published by Artscroll, Scherman's commentary is mostly a collection of earlier works made accessible for English readers. It is written for the lay-person, and presents a standard Orthodox perspective on several general theological issues in Judaism. For example, Scherman encouragcs observing the traditional laws of Shabbat, and speaks freely about God's purpose for us, and God's promise to redeem Israel from exile.[14] Most of these recently published works continue the tradition of popular explanations of the *zemirot*. They are written in easy prose, intended to bring the teachings of the rebbes to their followers at the Shabbat table.

I will now offer a closer examination of two specific collections of commentaries, *שלושה ספרים נפתחים* and *באר החסידות*. Together these commentaries represent both the eighteenth century and twentieth century writings. I will limit my examination to their explanations of the three *zemirot* I translated in chapter two, דרור יקרא, יום שבתון and יום זה לישראל.

As I stated above, *שלושה ספרים נפתחים* a work which includes three of the earliest commentaries to the *zemirot*, *מטה יהודה*, *פרחי שושנים* and *מנחת יעקב*, was published in Pietrikov in 1910. Since *מנחת יעקב* comments only on Luria's *zemirot*, I will not discuss it here. In addition, neither of the other two authors comment on יום זה לישראל. The reason for this absence of commentary is not apparent. The song is printed in the text, but it is possible that it was added in by the editor of the 1910 edition.

Other than the introduction I discussed above, there is actually very little of note in Oppenheim's commentary on the *zemirot*. He offers a very clear and simple explanation of the plain sense meaning of the *zemirot*, and includes a thorough catalogue

[14]Scherman, *Zemiros*, 84-85.

of the references to biblical and rabbinic literature. In general, Oppenheim focuses on the connections between the language of the *zemirot* and that of the Bible. For example, in his comments on the first verse of יום שבתון, Oppenheim notes the connection between the line זְכְרוֹ כְּרֵיחַ הַנִּיחוֹחַ, "remembering it as a delicious fragrance", and Leviticus 2: 2, the end of which reads,

וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת אַזְכָּרָתָהּ הַמִּזְבֵּחָה אִשֶּׁה רֵיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה׃

"And the priest shall offer this token portion [of incense] and he shall turn it into smoke on the altar, as an offering of fire, of delicious fragrance to the Eternal." He specifically points out the relationship between the word זְכְרוֹ and the word אַזְכָּרָתָהּ, both of which have the same root, זכר meaning "remember."[15]

As I stated above, the author of *פרחי שושנים* has a specific agenda of providing spiritual elevation through his commentary on the *zemirot*. It is a short work, and offers brief mystical teachings in connection with the some of the concepts raised in the *zemirot*. For example, in commenting on the refrain of יום שבתון, he refers to a teaching in the *Zohar* that the dove actually returned to Noah just as Shabbat was approaching. He also comments that of all animals the dove has a special relationship with Shabbat, because it does not eat produce which has been cut down from a tree on Shabbat.[16]

R. Moshe b. Eliyahu offers a more explicitly mystical teaching on the last verse of דרור יקרא, which reads, דְּעֵה חָכְמָה לְנַפְשֶׁךָ וְהִיא כֶתֶר לְרֹאשֶׁךָ. "Know: such is the wisdom of your soul, and it will be a crown upon your head." Playing on the words כֶתֶר and חָכְמָה, which are the names of the two uppermost *sefirot*, he states that spiritual elevation takes place on Shabbat in all the worlds, divine and human. In the divine realm, Shabbat, the *sefirah Malkhut*, rises to *Yesod*, and *Chokhmah* rises to the level of *Keter*. The song teaches us that the human being who studies Torah (*Chokhmah*), rises from the lower

[15] *שלושה ספרים נפתחים*, 79.
[16] ibid., 79.

level of the soul, *nefesh*, to the higher level, *neshamah*. These mystical processes occur only on Shabbat.[17] In sum, these two early commentaries reflect the explicit religious goals of their authors. In their own ways, they are each intended not only to enrich the experience of singing *zemirot*, but also to teach Torah to the reader.

באר החסידות, edited by David Abraham Mandelboim (1994) is a very interesting example of the proliferation of Hasidic commentaries on the *zemirot* in recent years. Rather than offering only the comments of a specific rebbe, as do many of the other commentaries, it contains the texts of the *zemirot* accompanied by excerpts from over 800 works of traditional Jewish literature, most of them Hasidic writings. These excerpts discuss either the texts of the *zemirot* themselves, or a concept raised in the *zemirot*. Mandelboim also includes the commentary of Ya'akov Weingarten, a modern ultra-Orthodox Israeli rabbi.[18]

Weingarten's commentary is actually a translation of the *zemirot* into simple modern Hebrew prose. As he states in the subtitle, it is "שוה לכל נפש," "accessible to anyone." Although Weingarten's ultra-Orthodox perspective comes through only occasionally in his translations of the *zemirot*,[19] it is obvious from the introduction to his commentary. For example, he states that the custom of singing *zemirot* comes from the time of creation, when Adam broke into song with the heavenly host on the first Shabbat. He also writes that the authors of the *zemirot* were taken over by the heavenly spirit while they wrote, and were able to channel the souls of all of Israel.[20]

The Hasidic commentaries collected in *באר החסידות* which were written from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, offer insights into various aspects of the

[17]ibid., 85.
[18]Ya'akov Weingarten's commentary was also previously published as a separate work, *שדר זמירות לשבת המפורש*. Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing Institute, 1993.
[19]For example, in Weingarten's translation of the second verse of דרור יקרא, he adds the words, "may we rebuild it soon" with regard to the Temple in Jerusalem. (p. 94).
[20]ibid., 5-6.

