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Israel Nazara
His Contribution to Liturgical Poetry.

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Inscribed with love
to
Rev. Dr. Henry Berxovitz D.D.
of Philadelphia.

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זמירות ישראל, ומה נחמד, לזמירות ישראל

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Chapter I.

Developement of Hebrew Sacred Poetry.

Not long did Israel's harp remain silent, while hung up on the willows by the rivers of Babylon. An instrument so accustomed to play to the accompaniment of the songs of an inspired soul, at the slightest touch of a favorable breeze, began to give forth music again. The music was indeed mournful and plaintive, but it was music nevertheless.

The Jews, after they became settled in Babylon, and after having somewhat adapted themselves to their environment, their first thought must have been, what is to be their destiny. The heartrending question no doubt, was asked by many a pious soul

'No Temple and no sacrifice, How can we sing the song of the Lord in a strange land?' All their thoughts were centered on Jerusalem

They loved to see at least the ruins of the Holy City, the dust of the Holy Land, the stones of her destroyed buildings were precious to them. And these sentiments were poured forth in prayer and Psalm. The One hundred and second Psalm was ~~no~~ doubt composed during the Babylonian captivity.

1. Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee.
2. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily.
3. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth.
4. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping.
5. Because of thine indignation and of thy wrath: for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.
6. Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.
7. For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.
8. So the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord, and all the kings of the earth thy glory.

16. When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory. 17. He shall regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.

The Prophet Ezeiel impressed on the minds of the people, that no man suffers for the sins of his fathers and that even the sinner need not die, that the merciful God is ever ready to receive him, if he repent of his evil.

And so the people would gather to listen to the exhortations of the prophets, and would confess their sins. Congregations were no doubt formed where the people would come together for instruction and prayer. While sacrifices could not be offered their spiritual yearning was satisfied in pouring out their hearts to God in Psalms of mourning and of penitence, composed by and for them. In this manner prayer became a temporary substitute for sacrifice, and thus the nucleus of public worship and liturgy was formed.

When the exiles returned to Palestine and the Temple was rebuilt and sacrifices reinstituted, Psalms and prayer began to play a more prominent part alongside of sacrificial worship. Of course, we find music and Psalms also in the first Temple, as in the account given of the musical liturgical service, in *Chronicles II. Ch. XXIX. 26-30.*, but it is not to such an extent as in the Second Temple. In the second Temple, the Psalms and prayers did not become, perhaps, an integral part of the sacrifice, but went alongside with it. "In the Mishnah" are given the Psalms for each day and the reason why they were chosen. Then there were the Festival Psalms as it is called the "Hallel" in which not only the Levites, but the whole assembly took part. In the same Mishnah *Tamid v.* we find, that the morning service of

¹ *Tamid III. Rosh Hashannah 30. b. 31. a. Sopherim XVIII*

² *Jew. Encycl. VIII 137.*

the Temple, held by the priestly hand on the Mosaic consisted of: the Doxology of ~~Sole~~ Love (Anavah Rabbah) the recital of the Ten Commandments, the three paragraphs of the Shema and the Benedictions of the Amidah. It would be a mistake to state that the Synagogue was instituted as a place of prayer, to replace sacrifice. The Synagogue was as it was called Beth Hachneses a House of Assembly or more correctly a Beth-Hamedrash a House of Interpretation, and it was chiefly a place of instruction and of interpretation of the Law, while worship was only a secondary matter. Ludwig Blau¹ quite correctly states that "the earliest elements of Synagogal worship were developed from the Temple service and the custom of Sacrificial watches (~~3-11~~) as well as from private and public worship, from Psalms and Prayers which were composed at

¹ Jewish Encycl. VIII 137

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different times for special occasions."

It was left for the Men of the Great Assembly, under the leadership of Ezra, who instituted daily prayer especially the 18 benedictions and the reading of portions of the Law.

As time went on, many of the Rabbis composed prayers for their private devotion, which later passed into the Liturgy.

It was only with the destruction of the Second Temple, when the synagogue became a "miniature sanctuary". The synagogue became the centre of the communal life. The people flocked thither to hear the Word of God and the daily liturgy became a part and parcel of his daily life. The prayers then replaced the sacrifices. And render as bullocks the offering of our lips (R.V.) Hosea 14. 2 was interpreted to mean prayer. The passage psalms 132:16

The activity of the so called Men of the Great Assembly lasted over 200 years.

"And ye shall serve him with your whole heart" was interpreted, to be prayer.

What is the service of the heart, but prayer.

After a cycle of years, the simple prayers no longer sufficed to fill the spiritual needs of the people. A soul that loves her God, wants to converse with him to give expression of her love and devotion, in words as well as in deeds. This lack of rest was especially felt on the day of the New Year, when over a half of the day was spent in the Synagogue, and even more so on the Day of Atonement.

It is then that the age of the Pijjutim began.

With a people so essentially religious as the Jews, and living constantly a life of self-sacrifice and martyrdom, it is but natural they should pour forth their woes and longings in religious songs. These songs, or Pijjutim, as they are called, were subsequently adopted in the Liturgy.

"The word *Pizjut* (plural *Pizjutim*) is derived from the Greek term for poetry, perhaps more directly from (*poietēs*). The author of a *pizjut* is called "*payjetan*"; a neo-Hebrew form derived from "*pizjut*". In *Midrashic* literature the word is used merely in the general sense of "fiction" (*Gen. R. LXXXV. Yalk., Dan. 1063*) while *Payjetan* is used in the technical sense of an author of liturgical poetry.¹

The earliest writers of the new-Hebrew verse arose about the 7th century. Coming in contact with the Arabs, and living under their rule and literary influence, they began to imitate their metric compositions. The persecutions which the Jews suffered under the early Christians, gave way to the more tolerant treatment accorded to them by the Mohammedans, after their conquest of Western Asia, and this, in no small degree

¹ N. Deutsch in *Jewish Encycl.* vol. X. 656.

tended to awaken their soul to sing; But while the Arabic poet sang of war, of fast steeds, and of impassioned love, the new Hebrew poetry knew not of a more worthy and inspiring subject than God and his beloved people, the children of Israel.

The earliest of the Paggutim we meet with, is Jose ben Jose (Hayakom). His date has been given variously from the 6th to the 8th century. He is quoted by Saadia and this would only prove that he lived not later than 850.

His poems are unrhymed and without metre, he uses the alphabetical acrostics, he also makes use of parallel phrases, all these go to show that he lived in an age of transition from Biblical to the new-Hebrew poetry.

His Abodah for the Day of Atonement is a liturgical epic, starting with the creation of man, sinfulness of the first generations, Abraham's recognition of God, the elation

of his children as Gods chosen people and the calling
of the Aaronic family to the service of the Temple and
then he goes on describing according to the Mishnah
the service of the Temple on the Day of Atonement.

One of his alphabetical poems is for the morning service of the New Year beginning with the words
אֵלֶיךָ אֱלֹהִים חַי וְקַיִם כְּבֹדוֹ אֲחֻזָּתוֹ (פסוק). *אלהים חיים ועדים כבודו אחוזתו*

It is a double alphabetical acrostic and each verse ends with the word (20th) Kingdom. His poetry is simple and beautiful and is marked by an elevation of thought.

The first one to introduce rhyme into Hebrew poetry is said to have been a certain Jannai, probably an inhabitant of Palestine. He also used the Alphabetical acrostic and wore his name into verse. We have a few of his piyyutim for the special Sabbaths and also the poem *shema shema yisroel* included in the Passover Haggadah.

There is no rhyme but the word *וְכֵן* closes every line while the refrain is *וְכֵן בְּרַחֲמֵי* "And it was at midnight."

Most of Jannai's productions are versified *Agadas*. His verse is rather agreeable, but on a whole his poetry is heavy and devoid of poetic charm.

One of the first and most prolific *piyyutanim* was Eliezer ben Kalis or Kaliri. Owing to the fact that we have none of his poems for the second days of the festivals or for *Simchat Torah*, (Rejoicing of the Law) as well as his intimate knowledge of the Palestinian Talmud and the names of Palestinian places, points to Palestine as his probable home.

Mystery was woven around his birth by tradition. Some claimed that he was one of the *Tanna'im*, but this altogether out of question, and this probably accounts for the popularity of his *piyyutim*. His compositions made their way into the

liturgies of Babylonian, Italian, German and French, except the Spanish Jews.

He wrote about 200 poems, including hymns for the holidays, songs of lamentation principally for the fasts, and many other compositions.

He was a Talmudic Scholar. Many of his poems are didactic and contain clever allusions to the Medrash. In the opening prayer for dew (Tal) he begins "שמעתי ושמעתי" "With His permission, I will speak in riddles" and indeed riddles they are, and it would require a great deal of knowledge and labor to guess them, as they are some time very obscure allusions to Medrashim.

His style is very and lacks poetic charm, in places it is a mere jumble of words and he often does violence to the Hebrew language by defying all rules of grammar. Ibn Ezra in his commentary to Koheleth takes him to task for having treated

the Hebrew language "like an unfenced city".¹

But with all the liberties that he took with the Hebrew language in coining new words, and inventing new verbs from nouns, he invests his language with life and vitality.

Zung in his perspicacious way says of Kalis the following: "He deals with the genius of the Hebrew language as it were, despotically, creates artificial words and forms, but with the skill of a master, and with gushing variety, that the nobility of thought makes us overlook the hardness of expression, especially in cases, in which the religious fervor of the Rappaport communicates itself to the critic. Kalis language abounding in hard and obscure expressions is not a work of literary art in the Periclean sense, but is rather like a Cyclopean structure, reminiscent of superhuman beings and sacred antiquities."

The statement of Graetz that "only a few of his compositions

have any poetic value, and none possess beauty" is altogether too sweeping. In justice to the Paggotan it must be said that in many of his poems he reveals a poetic genius and shows a great deal of tenderness and pathos. To give but one example from the Kinnah for the 9th of Ab beginning "למנוחם של" (Lemenuchem shel)

He represents the prophet Jeremiah standing at the Machpelah and addressing the Patriarchs, that they should intercede for their children to God. The dirge opens thus:

The Prophet standing by the Father's graves,
With soul overwhelmed speaks, for solace craves:
"How can ye lie at rest, beloved ones,
While sharpened swords consume your captive sons?
Where now, O fathers, lurks your merit rare
In that vast wilderness of lands laid bare?
They cry each one with lamentation sore
For children banished, sons that are no more;
They pray imploring with a cry for grace

To Him who dwelleth in the realms of space;
 Oh! where is now God's promise made of old:
 "I will not my first covenant withhold?"

One by one the fathers rise and implore God on behalf
 of their distressed children, and at last the gracious
 message of God is heard;

Turn, O ye perfect ones,
 Unto your rest again;
 I will fulfil for you
 All that your hearts desire:

Down unto Babylon
 With you my Presence went;
 Surely will I return
 Your sons' captivity.

The most important person after Kalir stands
 out Saadia of Fajum, better known as Saadia Gaon
 (892-942). He was Gaon of the Babylonian School
 before its decline. He was founder of a new literature
 and was the first one to create a Jewish philosophy.

He adopted the methods of Arabic philosophy to Jewish theology. He also translated the Bible into Arabic. When only twenty years of age, he completed a Hebrew dictionary. (Tzgoron) He compiled a "Siddur" of his own, which contains several original piyyutim.

His most memorable works were his "Commentary on the Book of Creation (Sefer Yetzirah) and his masterpiece Faith and Philosophy" (Emunoth Ve Deoth).

It is to be noted that from the time of Saadia the stream of Hebrew poetry is divided in two channels. The one of Kalirian influence flowing down the centuries through Poland, Germany, Italy and France and the other which may be traced to Saadia - to Moorish Spain where the Hebrew poetry reached its highest development, and that period we will now consider.

But before I do so, I ought to mention a few the Rabbatanim of Germany, France and Italy. Zunz gives over 900 names of Rabbatanim, but within

of this chapter I can only mention a few of the most important ones. Such as Moses ben Kalonymos, Meshulam ben Kalonymos, to whom it is attributed the writing of the famous "Unthaneh Torah" which he was asked to write, in a dream, by R. Amnon of Mainz. Kalonymos ben Jehudah, Eliezer ben Judah of Worms and others in Germany.

Those in France are: Jom-Tov ben Isaac of Joigny (martyred in June 1190) Moses of Couci; Rashi and many of Foraphists were liturgical poets.

Those of Italy may be mentioned

Like going from an uncultivated field of flowers into a garden tended by the masterful hand of a horticulturist, so do we go over from the poetry of those who followed in the steps of Kalir, to the poetry of the Spanish-Moorish poets, that made that period famous in Hebrew Literature.

"In the days of Chasidai," says Charisi, the Hebrew

poets began to " And true it is, under the patronage of Chasdai. Ibn Shaprut (915-970) flourished Dunash ben Labrat and Menachem ben Saruk. They were both grammarians. Ibn Shaprut was the first one to employ metre in Hebrew verse. Menachem ben Saruk on the other hand, may be said, to have been the founder of scientific Hebrew grammar. Dunash ben Labrat who was vying for the place of honor with Menachem in Chasdai's court, began to criticize Menachem's work, and the latter answered him. These literary disputes were carried on in verse and called forth on both sides some very witty satire and pointed epigrams. The pupils of both parties took up the battle for their masters cause. The supporters of Menachem opposed the metre, looking upon it as a foreign element in the Hebrew language; but desirous to show their opponents, that it was not for the lack of ability on his part to employ the metre, they carried on the discussion in rhymed metrical verse. But as we

will see, the Arabic metre took up its abode in the Hebrew language and became "naturalized".

I could scarcely mention the name of that remarkable personality Samuel Ibn Nagdela better known as Hanaggid (993-1055). He was a scholar and a poet and a patron of learning. His Introduction to the Talmud (~~Met~~ Hafalmod), is still considered a standard work. His hymns he called "Ben Thilai" his proverbs "Ben Mishlei" and his philosophy "Ben Kokhelith". Under him the centre of Judaism became firmly established in Spain.

A bright star rose on the horizon of Spain in the man of Solomon Ibn Gabirol born in Malaga 1021 and died 1058 or 1070. His father died when he was very young and he was left without means. As a consequence his poetry is tinged with melancholy and despair. When he was only 16 years of age he wrote:

מלכות צדקה ושלום	ואמרו האנחנו בארץ
ואם אינך לא קיסר	לחיות להיות מן הארץ
אשר אלמנו ודברנו	ובין אב ואם מאה חלום
ואם בא צדק	אנו נבא איתנו

Thou supreme, exalted over all

Thou art one, the first great cause of all

Thou art one, and none can permeate

Not even the wise in heart, the mystery

Of thy unfathomable Unity:

Thou art one, Thou infinitely great.

One of the sweetest dawn songs is his poem beginning:

אני ה' אלהיך
אני ה' אלהיך

אני ה' אלהיך
אני ה' אלהיך

אני ה' אלהיך
אני ה' אלהיך

אני ה' אלהיך
אני ה' אלהיך

One of his greatest philosophical works is Fons Vitae

"The Fountain of Life". It was originally written

in Arabic and in 1150 was translated in Latin. This

work was ascribed to one Avicenna, supposed to be an

Arabic philosopher, until Munk proved that Avicenna

was no other than Ibn Gabirol.¹

His ethical work is called Ennoblement of Character.

¹ Melange de Philosophie Juive et Arabe, Paris 1857

The generally supposed "The Choice of Pearls" *Milcham Pininim* to be his is disputed among scholars.

There is a legend about his death, how an Arabic poet slew him, because ~~he was~~ jealous of him, and buried him in his garden. Over his grave grew out a wonderful fig tree. The tree aroused a great deal of curiosity and it was taken up by its roots. When this was done, the secret was discovered. But if the earth produced out of his ashes such a wonderful tree, his spirit gave us the more wonderful tree in his works, which is indeed a tree and "Fountain of Life".