Hasidic world-view. They show tremendous concern with observing Shabbat to its fullest extent. For example, in *תולדות יעקב יוסף*, R. Ya'akov Yosef Mochiakh b. Yehudah Hakohen, a disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov, interprets the line יוֹם שַׁבָּתוֹן אֵין לִשְׁכּוֹחַ "You should not forget the Sabbath day," as "On the Sabbath day, do not forget, " in order to teach that forgetfulness and inattentiveness are forbidden on Shabbat.[21] Commenting on the following line, זְכָרוֹ כְּרֵיחַ הַנִּיחוֹחַ, R. Moshe Teitelboim, in his work, *ישמח משה*, draws an analogy between remembering Shabbat and remembering the sacrifices. In Menachot 110a, the Talmud states that anyone who studies the laws of sacrifice merits as if he had actually offered them himself. Teitelboim teaches that if one remembers the "delicious fragrance" of Shabbat during the week, s/he brings the holiness of Shabbat into the weekday world.[22]

The Hasidic commentaries also show a concern for repentence, and a preoccupation with overcoming "the evil urge." For example, one commentator interprets יום שבתון as referring to Yom Kippur, since in the Bible, Yom Kippur is called שבת שבתון. According to his reading, the dove symbolizes the soul which finds rest after repenting on Yom Kippur. In commenting on דרור יקרא, he also states that the freedom referred to in the first line of the song is freedom from the evil urge.[23] R. Avraham Eger from Lublin, in his work *שבט מיהודה*, offers an interesting comment on יום שבתון as a whole. He points out that all the lines at the ends of the verses speak of God's giving strength to human beings. In his opinion, this is to remind us that when we have used up all our own strength, God will step in and help us. He compares this to a situation of war, where people are pushed to handle as much as they can stand, and just when they think they can no longer survive, God helps them win. Using classic Hasidic discourse, Eger then points out that war, מלחמה, is the same as ענג, pleasure, in *gematria*. The time of

[21]*באר החסידות*, ed. David Abraham Mandelboim. B'nei Brak, 1994, 227.
[22]ibid., 227.
[23]ibid., 228. Unfortunately I could not identify this commentator.

עונג שבת is the time of a big meal, which is when one has to wage a war with his/her evil urge not to succumb to gluttony. Thus Shabbat meals are the appropriate time to sing the song יום שבתון, which reminds the singer to annihilate his/her own strength, and instead fill him/herself with the strength of God so that s/he may experience "the true pleasure of Shabbat."[24]

Finally, these Hasidic commentaries show that studying and teaching Torah is of the highest value. For example, R. Natan Alter Brokstein of Lvov states that in the first line of דרור יקרא, which reads, דְּרוֹר יִקְרָא לְבֵן עִם בַּת, "בן" represents Torah, and "בת" represents fear of God. Together, they refer to studying Torah for its own sake. According to Brokstein, studying Torah for its own sake will eventually bring the freedom of the messianic age.[25] Another example of the importance of teaching Torah is offered in a story told by R. Baruch from Zvov. He says that he once was staying at the home of a wealthy and righteous person for Shabbat. However, he found that he could not speak words of Torah there. Eventually he realized that it was because a very evil person had once lived in that house. He checked and found out that it was true. On that Shabbat, he recounts that he prayed with sorrow. His experience offered him an interpretation of a line from דרור יקרא: דְּרוֹשׁ נָוִי וְאוּלָמִי, "Because of the dwelling place, נָוִי, I was silenced, נאלמתי (וְאוּלָמִי), from speaking words of Torah." In sum, the commentaries on the *zemirot* reflect the religious values of their authors. They are, in effect, small sermonic excerpts which are meant to teach all those gathered around the Shabbat table.

[24]ibid., 231.
[25]ibid., 247.

Twentieth Century Hasidic Commentaries on the Zemirot

1. *Zemirot L'shabbat Ul'khol Moadei Hashanah im Minhagim V'chidushei Torah Misefer Divrei Yoel.* (from the works of Rav Yoel Teitelboim) ed. by Shraga Loifer, Brooklyn, 1980.
2. *Sefer Zemirot L'shabbat: Perush Oneg V'simchah B'shabbat.* Brooklyn, 1980.
3. *Zemirot Shabbat Kodesh Im Perush Azamer B'shvahin*, ed. S.C. Grussgott. London, 1992
4. *Seder Zemirot L'shabbat Kodesh: Tov Lehodot.* Jerusalem, 1993.
5. *Zemirot L'shabbat Kodesh Im Perush Ranu Shamayim.* (collected teachings by Rabbi Makashui), ed. Yosef Moshe Friedman. Bedford Hills, NY, 1992.
6 *Kuntres Mizmor L'David Im Zemirot L'shabbat.* (from the family of Maharam Shik), 1994.
7. *Zemirot Shabbat Kodesh L'veit Tsunz.* B'nei Brak, 1994.
8. *Zemirot L'Shabbat Kodesh Kol Aryeh.* Brooklyn, 1994 (commentary by R. Abraham Yehudah Hakohen from Arogzav), ed. Yoel Zisman Aharonreich
9. *Zemirot L'Shabbat, Harim Yiranenu.* (collected from works of Rabbi Yechiel from Zlotshov) Brooklyn, 1997.
10. *Zemirot Shabbat Im Yalkut Zemirot Chukecha* (commentary by the Satmar Rebbe) Kiryat Yoel, 1997.
11. *Nitei Aharon.* Rabbi Aharon Rosenfeld. Monroe, NY, 1998.
12. *Zemirot L'shabbat Or Yisrael.* (from the works of Israel Dov from Viladnek.) Kahal She'erit Yisrael, Spring Valley, NY, 1999
13. *Avodat Levi*, Kiryas Tosh, Quebec, 1999.

Chapter 4

A Liberal Jewish Commentary on the Zemirot

As I discussed at the end of Chapter 1, the *zemirot* are not easily accessible for liberal Jews. First, they are written from a medieval Jewish perspective, which entails not only an adherence to the halakhic system, but a need for Shabbat as a contrast to the existential and physical difficulties of a people in exile. Second, they are written in Hebrew and Aramaic, which makes them difficult, if not impossible, for those who do not have facility in these languages. The commentaries on the *zemirot* that I surveyed in the previous chapter, like the *zemirot* themselves, are all written from within the framework of halakhic Judaism. In addition, with the exception of the Artscroll commentary, they are all written in Hebrew. Therefore, although they are intended for popular audiences, they do not address the needs of the liberal Jewish community. Thus, in the final chapter of this thesis, I have attempted to begin to fill this niche by writing a commentary to the *zemirot* for English-speaking liberal Jews.

This commentary is divided into two sections: *pshat* (plain sense of the text), and *drash* (interpretation). In the *pshat* sections, I have included all of the biblical and midrashic references contained in the *zemirot* themselves. In the *drash* sections, I have brought some interpretations of the texts from other commentaries, and offered some of my own. Like the traditional commentaries I discussed above which reflect the religious values of their cultures, I have attempted to write this commentary so that it addresses at least some issues in the liberal Jewish community today. For example, I will refer to the need for spiritual and personal growth, the divisions within the larger Jewish community, and current events in Israel. The texts of the *zemirot* themselves raise many difficult theological issues, such as the meaning of suffering, life after death, the authority of the commandments, and the nature of the covenant between God and Israel. On the whole, I have not focused on these issues in order to avoid dictating a particular theological

perspective to the liberal reader.

This commentary is meant as a guide for the individual who is just beginning to learn the *zemirot*, and it is interested in expanding his/her Shabbat observance. My hope is that it will provide good material for many a Shabbat dinner-table discussion.

Yom Zeh L'yisrael

יוֹם זֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

1. **This is a day of light and gladness for Israel--**
   Shabbat, the day of peace.

1. יוֹם זֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אוֹרָה וְשִׂמְחָה
   שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה:

2. **You commanded the details as we stood at Mount Sinai**
   To keep Shabbat and holidays all of my life
   To set before me a portion of food, even a full meal--
   Shabbat, the day of peace.

2. צִוִּיתָ פִּקּוּדִים, בְּמַעֲמַד הַר סִינַי,
   שַׁבָּת וּמוֹעֲדִים, לִשְׁמֹר בְּכָל שָׁנַי,
   לַעֲרֹךְ לְפָנַי, מַשְׂאֵת וַאֲרוּחָה,
   שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה:

This is a day...

יוֹם זֶה...

Yom Zeh L'yisrael was written by Rabbi Isaac Handali in the fifteenth century. It focuses on the basic experiences of celebrating Shabbat such as festive meals, comfort, and a time of respite from the difficulties of the week.

1. This is a day of light and gladness...

Pshat (plain meaning of the text): The opening line of this song expresses the simple joy of celebrating Shabbat. The light referred to here is the light of the Shabbat candles which decorate the home. Light is also an additional expression of the positive experience of Shabbat.

Drash (interpretation): Some commentators state that "gladness" specifically refers to the material comforts of Shabbat, such as plentiful meals and time to rest. They interpret "light" as the spiritual manifestation of this happiness. It symbolizes lightness of heart and the Divine blessing which pours on to the Jewish people during Shabbat.[1]

[1]Scherman, *Zemiros*, 84.

Shabbat, the day of peace

Pshat: The Hebrew word *menuchah* literally means rest. However, I have translated it here as "peace" because it implies not only physical rest, but an overall experience of comfort and contentment.

Drash: In its medieval context, this song celebrated Shabbat as a relief from the precarious existence of the Jewish people in exile. It spoke to the existential fear caused by homelessness and subjugation to the will of other nations. Shabbat, as a symbol of God's covenant with the Jewish people, reminded the Jews that God cares for them and grants them a time for rest from their worry. Although today most Jews do not have this same kind of experience, we still have many communal worries, such as the deep divisions between the different movements of Judaism, the difficulty of the political situation in Israel, and the problems involved in rejuvenating our communal religious life. Shabbat can be an opportunity to set aside these concerns and celebrate the positive aspects of being Jewish, both cultural and religious. It is possible to interpret this song on an individual level as well as a communal one. We all need rest. Shabbat can be a refuge from the hectic pace of our everyday lives, a time for emotional release, spiritual rejuvenation, and connection with family and friends.

2. **You commanded the details as we stood at Mount Sinai,**

Drash: Observing Shabbat is not just an experience of the present, it is also a means for connecting to the past. The Rabbis ask us to sees ourselves as if we all had experienced the Exodus from Egypt, and as if we had all stood at Mount Sinai. Our communal memory can serve to unite us to previous generations as well as to shape our identities in the present.

To keep Shabbat and holidays all of my life.

Pshat: Literally, "all of my years."

Drash: Celebrating Shabbat is a lifelong experience. We can use our Shabbat

celebrations as a marker of time, a means to measure how much we have grown and changed through the years. It can also be a time to reflect on the events of the past week.

To set before me a portion of food, even a full meal--

Pshat: The author reminds us that in the Talmud we are taught to have festive meals on Shabbat (BT Shabbat 118b). However, it is unclear from the text whether the author means to say that we are to set up the meals, or whether God does it for us.

Drash: The unclear nature of the sentence above reflects the fact that both human beings and God participate together in the act of creating food. This line also presents a parallelism with the line above it. Both food and holidays are gifts of sustenance from God, and singing these songs at the Shabbat table allows us to offer thanks for these gifts together.