A great many poets too numerous to mention crown the eleventh century! There was Isaac Ha Eli 1038-1083 a contemporary of Gabirol. Moses ~~ben~~ Ezra and his brothers Isaac, Jehudah and Joseph were among the pupils of Eli.

Moses ben Ezra is called the "poet of penitence". He had a sad experience in his youth with an affair of the heart, and in consequence, throughout all

of his poems is heard a melancholy strain. He wrote some good hymns and many found his place in the prayer book. One of them may be mentioned beginning

אני חפץ לך

My soul desireth after Thee in the night

The poem has the acrostic

אני חפץ לך

One of his Selichas is very good:

אני חפץ לך
אני חפץ לך

אני חפץ לך
אני חפץ לך

אני חפץ לך
אני חפץ לך

אני חפץ לך
אני חפץ לך

Many of his poems are very emotional, but on a whole they lack sweetness and freshness.

Another Ibn Ezra though from another branch of the family is Abraham Ben Meir Ibn Ezra of Toledo (born about 1088 - died 1167) He had a wonderful knowledge in all branches of learning. He had a clear vision and sharp analytical powers

He was bold in research and was an excellent exegete of the Holy Scriptures. The Ezra was the first one to maintain that the Book of Isaiah is the work of two authors. He wrote a great deal of poetry. His poetry abounds of a great many witty and pointed epigrams but it lacks smoothness and polish.

A believer in God, he nevertheless believed in Astrology. He was very witty and often laughed at his own troubles.

כי אלהים בראני ואלהים יצאני
לחיים ואלהים יצאני לחיים

אם אלהים יצאני לחיים
אם אלהים יצאני לחיים

אם אלהים יצאני לחיים
אם אלהים יצאני לחיים

I strive to become wealthy, But the stars are opposed to me

If I dealt in throned Men would never die

If I dealt in candles The sun would never set.

His religious poetry lacks the sublimity of Gobirol or Jehudah-Halevi. His verse though metrical, is artificial and forced.

He traveled a great deal. He visited Africa Egypt and Palestine and finally died in Rome 1167.

Like the sun at midday, so shines the name of Jehudaiah ben Solomon Halevi (born 1086) on the horizon of the golden age of Hebrew literature in the Middle ages. All the beauty, sweetness and tenderness of former poets are all focused in this person. "a perfect poet, a perfect thinker, a worthy son of Judaism" he has become the beloved poet of all the ages. Of a deeply religious soul, a spotless character, an optimistic soul, all these were united in him.

How descriptive are the words of Heine:

"Pure and faithful, even spotless
Was his song, even as his soul was:
Soul, that when the maker fashioned,
With his handiwork delighted,
Straight he kissed the beauteous spirit;
And that kiss, in sweetest music
Echoing, thrills through all the singing
Of the poet consecrated."¹

¹ Translation by Solomon Golis Cohen
in Gaetz vol. III p. 322.

He was not only a poet, but also a serious student and profound thinker. He was also famous as a physician. His famous work *Al Huzari* is a far famed philosophical dialogue.

The national poetry of Halevi is of the very finest that Hebrew poetry has ever produced. In it is combined the tripple cord of "The Torah, the Holy One Blessed be He, and Israel" "תורה ואלהים וארץ ישראל". His poems of the religious national character breathe with such a trust in God and a longing for Zion as if it were his 'Herzengsdame'.

There is probably no more touching poem in all Medieval sacred poetry than Jehuda Halevis "Ode to Zion"

בית דוד ואלהים ישראל. שמואל הנגיד

הוא הנהיג את ישראל

With R. Jehuda Halevi the muse of Hebrew poetry
 became silent. Now and then we hear her a
 sigh, as in the Schachot of Meir of Rothenberg, but
 her voice, in full strength and beauty, is not heard
 until the sixteenth century in the great liturgical
 poet Israel Nagara.

Chapter II.

Nagara his Time and Place

Gœthe says:

"Willst den Dichter du verstehen,
Musst in Dichters Lande gehen."

In order to form the proper estimate of our poet Nagara, let us first pass in rapid review the condition of the Jews of the sixteenth century in general, and that of Palestine, especially of Safed and Damascus in particular.

It is not without horror that I mention the awful catastrophe that befell our brethren, in their expulsion from the Pyrenean Peninsula in 1492. My blood chills within me when I think of the awful persecutions which our people suffered for the cause of their religion. With the cross, the emblem of love in one hand, and with instruments of torture, or the fagot that kindled

the fires of the Auto de fe, in the other, our people were subjected to the most cruel and hideous forms of death. For a people, that lived for so long in a country in peace, where they had their homes and established business and professions, in a country where they were useful and honorable citizens, it must have felt like a third exile to be driven out so mercilessly, and like vagabonds to seek shelter wherever they could.

The most natural place, where a people suffering from Christian bigotry and fanaticism, would ~~have~~^{to} find refuge, would be the Mohammedan countries, where their brethren were treated with tolerance, and among these Turkey was the most inviting, and of Turkish territory Palestine was the most attractive.

It is a general experience in Jewish history that great catastrophes always call forth a longing for Zion. Though the love for the land

of their fathers was never extinguished in the hearts of our brethren, but the "Judennota" always revived and rekindled that love for the land of Prophets and the Psalmists. If to suffer is bad anywhere, the Jew would rather suffer, if necessary, in the land where he calls his own. Especially, when the Jews were hospitably received and were accorded places of trust and honor. The Mohammedans recognized their value and felt that this new element of a sober and industrious people, were well-suited to their country. The Jews soon began to carry on business on a large scale, and even manufactured armour for his soldiery. Among the exiles were great many linguists who were employed as interpreters, and the Jewish physicians, who were skilled in their professions, were employed by sultans, vizirs and pashas.

The communities in Palestine began to increase with great rapidity especially the of the Holy City and the town of Safed in upper

Galilee acquired a large Jewish population, and the young town of Safed became of great importance as it will be seen in subsequent events.

Not only did it rival Jerusalem, but excelled it in many important matters.

Suffering was never so great, that a spark of hope should not be left in the heart of sufferer.

All people, that became strong and enduring, through the noblest quality of the soul, hope, were never too

carried away with the hope of the advent of the Messiah.

Many saw in the expulsion, the finger of God, and that this chastisement must have been for a

purpose. The very fact of their finding a home within their home of old, the event of restoration

of the Temple, and other similar "signs" were looked upon as a 'Beginning of the Redemption'

1) Kabbala was in the air. The greatest men of Israel were enmeshed in its mysteries. David Benbami was traveling through Europe

as the supposed ambassador of the Lost Ten Tribes.
 Solomon Mollath a Manau a well educated
 and accomplished young man who held a high
 office at the court of Lisbon, was initiated in the
 covenant of Abraham and openly became a Jew.
 He afterwards became an ascetic, spending his time
 in fasting and prayer. ~~that~~ ^{he} might be expected he
 saw visions, and received commands from on high to travel
 to Turkey. He visited the most important Kabbalistic
 centres such as Salonica and Adrianople and
 in Palestine Jerusalem and Safed. In 1529 he
 found him in Ancona, Italy, where he preaches
 the advent of the Messiah. He was of such a
 charming personality that he found protection
 in the very mouth of the tiger, the Vatican. He
 was admitted to see Pope Clement and the Pope
 together with many Cardinals gave him protection
 from the Roman Police who would have seized him
 as a renegade from the Roman Catholic faith.

However, he did not escape the inquisition and was burned in Mantua as a heretic in 1532.

This particular event made a powerful impression on the minds of the Kabbalist and even upon those who were more inclined to Talmudism, and everybody felt that something of the unusual was going to happen.

Let us now take a cursory ^{glance} at what was going on in Safed, the most important city of that time in Palestine, which was so near Damascus, a town north-east of Safed, the place of Hagara.