3. Beloved in the hearts of a broken nation **For aching spirits, an extra soul** **It casts away the sigh of the depressed spirit–** **Shabbat, the day of peace.**	3. חֲמֻדַּת הַלְּבָבוֹת, לְאֻמָּה שְׁבוּרָה, לִנְפָשׁוֹת נִכְאֹבוֹת, נְשָׁמָה יְתֵרָה, לְנָפֶשׁ מְצֵרָה, תָּסִיר אֲנָחָה, שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה:
This is a day...	יוֹם זֶה...

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3. Beloved in the hearts of a broken nation

Pshat: Shabbat is a beloved institution of Judaism. The **broken nation** again refers to the scattering of Jews over various lands in the Diaspora.

Drash: Although we may no longer view the presence of Jews in the Diaspora as evidence of broken nation, our brokenness can be understood as the deep rifts in the Jewish community between the Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist movements. We may disagree about how to observe Shabbat, but it can also be an opportunity for us to celebrate together, sharing a meal and the pleasure of singing *zemirot*.

For aching spirits, an extra soul

Pshat: This line refers to the Talmudic interpretation of Exodus 31:17, which reads, "It shall be a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel. For in six days the Eternal made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day God ceased from work and was refreshed."[2] The final word of this verse is "*vayinafash*," which literally means, "He was refreshed." However, its root is the word *nefesh*, which means life or soul. The Rabbis interpreted this phrase to mean that on Shabbat, God gives each Jew an extra soul (BT Beitsah 16a).

[2]All Biblical quotations are taken from the *New JPS Tanakh*. However, I have changed the word "Lord" to "Eternal", and the word "He" to God in keeping with the goal of gender-neutral translations.

Drash: What does it mean to have an extra soul on Shabbat? Rashi comments that it refers to *rochav lev*, expansiveness of heart. When we are not occupied with weekday stresses, we have an expanded ability to give and receive love, and to be present to those around us with added sensitivity and warmth. Shabbat is also a time for spiritual contemplation and prayer. Perhaps we gain an additional soul as we reach closer to God.

It casts away the sigh of the depressed spirit–

Pshat: This stanza as a whole echoes the theme of love between Israel and Shabbat that is present in many medieval poems. Shabbat is the loved one, whose presence cheers the lonely and depressed people.

Drash: The emotions portrayed in this verse remind us of the potential for Shabbat to be an emotionally intimate experience. It offers the opportunity for reflection and examination of our feelings, as well as the time to share them with others.

4. You sanctified and blessed it from among all the days **In six days you finished the work of the world** **On it the melancholy find tranquility and security--** **Shabbat, the day of peace.**	**4. קִדַּשְׁתָּ בֵּרַכְתָּ, אוֹתוֹ מִכָּל יָמִים,** **בְּשִׁשָּׁת כִּלִּיתָ מְלָאכֶת עוֹלָמִים,** **בּוֹ מָצְאוּ עֲגוּמִים, הַשְׁקֵט וּבְטָחָה,** **שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה:**
This is a day...	**יוֹם זֶה...**

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4. In six days you finished the work of the world

Pshat: This line and the preceeding one both reflect the language of Genesis 2:1-4, the conclusion of the creation story.

Drash: This stanza reminds us that on Shabbat we imitate God's actions both by resting after a week of work, and by declaring Shabbat sanctified time. The process of sanctification is setting aside something, not just for its usefulness, but simply for its being. Shabbat therefore, is sanctified time because it is not time which is understood to be used for work or creativity, but simply to be. Thus in sanctifying Shabbat we are actually sanctifying ourselves. We have this time to appreciate each other not for our daily functioning, but simply for our beings.

5. You commanded us with awe in the prohibition of work **I will deserve the glorious kingship if I keep Shabbat.** **I will offer tribute to the Awesome One, an offering of aromatic spices--** **Shabbat, the day of peace.**	5. לְאִשּׁוּר מְלָאכָה, צִוִּיתָנוּ נוֹרָא, אֶזְכֶּה הוֹד מְלוּכָה, אִם שַׁבָּת אֶשְׁמְרָה, אַקְרִיב שַׁי לַמּוֹרָא, מִנְחָה מֻרְקֶחָה, שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה:
This is a day...	יוֹם זֶה...

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5. You commanded us with awe in the prohibition of work.

Pshat: It is unclear whether the word "*nora*," "awe," modifies "commanded," or is actually an appellation for God, which would render the line, "You, Awesome One, commanded us in the prohibition of work." I have chosen the former translation since to have "*nora*" as an adverb creates a syntactially clearer reading of the Hebrew sentence.

I will deserve the glorious kingship if I keep Shabbat.

Pshat: This line refers to the midrash which teaches that if all of Israel kept one Shabbat correctly, the messiah would come. (Exodus Rabbah 25b, PT Taanit 74a). The "glorious kingship" is that of the descendent of King David, who is expected to rule over Israel in the messianic era.

Drash: Whether or not we subscribe to the notion that there is one correct way to keep Shabbat, this midrash implicitly acknowledges the difficulty of observing Shabbat at all. We are asked to rearrange our lives according to a specified temporal demand. However, the midrash also teaches that the rewards for doing so can be enormous. The spiritual rest we can gain by keeping Shabbat allows us to function better as human beings, and thus participate more fully in *tikkun olam*, perfecting the world, the process through which we may someday reach the messianic era.

I will offer tribute to the Awesome One, an offering of aromatic spices--

Pshat: The phrase "tribute to the Awesome One" is taken directly from Psalms 76:12. The sentence as a whole is probably a continuation of a vision of the messianic era in which the Temple will be rebuilt, and individuals will be able to offer sacrifices there.

Drash: It is also possible to understand the celebration of Shabbat itself as an offering to God, concluded with the presentation of spices during *Havdalah*.

6. Renew our Temple, remember its destruction **Give Your goodness, our Deliverer,** **to those who are saddened,** **Who sit on Shabbat in song and praise--** **Shabbat, the day of peace.** **This is a day...**	6. חַדֵּשׁ מִקְדָּשֵׁנוּ זָכְרָה נֶחֳרֶבֶת, טוּבְךָ מוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ, תְּנָה לַנֶּעֱצֶבֶת, בְּשַׁבָּת יוֹשֶׁבֶת, בְּזִמְרָה וּשְׁבָחָה, שַׁבָּת מְנוּחָה: יוֹם זֶה...

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6. Renew our Temple, remembered in destruction
Give Your goodness, our Deliverer, to those who are saddened

Pshat: There is a repeated grammatical inconsistency in these two lines. First, the expression *zokhrah necherevet* (remember its destruction) is gramatically feminine, although it seems to modify *mikdash* (Temple), which is masculine. It is therefore possible that the author is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, which is grammatically feminine. Second, *ne'etsevet* (those who are saddened) is also in the feminine singular. It is possible that this continues to refer to Jerusalem, although some commentators suggest that it refers to another absent subject, *Knesset Yisrael*, (the congregation of Israel), which is also grammatically feminine singular.[3] I have translated it according to the latter suggestion since it reads better in the rest of the verse. I have also rendered it as plural to imply the sense of the collective noun. This verse also furthers the traditional messianic vision presented in the preceeding lines.

Drash: Talmudic teaching provides an additional connection between Shabbat and the messianic era. Shabbat is considered a "semblance of the world to come" (BT Berachot 57b). The world to come may refer either to life after death, or to the end of time. Whether or not we hold the traditional theological hopes for rebuilding the Temple or the coming of the messiah, Shabbat presents us with a moment to experience the essence of peace and joy, and to reflect on the ultimate goals which we strive to fulfill in our lives.

[3] *באר התסידות* ed. David Abraham Mandelboim. B'nei Brak, 1994.

Yom Shabbaton

יוֹם שַׁבָּתוֹן

1. Do not forget the Sabbath Day
Remembering it like a delicious fragrance
The dove found rest on it,
and there rest those who are exhausted.

The dove found rest...

1. יוֹם שַׁבָּתוֹן אֵין לִשְׁפּוֹחַ,
זִכְרוֹ כְּרֵיחַ הַנִּיחוֹחַ.
יוֹנָה מָצְאָה בּוֹ מָנוֹחַ,
וְשָׁם יָנוּחוּ יְגִיעֵי כֹחַ:

יוֹנָה מָצְאָה...

This song was written by Judah Halevi (1075-1141C.E.), one of the most famous medieval Jewish poets. It speaks in simple but powerful language, and uses many biblical allusions. It is specifically centered around the story of Noah, whose name literally means "rest." The poem as a whole plays on the contrast between God, who is all-powerful and the source of all strength, and the human beings, who need rest in order to be strong.

1. Remembering it like a delicious frangrance

Pshat: The expression *reiach nichoah*, (delicious fragrance) is the phrase used to describe the smell of sacrifices. A clear example of it appears in Leviticus 1:9, which reads. "...the priest shall turn the whole into smoke on the altar as a burnt offering, an offering by fire of *reiach nihoach* to the Eternal." The author probably uses this language to remind us that observing Shabbat, like the practice of sacrifice in its time, inspires Divine satisfaction.

The dove found rest on it.

Pshat: The language of this line is taken from Genesis 8:9, "But the dove could not find a resting place for its foot, and returned to him to the ark, for there was water all over the earth." The continuation of the story tells how Noah waited seven days between each

time he sends out the dove to find land. Although the biblical text does not specifically refer to Shabbat, Halevi implies that the interval of seven days could be read as such.
Drash: Since the early rabbinic interpretations of the Song of Songs, the dove has been a common symbol for the people of Israel, who find rest on Shabbat.

And there rest those who are exhausted.

Pshat: This expression literally reads, "and there rest those whose strength is spent." The language is taken from Job 3:17.

Drash: In its biblical context, this phrase actually refers to death, not Shabbat. It appears in a speech by Job who is lamenting his suffering, and stating that it would be better for him not to have been born. The context of the verse presents the connection between Shabbat and the "world to come," as noted in the commentary to *Yom Zeh L'yisrael*. Here, Shabbat, like death, provides a rest from suffering. Other commenators suggest that "there" refers to paradise, and cite the midrash that teaches that the gates of heaven were opened to the dove, who plucked the olive branch "there" and brought it back to Noah (Bereishit Rabbah 9:7). In paradise, the righteous will rest from the exhaustion caused by their work in the world overcoming sin.

There is an additional connection between Shabbat and death. If we are consumed by our work, and it is the sole aspect from which we derive meaning in our lives, then resting from work can feel like death. However, Shabbat, which provides a time to experience the holiness in simply being, and not creating, can sometimes help us gain perspective in our lives.

2. This day is glorious for the faithful ones **Parents and children are careful to guard it.** **It was engraved on the two tablets of stone** **By the One of great vigor and bold strength.**	2. הַיּוֹם נִכְבָּד לִבְנֵי אֱמוּנִים, זְהִירִים לִשְׁמֹרוֹ אָבוֹת וּבָנִים. חָקוּק בִּשְׁנֵי לוּחוֹת אֲבָנִים, מֵרוֹב אוֹנִים וְאַמִּיץ כֹּחַ.
The dove found rest...	יוֹנָה מָצְאָה...

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2. This day is glorious for the faithful ones

Pshat: Literally, "the children of the faithful ones." This refers to Israel, who are faithful to God by keeping Shabbat.