Safed almost unknown, became very prominent through the activities of R. Joseph Karagossi. Himself an exile from Spain, and after residing in Sicily, Beyrout and Sidon, came to Safed and settled there. He was a great Talmudist and Kabbalist and he no doubt established there a school. He was a man of sterling qualities and of a very kind and conciliating character.

and under his supervision the city began to grow^{so} rapidly that in 1603 according to Glomel's letter it contained 18 Talmudic Yerhiboth, 21 Synagogues and a school for the children of the poor with 20 teachers and 400 pupils.¹

Damascus, too, became a very important place and a great deal of commerce was carried on between that city and Safed.

But it is not so much with the economic conditions of Safed, that we are now interested, although "Kemach" as our Rabbi admitted is a greater merit to "Torah", but with the spiritual condition of that city, as this would help us to get a better insight in the ideas and ideals of Nagara.

Two names, most prominent in the history of Safed of the 16th century, are R. Joseph Caro the greatest legalist of his time, and R. Isaac Luria (י"ל) as he was called by his disciples the Lion

¹ Schechter. *Gedolim in Jud.* Ser. II p. 209

the recognized Kabbalist and head of the school at Lefed. I must content myself by merely touching on the history of these and other famous men, which I will mention in the course of this chapter.

R. Joseph Caro was born in the Pyrenean Peninsula in 1488. After his many wanderings, he finally came to Lefed, where he was at once recognized for his great learning and piety, and became a prominent figure. Among the great works which he left to posterity is the gigantic work Beth-Joseph and the Shulchan Aruch which he finished in the year 1555. Other works of his are the Keseph Mishneh the Klalei-ha Talmud, and a work which did not appear in print until 30 years after his death "Maggid-Mesharim" a kind of a diary.

Caro was a remarkable character. A man who was so strict a legalist was at the same time a mystic who had a Maggid, a Teller or Mentor, the soul of his Mishnah, who would

give him instructions what to do and explain to him obscure passages of the Mishnah.

In him, as it seems, the rigorism of the Law and the phantasy of Mysticism lived side by side without encroaching one on the domain of the other. Any one, who is not familiar with Caro's biography, and judging only from his legalistic works, would never suspect, that he received greetings from heaven, through the Maggid in the form of "Peace from the Jeshibbath shel Maalah" (college of heaven) or beginning with the words "Behold, the Holy one blessed be He, and the sons of the (heavenly) College send unto thee peace, and are opening unto thee the gate of light."¹

Caro was also one of the four who received the "Semicha" from R. Jacob Berab, and this must have no doubt added fuel to the fire of his phantasy, that he will

¹ Maggid Mesharim 52 c. 29 d. note from the letters "Yudies" second ser. p. 218.

be better fitted to become a prominent leader and hasten the advent of the Messiah.

Next comes the chief of the visionaries, who made Safed a Mecca of Mysticism, R. Isaac Luria. As it might be expected, the birth of such a man, who held intercourse with heavenly beings, would be enshrouded in the legend of mystery. No less a person than, the ever ready to serve, Elijah, announced to Luria's father the birth of his child and told him that he should name him Isaac, and that he will save Israel from the K'lippoth. (the shell or husk that envelopes and obscures the good) and also that through him the teachings of the Kabbalah will be revealed to mankind.

Isaac Luria Luria was born in Jerusalem in 1534 and died in 1572. He lost his father when he was 8 years old. It is said that even when a child he showed a remarkable knowledge of the Talmud. He, together with his mother emigrated to Cairo

where, his uncle Mordechai Francis, a tax-farmer,
 adopted him as his own son. R. Bernaliel Oshkrenzi
 the author of "Shitta MeCubetzes" became his teacher
 and until he was fifteen years of age he remained
 under his guidance. At that age he married the
 daughter of his patron-uncle. He became
 interested in the Kabbala. The "Zohar" (Splendour)
 the then supposed work of R. Limon ben Jochai,
 became his chief study. He was irretrievably
 lost in the mysterious windings of his mystical
 labyrinth, and the more complicated and
 intricate the doctrines of the Zohar became for
 him, the more holy and mysterious he considered
 its teachings, and resolved to solve and
 fathom this "mystery of all mysteries". By
 "hints" from heaven he learned that in order to
 become initiated in the mysteries of the Kabbala
 he must more vigorously separate himself from
 the pleasures of the world and live the life of an ascetic

And after spending two years in fasting, praying, and self-imposed chastisements, he finally felt that he was worthy of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit and to hold communion with Elijah. Accordingly he received a "message" to leave the unclean land (Egypt) and to go up to Lafeet. ~~There~~ his arrival there he became acquainted with Cordorero, whose daughter was afterwards married to Surias son, and after Cordoreros death, Suria became his successor and head of the mystic school. Suria, by this time, was looked upon not only as a great Kathalist, but one of the few great spirits which God permits occasionally to descend on earth for mankind's salvation.

Suria communicated with spirits, and angels ministered unto him. "He saw spirits everywhere, and heard their whispers in the rushing of the waters, the movements of the trees and the grass, in the song and twittering of birds, even in the flickering of flames."

This would not be the place to enter into the complicated systems of the Kabbala, such as the Sephiroth (Emanations) Parzuphim (which may be called attributes, likenesses, faces, or countenance), the Adam Hakadmon (original man) and his Olam Katsi'kan (the ideal world), sufficient to say that he believed to possess the soul of Messiah ben Joseph and that he would play a great role at the advent of the Messiah.

There were a great many societies at that time in Safed, such as the Chabrim (associates) over whom Luria presided. There were also the society "Tent of Peace" (Suknath Shalom) and also the Society of Penitents distinguished for their ascetic practices. This and the other societies went so far in imitating Catholicism as to introduce auricular confession. They visited the graves of Saints and attempted to conjure down from heaven good spirits.

Among the prominent men of Safed may be mentioned R. Jacob Berab who reintroduced the "Simcha" (ordination, faying of the hands). R. Elijah de Vidas author of *Reshit Chochmah*, R. Chajim Vital, who looked upon himself as the successor of Luria, already mentioned Cordovero, R. Joseph Aschkenazi, R. Solomon Alnabey author of the well known Sabbath hymn "L'cho Dodi". R. Moses Galanti, ordained disciple of Joseph Caro. R. Moses ben Joseph Trani also ordained by Berab. R. Jomtov Zahalon, and the father of Israel Meyerson who was one of the "Lion Whelps" (disciples) of Luria and was a President of one of the Yeshibbas, before he went to Damascus, where he was Rabbi until his death.

In an age and place where men held intercourse with angels, received messages from heaven, and long

¹ See Aramca's n.

visits from patron-saints, is it surprising to find
 our poet Nagara, a son of ~~the pupils of~~ Senior indulge
 occasionally in bold metaphor and in autopo-
 morphic expressions. Born and reared in an
 atmosphere like his, it is not to be wondered at,
 that he was not altogether free from the grossness
 of the Kabbala. Considering his time and place
 and that he was ~~as~~ ^{of} ecyptic himself, his poems
 are comparatively free from the grotesque terms
 employed by the Kabbala about God, especially
 when compared with poems of some of his
 contemporaries, as we will have occasion to see
 in the last chapter.

Chapter III Nagaras Works.

One of the most famous liturgical poets of the sixteenth century was R. Israel Nagara. His name in full, as he signed it, to the preface of his collection of poems *Zimiroth Israel*, was *Israel ben Moses ben Levi Nagara*. The same inscription appears over many of his poems. The knowledge of his name in full is important to us, as it would help us to correct an error which has appeared ^{has} and been repeated by many writers, as we will see later in the chapter.