Drash: Some commentators suggest that "the faithful ones" are actually the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are exemplary in their faithfulness to God. "The children of the faithful ones," are Israel.

It was engraved on the two tablets of stone

Pshat: The author refers here to the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. According to the biblical text, the tablets were inscribed by God (Exodus 32:18).

By the One of great vigor and bold strength.

Pshat: This characterization of God is taken from Isaiah 40:26.

Drash: The verse quoted in this line appears in one of the most famous chapters of Isaiah, which is read as the haftarah on the Shabbat following the Ninth of Av. In it Isaiah describes the comfort which God will offer to the people of Israel following the destruction of Jerusalem. The context of God offering comfort to the people of Israel reflects again the theme of Shabbat as a time of comfort and relief from suffering. It also contrasts God's great strength with the ephemeral strength of human beings.

3. All entered into the covenant together	3. וּבָאוּ כֻלָּם בִּבְרִית יַחַד,
"We will do" and "we will hear" they said as one.	נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמַע אָמְרוּ כְּאֶחָד.
And they opened their mouths and answered "the Eternal is One"	וּפָתְחוּ וְעָנוּ יְ־וָה אֶחָד,
Blessed is the One who gives strength to the weary.	בָּרוּךְ הַנּוֹתֵן לַיָּעֵף כֹּחַ.
The dove found rest...	יוֹנָה מָצְאָה...

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3. All entered into the covenant together

Drash: Some commentators say that the revelation at Mount Sinai took place on Shabbat.[4]

"We will do" and "we will hear" they said as one.

Pshat: This line is actually a combination of two different verses in Exodus in which the people of Israel respond to the experience of the revelation at Mount Sinai. In Exodus 23:4, the Torah tells us that the people "answered with one voice." Exodus 23:7 reads, "Then he [Moses] took the record of the covenant and read it aloud to the people. And they said, 'All that the Eternal has spoken we will do and we will hear.'"

And they opened their mouths and answered "the Eternal is One"

Pshat: This line is a reference to the second rendition of the Ten Commandments, which appears in Deuteronomy. It is followed by the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4.

Blessed is the One who gives strength to the weary.

Pshat: This is another quotation from chapter in Isaiah discussed above. (Isaiah 40:29)

[4] *בית יעקב*, Lemburg, 1904, 171.

Drash: Commentators state that this line refers to the midrash which teaches that the awe of hearing God's voice at Mount Sinai caused the souls of all of the people to depart, whereupon God sent angels and life-giving dew to revive them.[5]

[5]Scherman, *Zemiros*, 170. Unfortunately, Scherman does not give a reference for this midrash, and I was not able to find it.

4. God spoke in holiness on the mountain of instruction **"Remember and "Keep" the seventh day.** **All of God's commandments are to be equally learned** **Gather your courage and strength.**	4. דִּבֶּר בְּקָדְשׁוֹ בְּהַר הַמּוֹר, יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי זָכוֹר וְשָׁמוֹר. וְכָל פְּקוּדָיו יַחַד לְגָמוֹר, חֲזֹק מָתְנַיִם וְאַמֵּץ כֹּחַ.
The dove found rest...	יוֹנָה מָצְאָה...

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4. God spoke in holiness on the mountain of instruction

Pshat: The word "*mor*," translated here as "instruction," is an unusual form. It probably comes from same root as *moreh*, teacher. However, it is also possible that it refers to Mount Moriah, where the binding of Isaac took place. There are some traditional texts which conflate the two mountains of Sinai and Moriah. It may also mean myrrh, although this does not seem to suit the context at all.[6]

"Remember and "keep" the seventh day.

Pshat: This line refers again to the two renditions of the Ten Commandments. The commandment for Shabbat in Exodus begins "Remember the Shabbat...," while the one in Deuteronomy begins, "Keep the Shabbat..." (Exodus 20:8, Deuteronomy 5:12).

Gather your courage and strength.

Pshat: Literally, "gird your loins and brace your strength." This line is a quotation from Nahum 2:2. The context of this verse fits well with the point of the line in the poem, since the biblical text speaks of victory as the reward for keeping God's commandments. The prophet encourages the people to fulfill their promises to God.

[6]*Mizmor Shir*, 66.

Drash: In both this verse and the preceeding one, Halevi depicts Shabbat as part of the ultimate covenant between God and the Jewish people. The people agree to accept the gift of Shabbat, and so God gives them strength. Halevi then reminds the reader to observe God's commandments with energy and vigor. Shabbat is thereby a vehicle through which God and the Jewish people prove their loyalty to one another.

5. The people who wandered like a lost sheep **God will remember to watch over them in covenant and oath** **And will not transgress them, causing evil to happen** **As You swore upon the waters of Noah.**	5. הָעָם אֲשֶׁר נָע כַּצֹּאן טָעָה, יִזְכּוֹר לְפָקְדוֹ בִּבְרִית וּשְׁבוּעָה. לְבַל יַעֲבוֹר בָּם מִקְרֵי רָעָה, כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ עַל מֵי נֹחַ.
The dove found rest...	יוֹנָה מָצְאָה...

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5. God will remember to watch over them in covenant and oath

Pshat: This line is very difficult to translate because the subject of the sentence is ambiguous. I have translated it above with God as the subject of the first verb, and "*l'fokdo*" as "His [God's] watching over them." This reading accords better with the rest of the verse, since God is the subject of the two following sentences. However, it may be the case that the subject of the first verb is "the people," in accord with that of the preceeding line. In that case," *l'fokdo*" may be translated as "will uphold it," which renders the line as "[the people] will remember to uphold it[(Shabbat, or the commandments] through covenant and oath." In this reading, the subject then changes in the third line of the verse.

As You swore upon the waters of Noah.

Pshat: The language of this line is taken from Isaiah 54:9-10, which reads, "For this to Me is like the waters of Noah. As I swore that the waters of Noah nevermore would flood the earth, so I swear that I will not be angry with you or rebuke you. For the mountains may move and the hills be shaken, but My loyalty shall never move from you, nor My covenant of friendship be shaken--said the Eternal, who takes you back in love."

Drash: By quoting Isaiah, the author reworks the theme of Noah introduced in the first verse. Similar to Isaiah's statements in chapter 40, the prophet reminds the people of

God's promise to them. Shabbat, the day of rest and comfort, is the ultimate sign of God's promise, as well as a means for the Jewish people to sustain their relationship to God.

Dror Yiqra

דְּרוֹר יִקְרָא

1. God will proclaim freedom for man and woman
And safeguard you like the apple of God's eye.
Your name will be beautiful, and not be forgotten
Sit and rest on the Sabbath day.

1. דְּרוֹר יִקְרָא לְבֶן עִם בַּת,
וְיִנְצְרֵכֶם כְּמוֹ בָבַת.
נְעִים שִׁמְכֶם וְלֹא יִוָּשֵׁבַת,
שְׁבוּ וְנוּחוּ בְּיוֹם שַׁבָּת:

This song was written by Dunash ben Labrat in the 10th century. It is one of the oldest extant *zemirot*, and is written in poetic Hebrew. Similar to *Yom Shabbaton*, the context of the biblical verses which the author quotes are important in understanding the poem. The central theme of the text is the protection that God will provide for those who observe Shabbat.

1. God will proclaim freedom for man and woman

Pshat: The language of this line is taken from Leviticus 25:10, which speaks of the freedom proclaimed during the Jubilee year. The Jubilee year was a time in ancient Israel when all debts were forgiven, and all members of a family could return to their ancestral portions of land.

Drash: Traditional commentators debate the meaning of the freedom described here. It may refer either to the freedom of the ultimate redemption at the end of time[7], or to the freedom from weekday labors.[8] The context of the biblical verse suggests that the freedom is freedom from the responsibility of earning money or worrying about debts.

[7] בית יעקב , 181.
[8] שלושה ספרים נפתחים ed. Ya'akov Shlimovitz. Pietrikov, 1910. This comment appears in the commentary מטה יהודה, 84.

And safeguard you like the apple of God's eye.

Pshat: Literally, "the pupil of God's eye" (Deut. 32:10, Zech. 2:12). The meaning of this idiom is that God will protect the people, God's most delicate and prized possession.

Your name will be beautiful, and not be forgotten

Pshat: The implication is that God will reward you for keeping Shabbat with a good reputation and many descendants.

Drash: We read in *Pirkei Avot* 4:17, "Rabbi Shimon taught: There are three crowns; the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty. But the crown of a good name is superior to them all." This teaching reminds us that we build a good reputation not only through our usefulness in society, but also through improving our personal relationships. Shabbat, when we are not obligated in our professional roles, is a prime opportunity for this kind of personal growth.

2. Seek My dwelling, My hall,	2. דְּרוֹשׁ נָוִי וְאוּלָמִי,
Give a sign of salvation to my people	וְאוֹת יְשַׁע עֲשֵׂה עִמִּי.
Plant a branch in my vineyard,	נְטַע שׂוֹרֵק בְּתוֹךְ כַּרְמִי,
Behold the cry of my children	שְׁעֵה שַׁוְעַת בְּנֵי עַמִּי:

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2. Seek My dwelling, My hall,

Pshat: The biblical context of these words suggest that the author is referring to the Temple in Jerusalem. (Joel 2:17)

Give a sign of salvation to my people
Plant a branch in my vineyard,

Pshat: These verses are based on a parable in Isaiah Chapter 5. In this text, God plants a choice vine which represents the people of Israel.

Drash: This verse expresses a desire for the messianic era. Some commentators interpret the "branch" as the messiah who will be planted among the people.[9] Others read it as a plea for the final redemption when the Jews will again be planted in the land of Israel.[10] An additional interpretation is implied by the context of the biblical reference of the "branch." The parable discusses Israel's disobedience to God's will, and their inability to appreciate what God has done for them. According to the text, God has planted the choice vine, but is only able to harvest wild grapes. Isaiah 5:11-12 continues God's expression of disappointment with the people. "Ah, those who chase liquor from early in the morning, and until late in the evening are inflamed by wine! Who, at their banquets, have lyre and lute; timbrel, flute, and wine; but who never give a thought to the plan of the Eternal, and take no note of what God is designing." It is probable that through this biblical reference, the author is warning Israel to behave well, otherwise they will not merit redemption. In addition, the author offers a particular warning against

[9]ibid., 82.
[10]Scherman, *Zemiros,* 181.

drunkenness at Shabbat meals, which should instead be a time to be thankful for God's gifts.

3. Tread the wine-press in *Bozrah*	**3. דְּרוֹךְ פּוּרָה בְּתוֹךְ בָּצְרָה,**
And in Babylon, who overcame us.	**וְגַם בָּבֶל אֲשֶׁר גָּבְרָה.**
Bring down my enemies in rage and fury	**נְתוֹץ צָרַי בְּאַף וְעֶבְרָה,**
Hear my voice on the day I call.	**שְׁמַע קוֹלִי בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָא:**

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3. Tread the wine-press in Bozrah

Pshat: This is a reference to Isaiah 63:1-4. Isaiah offers a vision of God returning from battle after avenging Israel's defeat among the nations. The text presents the image of God's garments spattered with the red of blood, as one who operated a wine-press would be spattered with the red of grapes. The context of the Biblical verse furthers the negative imagery of wine and grapes implied in the previous stanza.

Hear my voice on the day I call.