The father of Israel Nagara lived in Safed and afterwards became Rabbi of Damascus, where he died in 1581. He was a pupil of R. Isaac Luria' (יִשְׁכּוֹנְיָא) He corresponded with

"The Orient" above mentioned, quotes him on page 657:

"Landschut in Amudei ha-
 אפרק יציק. האמר תכבד מורי אבנא"

Abodah p. 150 called attention to this error, and in
Hadasif 1887 Bernfeld again attributes the "n^o 10" and the
"n^o 23" to Nagara's father, referring to the "Orient." His own son
Israel Nagara, in his eulogy on his father, in the 5th part
of "Memci Tract", under the subtitle "Me-Hamivrim"
Ed. Venice p. 1646. mentions only the "Lexach Tor"
of the works of his father, and it is not likely that his son
would not have mentioned these works, had they belonged to
his father. Aside from this, though not impossible,
it is not likely probable, that R. Moses Nagara
one of the "Lion-Whelps" (^{לְיוֹנֵי הַיָּד}) of Luria should
be interested in the "Moreh"

for poetry. Gedalya Hm Gachya (1515-1587) formed some kind of a school or a circle of poetry. He assembled all those who were interested in new-Hebrew.

Conferte (Ed. Kassel) p. 49b. when he speaks of Nagara's father he mentions the only work namely "Seder Torah".

I also consulted

and he too states: nomen est arabicum v. sub filio

Israel Nagara et de confusione auctore superiore sub Moses b. Jehuda 1313 Scarmine in nostrum exstant in Cod. Uri 498 fol. II f. 95.

I must also point out here, that Leichter in his "Studies" series II p. 251 speaks of Israel Nagara's father as R. Joseph Nagara which is positively false. In his note 116 on the page mentioned above he refers to Azulai, which has no such name and also to a work entitled Chemdath Jorrim ^{מחמדות יוריים} attributed to Nathan of Gaza and there is not the slightest hint about Nagara.

poetry, at his own expense, to recite their poems, and asked of those at the distance to send to him their poetry. One of the poets who sent to him the fruit of his was Israel Nagara.

Though a young man, he became very popular. Solomon Ibn Lajis requested him to write a poem for his Jerushah, which he did². From Safed he went to Damascus where he became a ^R in the Sephardic congregation. From Damascus he left for the town Baris, where he lived in the house of the poet R. Joseph Mubchar and after a little while he returned to Damascus, and he had some trouble there and left. He wandered around for a while in the suburbs of Damascus

Graetz Vol. IV p. 609

L'miroth Israel, page 153. A. Venice &

L'miroth Israel p. 145

and then he returned to Damascus again. ^{He} had a large correspondence with the most noted people of his time such as R. Jom tov Zohalon Pines, R. Brachel Ashkinazi, R. Jacob Berab, and Solomon Jobez he wrote a letter of which every word begins with the letter א (Aleph) beginning אשר יצא יצא יצא יצא יצא יצא יצא יצא יצא יצא which is indeed an artistic literary novelty. He also wrote many letters of recommendation and letters asking for help to other communities. In one of these letters where he speaks of himself as one of the 'young sheep of Damascus' (אשר יצא יצא יצא יצא יצא יצא יצא יצא יצא יצא) he asks in the name of the communities of Damascus to contribute money, in order to aid the poor who live in Jubar, and to repair the Synagogue supposed to be built by Elisha ben Shafat, and there is also a cave, supposed to have been inhabited by Elijah the Tishbeite.

Zmiron Israel V. p. 1458.

Ibid. p. 164a.

While in Damascus he became acquainted with many Turkish poets. His knowledge of the Arabic and Turkish languages won for him their friendship and they would of ten go out together, recite poems and sing. Many of the Kabbalists were, of course, shocked at such behaviour and they reported it to his father. He was at once summoned by his father to come to Safed. While there he was married but during the plague his wife and ten year old daughter died.

In 1579 his father left Safed, and they together came to Damascus, where his father was made chief Rabbi. R. Moses Margara only lived for two years and died in 1581 - (p'k. 505)

With the death of his father, he remained destitute. His friend Chajim ben Chajim took him in his house and supported him. While in his house

Chaim encouraged him to gather his poems and other writings and to publish them. It is self understood that he also furnished the means for their publication.

"Through his warm interest, he writes in his long preface to *Memei Israel* "the snow of my coldness melted he awakened me as if from sleep, through his mediation and his incessant requests I was stirred up, and collected all my writings, poems, friendly correspondence and recommendation for the poor."

While in Damascus he was married again and had three children. In his olden days he was the *Sefer* of the

Nagara enjoyed great reputation as a poet. His poems were very popular so that they were incorporated in the prayer-books and *Machzorim*. Benjamin II tells in his travels, that most of the hymns which were sung on Friday night and the Holidays, while he was in Aleppo, were composed

by Israel Nagara. Leon de Modena wrote a poem
in the beginning of his book "Oloth Tamid" where he
says "There never arose in Israel the like of Israel"

77 "Israel's Israel of the". Azulai in Sh. King. gives a very
high opinion about Nagara: Nagara's poems,
he says, are so lofty that even the great Rabbalist
R. Isaac Luria expressed his approbation, saying:
His poems are worthy of Heaven"

But in spite of this Nagara did not escape the
venomous remarks of the Rabbalistic dreamer R.
Chaim Vital. In his Meoroth Olam he says:
"It is quite true that the Pizmonim, which he,
namely Nagara, composed are in themselves very
beautiful and pleasing, but he does not deserve
to be spoken to, even a single word, and whoever
sings his pizmonim, no good will come to him
because he always uses trivial language

32/2 10 2 10 10
that is the poem.

and was at all times drunk. During the three weeks perhaps he was invited to the house of Jacob Menidosh, where, he put his hat on the floor, and sang songs in a loud tone, ate meat and drank wine until he became intoxicated."

A man of Nagara's temperament who did not indulge in *pirsho* was not a man after Vital's heart and the statement just quoted is without doubt exaggerated, and the name, of such a divine singer and pious soul as that of Israel Nagara should not be besmirched, by the witness of such a fanatic Kabbalistic dreamer.

Nagara did when he was young indulge in and then in wine song or a love poem, but the bulk of his poetry is all devoted to religious subjects.

In his *Memor Israel* we find this inscription over a short wine song

אין חתול אין חתול אין חתול אין חתול

אין חתול אין חתול אין חתול אין חתול

אין חתול אין חתול אין חתול אין חתול

אין חתול אין חתול אין חתול אין חתול

We find also that R. Jehudah Halevi sang a similar song

"Shall he, who four-and-twenty years has not seen run,

Relinquish all his joys, and the wine barrel shun?"

In the volume above mentioned p. 153. he says that he wrote

the following poem on a fan which he presented to a girl.

People in those days were not so unfashionable after all.

31

And this one is again from Jehudah Halevi:

One of his sweetest love songs is the following:

יבנה ביתי ואלו ימים, ואלו ימים בלבד קבלה?

יבנה ביתי ואלו ימים, ואלו ימים בלבד קבלה?

קבלה ואלו ימים, ואלו ימים בלבד קבלה?

קבלה! ואלו ימים בלבד קבלה, ואלו ימים בלבד קבלה.

These few poems, mentioned, and a few others were
 a similar strain were only the effusions of a youth.
 But to know the real soul of the man, his love for God
 and his people we must examine his work of
 genius the *Imiroth Israel*, but before we
 do so, we will enumerate all of his writings
 when and where they ^{were} published, and their contents.

The complete list of his works are: 1) *Imiroth*
Israel, of which I will speak later more in detail.
 At first his work appeared under the title of
pubitz shonah shalosh at Safed 1587 published by
 Hyeche Ashkenazi, this volume contained
 only 108 poems and they were not as yet divided
 as find it in later editions. The second complete
 edition was published in Venice by Jos. de Gara
 in 1599. Some extracts from this edition
 was published in Frankfurt a. M. under the title
 of *Shel shonah shalosh shalosh shalosh* in 1712. v. by Johan Kellner.
 The third complete edition was published

in Belgrade, but without the preface, and the omission of seventeen poems.

2/ "Mesachkes Bitterel" is a moral-poem

on the vanity of the world. It appeared in Safed in 1587.

"Khulas Israel" (where an extract from *Estroth Israel* was published together with *Estroth Israel* by R. Joseph Jacoby and *Estroth* by R. Joseph Esoli in 1791 (1791/1792)).