Drash: These expressions of violence seem especially out of place on Shabbat. However, it is important to note that it is a call for God to punish those who seem to deserve it, not a call to practice indiscriminate vengeance. We all have adversarial forces in our lives, and need to express anger towards them. Shabbat can be an opportunity to reflect on our frustrations and express them in a non-harmful way, thus granting emotional release.

4. God, make myrtle, cypress, fir, and pine **Bloom on a desert mountain.** **And for those who caution others, and those who are cautioned,** **Let tranquility flow like the waters of a river.**	4. אֱלֹהִים תֵּן בַּמִּדְבָּר הַר, הֲדַס שִׁטָּה בְּרוֹשׁ תִּדְהָר. וְלַמַּזְהִיר וְלַנִּזְהָר, שְׁלוֹמִים תֵּן כְּמֵי נָהָר:

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4. God, make myrtle, cypress, fir and pine
Bloom on a desert mountain.

Pshat: The image presented in these two lines is taken from Isaiah 41:19. Isaiah expresses a utopian vision in which God will cause the desert to bloom.

Drash: In commenting on this verse from Isaiah, Rashi interprets the different trees as symbols for wisdom, goodness, and peace. In general, thriving vegetation is symbolic of abundant divine blessing.

And for those who caution others, and those who are cautioned,

Pshat: The language of this line is taken from Ezekiel 3:16-21. Ezekiel reports that God tells him to warn the sinners amidst Israel. If he fails to warn them, then he is as guilty as they. If they continue sinning despite his warning, then they will be punished, but he will be saved.

Let tranquility flow like the waters of a river.

Pshat: This line uses an image from Isaiah 48:18, which reads, "If only you would heed my commands! Then your prosperity would be like river, your triumph like the waves of the sea." The implication is that there will be peace and prosperity for those who keep Shabbat.

Drash: This verse and the preceding one present complementary visions of what will happen if Israel keeps Shabbat; Israel's enemies will be destroyed, and the righteous will be rewarded with peace. However, it is also possible to interpret them as presenting

opposing visions of society. Verse 3 describes a situation in which nations are antagonize one another, which provokes God's wrath. Verse 4 describes a situation in which people are involved in communal living. They are taking responsibility for their own actions and show concern for the actions of others. This is a society in which there is peace and tranquility, and it ultimately yields God's blessings.

5. Zealous God, stamp down those who rise over me. **Cause their courage to fail and them to come to grief,** **We open our mouths wide, and we fill them** **Our words ring out in joy to You.**	5. הַדּוֹךְ קָמַי אֵל קַנָּא, בְּמוֹג לֵבָב וּבְמִגְיָנָה. וַנַּרְחִיב פֶּה וּנְמַלְאֵנָה, לְשׁוֹנֵנוּ לְךָ רִנָּה:

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5. Zealous God, stamp down those who rise over me.
Cause their courage to fail and them to come to grief.

Pshat: Literally, "with melting heart and grief." The language of this verse is taken from Ezekiel 21:20. This continues the theme of Verse 3, in which the speaker asks God to avenge his/her enemies.

Drash: In this verse, Ezekiel is not speaking about Israel's enemies, but about Israel itself, who will come to grief because of its people's evil ways. Our own wrongdoings can overshadow us, whether they are transgressions against others or against ourselves. Shabbat is an opportunity to put our feelings in perspective, and begin a fresh start in the new week.

We open our mouths wide, and we fill them

Pshat: The language of this line is taken from Psalms 81:11. The Psalm reiterates the idea that if Israel obeys God's commandments, God will reward them and punish their enemies.

Drash: The concluding line of this Psalm is, "I [God] sated you with honey from the rock." Read in conjunction with the following stanza, honey represents our inner knowledge and connection with God. On Shabbat we can take the time to explore this connection, which can replace the bad taste left in our mouths from the difficulties of the week.

Our words ring out in joy to You.

Pshat: The language of this line is taken from Psalm 126: 2. Psalm 126 is traditionally added to the beginning of the Grace After Meals on Shabbat and festivals.

6. Know: such is wisdom for your soul **It will be a crown upon your head.** **Safeguard the commandment of your Holy One** **Keep God's holy Shabbat.**	**6. דְּעֵה חָכְמָה לְנַפְשֶׁךָ** **וְהִיא כֶתֶר לְרֹאשֶׁךָ.** **נְצוֹר מִצְוַת קְדוֹשֶׁךָ,** **שְׁמוֹר שַׁבַּת קָדְשֶׁךָ:**

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6. Know: such is wisdom for your soul

Pshat: This line is a quotation from Proverbs 24:14. The surrounding verses read, "My son, eat honey, for it is good; let its sweet drops be on your palate. Know: such is wisdom for your soul; if you attain it, there is a future; your hope will not be cut off." The "wisdom" referred to here is Torah.

Drash: The context of this Biblical verse continues the imagery of honey from the previous stanza. Here honey represents knowledge of Torah. The juxtaposition of these two verses creates a subtext in this poem in which eating honey is to taste the sweetness of contemplation and study on Shabbat. Shabbat lends the opportunity to access both the knowledge of our innermost beings through spiritual centeredness, and to acquire new knowledge through the study of Torah.

And it will be a crown upon your head.

Pshat: This reflects the teaching of *Pirkei Avot* quoted above.

Safeguard the commandment of your Holy One
Keep God's holy Shabbat.

Drash: Through the use of the word "*ntsor*" (safeguard), the poet weaves into this final stanza the teaching of the first stanza of the poem, "And [God] will safeguard (*v'yintsorkhem*) you like the apple of God's eye." The ultimate purpose of Shabbat is as an expression of the covenant between God and Israel. If Israel carefully guards God's holy Shabbat, God will carefully guard the people of Israel.

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