3/ *Shochetei Nojebolim* probably a rhymed digest of the laws on slaughtering and purging. It was published together with a small book entitled *Shochet* in Constantinople 1718 by *Shochet* and again in Amsterdam with a small book *Shochet* by Abraham Mizrahi, by J. H. Murrenhousen.

In the preface of that rhymed digest Nagara says that he composed it at the request of his son Moses as a sort of a compendium for the laws of *Shochet* so that even a *Shochet* would be able to slaughter *Shochet* with his knowledge obtained from it and his *Shochet*.

would be etc. The poems contain the acrostics
 of *קטן וזרע* and for the one of the Biderkahn *קטן*
קטן וזרע. The name of the author seems very
 grotesque, but he gives the reason for calling it
 so, so that even little children knowing these
 laws would be eligible to slaughter, and not
 only because this would be against the law as
 stated in Chulin 1a. but I have my doubts
 whether any Orthodox Rabbi would issue any
שטר (license) to slaughter on the knowledge
 gained from these ~~blatant~~ leaflets. 4. *Memor*
Israel, a collection of poems, eulogies, letters
 of recommendation divided in 6 parts

הופיעה in *הערות*, *הערות*, *הערות*, *הערות*, *הערות*, *הערות*. It appeared in
 Venice 16054. 5). *Sheerith Israel* *שירי*
 "Pizmonim and prayers which he forgot to
 incorporate in his book *Emith Israel*"

Kore - Hadorka Ed. Karel. 498. b. also see note on next page

that Israel Nagara was Rabbi in Gaza where he died, and that his son Moses succeeded him:

To return now to the *Imroth Israel* which I mention.

It is one of the most interesting collection of religious poems. The book is divided in three parts. The first part is called *amr*, 225 poems for daily devotion the second part *rel*, 54 poems for the Sabbaths of the year. The third part *el*, 67 poems for the new moon, feasts and fast days and for special occasions, such as for *Chamurah* a versification in epic form of *Megillath Antiochus*, for *Purim* the *Megillath Esther* in rhyme or the order of "Adon Chosdech" by R. Jehudah Halevi and for the Sabbath before the Passover commonly called *Shabbos Hagadol*, the story of the Exodus in rhyme.

M. Sachs translated three of his poems in German

Conforte. K. H. ed. Kan p. 496.

Jahrbuch d. Israeliten, Buth. pp. 236-38.

A collection of Pizmonim besides the Tmirot Israel which are to be found in M22. in the Imperial Library of Vienna were edited and published in Aug. 1854 under the title "Hymnen des R. Israel Nagara" nach einer H. d. K.K.

W. Bacher reports, that in the Catalogue of Hebrew Manuscripts of David Kaufman under the no 438 is to be found a collection of poems under the title of *Shelishot* as mentioned by Alzulai, and it is an autograph copy by the author. The volume is described to be very pretty, small and elegantly rebound. The 255 enumerated leaves are preceded by five pages not numbered and on the third page of these not numbered pages, appears a remark as to the acquisition of the manuscript *המסכתא הזאת* *נמצאה ביד הרה"ק ר' יצחק גרשון* *הגדולי ז"ל*. This M22. belongs now to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

his practice in his times as we see from Lonzano's

apology ארכיוו קרב רכונק באראללען דא אהמחברס ליינס ווארט וואס ער האט געטון, וואס איז אונז

וואס האט ער אויפגענומען, ביז און נאך באלד Of course there is

no harm in it because he adopted it. Although

I can appreciate the feelings of those who objected to the adaptation of such melodies, as if we would

hear a psalm adapted to the tune of "Onward Christian Soldiers". But this was nothing new

in Nagara's days. Even in the days of Jehudah Halevi this was quite common. Archivalti

says: אלעס זינט (זינט זינט וואס דאס איז אונזער סאמעלירט, און עס איז אונזער סאמעלירט אונזער סאמעלירט אונזער סאמעלירט)

היינט (היינט איז אונזער סאמעלירט אונזער סאמעלירט אונזער סאמעלירט אונזער סאמעלירט)

The same Lonzano, who does not object to adopt strange melodies to his poems objects very strongly to the seasons expressions used by Nagara.

He complains against his using terms אונזער סאמעלירט אונזער סאמעלירט אונזער סאמעלירט אונזער סאמעלירט

אונזער סאמעלירט אונזער סאמעלירט

אונזער סאמעלירט אונזער סאמעלירט

He may as well complain against R. Anshba who called
the Song of Songs *shaz bsh* and Nagara only adopts
expressions from or modeled after the Song of Songs.

But even if we should admit that Nagara's
terms are sometimes erotic, with Lurzans it is
not not a case of "*shaz bsh*" as he says that he ~~did~~
~~criticized~~ Nagara "*shaz bsh*" but it appears to
me, ~~that it is~~ rather a *shaz bsh* that does not tend
to the increase of wisdom. This poetic Vagabond
knew how popular Nagara's poems were, and
whenever he had a chance he attacked him.

I feel almost sure that the following lines are
intended to attack Nagara, as he expresses himself
plainly on p. 142 a. and b. in his 'Ishai Jodath' in a similar strain.

1/18/1911 13/11/1911 1/18/1911

1/18/1911 13/11/1911 1/18/1911

1/18/1911 13/11/1911 1/18/1911

1/18/1911 13/11/1911 1/18/1911

1/18/1911 13/11/1911 1/18/1911

1/18/1911 13/11/1911 1/18/1911

ibid. canto 10. p. 137, 8.

ibid. canto 10. p. 137, 8.

The words *תלמיד* can mean nothing else but *disciple* perhaps *the* stands for *his*, for otherwise the word has no meaning whatsoever. If this be true, it would substantiate the statement made by *him* in that he was a *Talmid* in Damascus *and* the Sephardic congregation.

But such slander cannot detract from the greatness of our poet. In the words of our Rabbi I would say "תן עין לך לראות, ופה לך לדבר" to let the words of the poet speak for itself. And thus we will proceed to the next chapter.

Chapter IV

Nagara the Liturgical Poet.

Since the days of R. Jehuda Halevi, with whose poetry we can compare our poet in many instances, up to the middle of the 16th century, the New-Hebrew poetry faded and drooped. It was Nagara, who by the freshness and vigor of his muse, brought back to life again that poetry, which seemed to have given up the ghost.

Mr. Sachs gives expression, when speaking of Nagara, to the following: "When the period of song had closed long ago, and the art so long cultivated by noble minds in Spain and Provence, seemed to have departed from among the Jews, a new devotee to this art appeared in Israel Nagara, who took up again Zion's silent harp from the willows and elicited from it pleasing tunes."

In beautiful form, in artificial rhythm, with
 ecstasy and pious devotion, he sang in the way of
 the old masters, and the ardent yearning which
 burned in his breast, inspired him to melodies
 at times mournful, at times hopeful. He too
 wound wreath and golden taine on which the
 pearls of poetic sentiment were strung about
 Sabbath and festivals."

It is, indeed, a remarkable phenomena, that
 Nagara, nurtured as he was on the breast of the
 Rabbala, born and brought up in the house
 of his father, a legalist and mystic, not having
 the advantages *Quod stimulus* for our *Spaun*,
 poets, that his mind should be directed to the
 field of poetry.

In no other poet of the Middle ages,
 except R. J. Halevi do we find such passionate
 lyrical outbursts as we find in Nagara.
 His poetry has its source not in mere poetic

sentiment, but in sincere and firm conviction in God. His soul is "God intoxicated". In all his poems there is a religious outpouring of the soul. When he sings of Zion's future glory, he rises to the height of sublimity, and when he mourns over her present sufferings, we can hear the heartrending cry issuing from the depth of his soul, like a mother mourns for her only son.

Nagara was possessed with a supreme religious enthusiasm. His art he dedicated to the service of God. His poems were to serve the purpose of arousing man to deeper devotion and a keener appreciation of his relation to man.

as by E. Cure van
Jehon el'll' Nee

idlydly Nee
Nee el' Nee Nee

The poet believed that every gift given by God to man, is not for man's selfish use and enjoyment but it must be turned to the service of the giver of all gifts and the service of humanity.

לכל זיוה וסלול
לאיל חלק מכלול

בזר וזל וזל וזל
ונפלא ונפלא

(P. 10.)
or again

כחול וזל וזל
כחול וזל וזל

כחול וזל וזל
(Z.I. 190.)

Among the many gifts which the poet enumerates
being bestowed by God upon man, poetry is one
there

כחול וזל וזל
כחול וזל וזל

כחול וזל וזל
כחול וזל וזל

And since this is the only thing the author possesses
he can at least give this to God

כחול וזל וזל
כחול וזל וזל

כחול וזל וזל
כחול וזל וזל

כחול וזל וזל
כחול וזל וזל

(P. 26)

With a childlike innocence he expresses the
thought as if, his song may perhaps, offend
Gods wrath

יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹדֵי לִחְיֵי גַם אֶחָדָם
כִּסִּים אֵין

אֶלֶּיךָ מֵאִלֹּהֵי כִי בְּלִיטֵי גַם
אֶלֶּיךָ מֵאִלֹּהֵי כִי

אֶלֶּיךָ מֵאִלֹּהֵי כִי בְּלִיטֵי גַם
אֶלֶּיךָ מֵאִלֹּהֵי כִי

(Z.I. 126.)

Having his conception of poetry, that it is a God given gift, therefore he would not devote it to profane poetry, to frivolous and secular song, but it must be all consecrated to holy service of his Maker

וְיִשְׂרָאֵל לֹדֵי לִחְיֵי גַם אֶחָדָם
כִּסִּים אֵין

אֶלֶּיךָ מֵאִלֹּהֵי כִי בְּלִיטֵי גַם
אֶלֶּיךָ מֵאִלֹּהֵי כִי

אֶלֶּיךָ מֵאִלֹּהֵי כִי בְּלִיטֵי גַם
אֶלֶּיךָ מֵאִלֹּהֵי כִי

Z.I.

We will now proceed to examine the poems of our author as to their contents: but first of all, we will look into the language, style

¹ The first poem in *Zmirot Israel*. I will also state here

that throughout this chapter I will use the *Zmirot Israel*, Venice Edition which I will designate by Z.I. the number for No. of the poem and P. as the *תרגום* edited by M. H. Friedlander Wien 1858

and meter.

In the preface to *Meisim Israel* the author says that the first thing a child should begin to cultivate is purity of the language (purity) and if poets are not always consistent with their claims he certainly was and lived up to his own injunction. His language is always idiomatic, and with very rare exceptions, it is purely biblical. His language is never polluted with the grotesque grammatical manipulations as is found in many of his predecessors. He very happily imitates the biblical style, but ~~imitation~~ he brings together biblical phrases, there is no incongruity in their arrangement, a by all seem dove tailed and fit one in the other perfectly. His style is always smooth, lucid, natural, but never shallow or superficial. There is no word juggling no utterance just to use a ready made phrase

but all manifests unity and fine taste. He is not altogether free from the conceits of medievalism he uses puns and often applies scriptural passages to altogether a different meaning, but he is so clever and ingenious in their handling that the reader forgets their artificiality. He uses the acrostic of his name and of the alphabet, often a double tripple and quadruple alphabet but never the ג"ה i.e. the alphabet reversed. ~~One~~ One of his poems every word begins with ה, but it is so smooth that the reader hardly notices it.

אלהי אלהי אלהי אלהי	אלהי אלהי אלהי אלהי
אלהי אלהי אלהי אלהי	אלהי אלהי אלהי אלהי
אלהי אלהי אלהי אלהי	אלהי אלהי אלהי אלהי
אלהי אלהי אלהי אלהי	אלהי אלהי אלהי אלהי
אלהי אלהי אלהי אלהי	אלהי אלהי אלהי אלהי
אלהי אלהי אלהי אלהי	אלהי אלהי אלהי אלהי

(2. 1. 57)

As an illustration upon playing on words, lends her poetic beauty, we will give the following

וְהַיְדֵּשׁ כִּי אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא
אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא

בְּכִכְבְּדֵנוּ לְמִנֵּי הַיָּד
אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא

לְמִנֵּי הַיָּד, אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא
אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא

(Z.I. 43.)

אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא, אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא

Here is one, a satire on the idols worshipped directly
honoured from Isaiah where the pun is very clever

אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא, אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא

אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא, אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא

אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא, אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא

אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא, אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא

אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא, אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא

אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא, אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא

אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא, אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא

אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא, אֵלֶּיךָ יָבוֹא

(P. 61.)

The rhyme and metre of Nagara is of the
Spanish-Arabic style as will be seen from
the poetry quoted in this chapter. He never employs
the Italian terza rima in his verses. There is a
great variety in his versification, so that the
reader does not tire of the monotony of the
same sounds. In a large number of his poems
especially the Psalms there always recurs
a very pleasing refrain, and at times the last

word of every line is repeated no doubt to suit the melody to which most of his poems are set.

It must be confessed that his metre is not always perfect as he often changes a Shiva ~~shiva~~ to a Shiva mobile. He also changes, though very seldom, the masculine for the feminine but this he only does when the acrostic demands it. But love letters, as many of his poems are, must be forgiven slips of the pen and shortcomings of metre.

If we were to attempt to classify Nagara's poems we would find it a very difficult matter, since they are all of a religious character. But besides the division as it was made by ^{the} author namely:

- 1) into prayers and praises for every day
- 2) for every week corresponding to the reading of the weekly portion of Torah and
- 3) for every new moon and special Sabbaths and feast & fast days,

we can subdivide them in purely devotional, national or Messianic and didactic poems.

וְלֹא תִּשְׁכַּח צִדִּיק מִחַסֵּד
לֵב אִישׁ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו

אֵת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו
לֵב אִישׁ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו

בְּכֹחַ אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו
לֵב אִישׁ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו

וְכֵן יִשְׁכַּח צִדִּיק מִחַסֵּד
(Z.1 p. 45.)

The poets only trust and hope is God

וְכֵן יִשְׁכַּח צִדִּיק מִחַסֵּד
לֵב אִישׁ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו

אֵת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו
לֵב אִישׁ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו

אֵת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו
לֵב אִישׁ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו

וְכֵן יִשְׁכַּח צִדִּיק מִחַסֵּד
(Z.1 p. 44.)

Having such an implicit faith in God, he feels that the love of man for his Maker will be rewarded by the love of God to man. The following reminds us very much of Lamentations' dawn song beginning *אֲנִי יְהוָה* note how melodious it is

יְהוָה חֲדָשׁ מִחַסֵּד
לֵב אִישׁ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו

אֵת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו
לֵב אִישׁ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו

אֵת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו
לֵב אִישׁ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו

וְכֵן יִשְׁכַּח צִדִּיק מִחַסֵּד
לֵב אִישׁ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יָמָיו

קל כחמא חמא כחמא חמא חמא

As long as God is with him he would fear no one

אשר ברוך אלהים אלהינו אלהינו אלהינו

אשר ברוך אלהים אלהינו אלהינו אלהינו

אשר ברוך אלהים אלהינו אלהינו אלהינו

אשר ברוך אלהים אלהינו אלהינו אלהינו

אשר ברוך אלהים אלהינו אלהינו אלהינו

Who has not been inspired by that beautiful, divine hymn, that justly found his way in ^{many of} all the prayer books, and is sung in every Jewish household, when the Sabbath is still observed, the soul elevating

Not only is the aramaic idiom here, as well as in few other of his aramaic poems, so correct, but the content to lift man heavenward, and his whole being rises in extasy to the "Master of all the worlds" the creator of things.

אשר ברוך אלהים אלהינו אלהינו אלהינו

אשר ברוך אלהים אלהינו אלהינו אלהינו

my enemy.
my city

So overwhelmed is the poet with the greatness and power of God, that he realizes his insignificance his limitations, even to begin to enumerate God's wonderful deeds

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

But when God and his people are one and inseparable and he fervently prays God for their redemption

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

(Z. l. p. 4)

The whole poem is permeated with such divine fervor and divine mystery. The poet made splendid use of the official language of mysticism, to speak of the "holy watchers" and the land where the souls and spirit rejoice "a land of wish to add Holy Land" right here, and Magan not written but this single poem, his name deserves to be inscribed in the golden book of the inspired singers of Israel.

The poet is never forgetful of of all that God has done
for him, his soul is full appreciation to Him who
is like father to a son, and hardly knows what
to repay it

כִּי אֵלֹהִים הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְהוּא הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְהוּא הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְהוּא הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ

But since God has everything what can man offer
to him

אֵלֹהִים הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְהוּא הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְהוּא הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְהוּא הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ

But there is only one thing that he is sure of, that
God delights in, his song, and therefore he would offer
it

וְהוּא הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְהוּא הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְהוּא הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְהוּא הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ

(Z. l. p. 68. 2)

הוּא הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ

¹ In the text is printed: וְהוּא הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ, which would have no meaning, especially
when the verse is taken directly from Psalm

כִּי אֵלֹהִים הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ

² This poem has been translated in German by Mr. Sachs in Kalender
by Busch, Wien 1846.

But it is not only the poet, but everyone should raise his voice in song and praise to God, whether the talented or untalented

יְהִי קוֹל אִמְשָׁךְ עָן כִּסֵּד הָיָה מִבְּלִיָּה
אֵלֶּכְךָ אֶתְּנוּ לָךְ קוֹל מִבְּלִיָּה הָיָה מִבְּלִיָּה
כִּי הָיָה לָךְ קוֹל מִבְּלִיָּה אֵלֶּכְךָ אֶתְּנוּ לָךְ קוֹל מִבְּלִיָּה
כִּי הָיָה לָךְ קוֹל מִבְּלִיָּה אֵלֶּכְךָ אֶתְּנוּ לָךְ קוֹל מִבְּלִיָּה

Man cannot excuse himself from his worthy act of service because of the lack of a melodious voice, even fowls and the young raven, who is not noted for his especially sweet voice, sing in praise to God

יְהִי קוֹל אִמְשָׁךְ עָן כִּסֵּד הָיָה מִבְּלִיָּה
אֵלֶּכְךָ אֶתְּנוּ לָךְ קוֹל מִבְּלִיָּה הָיָה מִבְּלִיָּה
כִּי הָיָה לָךְ קוֹל מִבְּלִיָּה אֵלֶּכְךָ אֶתְּנוּ לָךְ קוֹל מִבְּלִיָּה
כִּי הָיָה לָךְ קוֹל מִבְּלִיָּה אֵלֶּכְךָ אֶתְּנוּ לָךְ קוֹל מִבְּלִיָּה

But the song, does not depend on the beautiful voice it must come from a pure heart

יְהִי קוֹל אִמְשָׁךְ עָן כִּסֵּד הָיָה מִבְּלִיָּה

¹ In the present text read מִבְּלִיָּה which I think is not correct the poet would refer to the passage מִבְּלִיָּה מִבְּלִיָּה as has been interpreted. In the text מִבְּלִיָּה. I think that מִבְּלִיָּה is more correct, in the first place it is taken from Psalm 147. Of course let מִבְּלִיָּה be but his could be referred to song.

But the poet is very modest about his special gift, it is not one acquired by effort but it is God given, and therefore man should not boast of it.

אֵל בָּרוּךְ שֶׁלֹּא מֵאִצְבָּא	אֵל בָּרוּךְ שֶׁלֹּא מֵאִצְבָּא
אֵל בָּרוּךְ שֶׁלֹּא מֵאִצְבָּא	אֵל בָּרוּךְ שֶׁלֹּא מֵאִצְבָּא
אֵל בָּרוּךְ שֶׁלֹּא מֵאִצְבָּא	אֵל בָּרוּךְ שֶׁלֹּא מֵאִצְבָּא

(P. 110.)

But the poet's soul, full of love and tenderness mixed with pathos, gives full expression to her feelings in the poems or hymns where God addresses Israel as his beloved, and where Israel begs redemption from the oppressing enemies. Thus the poet puts the following in the mouth of God:

יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ	יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ
יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ	יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ
יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ	יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ

יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ יְיָ

The beloved one still has faith in her lover, God, but she realizes her conduct and therefore does not blame him for neglecting her

ידעתי כי חפצתי כי
 ודעתי כי חפצתי כי

אלקדסותי עמלי' / אמרש ירה העל/

מחלוקת בין שני — ובהקדם אמרנו לך
(Z. I. p. 32)

The poet full of hope bids his people to cheer up as the redemption is sure to come

יולת עזאביק לאוס תגן חשב יממ

הגדל של אלה במה .

אשר צרכי ביתי למד, אלוהי בני ישראל, בארצות חלוצות

חבולת קרימה מיני פאנלס אינדי

למלך יצחק חתן
אלקנה ויוסף

כ"ט אב' כ"ח
אלזאזל 277

אשר היה מלך ארץ מצרים, ויהי

אלה דעתו כי יתחיל תפלה
 'עבד אסירי ציון'
 (Z1. p. 20.)

Though there is a great deal of pathos expressed in the poems where the poet speaks of the dispersion of his people but there is always a tone of hopefulness and of courage

יחזקאל בן בוזי
אברהם בן יצחק

הניח את המעטפה ואת המפתח

נא אהר במו ערב בשר
 כי בלתי יתצו קח
 אל מתקלא אל ליל
 ואלו נחל חסד אלה
 דבר ציון חלל טיול
 ואני מוקד מלאך חל
 וכלו חרין מלכות
 ואני דבית טא אלה

But he is always hopeful

ואני מלכות חל
 ואלו חרין מלכות
 וקח יאני מלכות
 (P. 15)

The poet feels sure that a deliverance is sure to come

ואלו חרין מלכות
 וקח יאני מלכות
 ואלו חרין מלכות
 וקח יאני מלכות

P. 6.

The following lines show how much the poet, like many of his contemporaries, were absorbed in the thought of the coming of the Messiah

ואלו חרין מלכות
 וקח יאני מלכות
 ואלו חרין מלכות
 וקח יאני מלכות

and when he comes

ואלו חרין מלכות
 וקח יאני מלכות

אמרי יבא
אמרי יבא

אמרי יבא
אמרי יבא

אמרי יבא
(P. 35.) אמרי יבא

In this and many kindred poems the poet expects the sudden arrival of the Messiah. He also seems to think that ^{the} very fact of praying for his coming shows a lack of faith.

אמרי יבא
אמרי יבא

אמרי יבא
אמרי יבא

אמרי יבא
אמרי יבא

(P. 16.)

For its beautiful style and loftiness of thought, especially that every line ends in a repetition of the same sound in the same word minus one syllable.

אמרי יבא
אמרי יבא

אמרי יבא
אמרי יבא

אמרי יבא
אמרי יבא

אמרי יבא
אמרי יבא

לְאוֹלָם כִּיחַ בְּאֵימָתָם כִּי אֶתְלֶנָּה — וְלֵבָי

בִּיד נִכְבֵּשׁ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ, בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — בְּלֵבָי

הַתְּחַלֵּץ הַיִּלְכָּתִי אֶתְּחַלֵּץ בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — סִלְכָּי

בְּשִׁלְכָלֶנָּה אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

כִּיחַ תִּכְבֵּשׁ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה כִּיחַ תִּכְבֵּשׁ — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ, בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — יֵלְכָי

אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ, בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ, בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ, בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ, בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ, בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

Don rich and striking are the figures in the following:

אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ, בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ, בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ, בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ, בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ, בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

אֶתְּחַלֵּץ אֶתְּחַלֵּץ, בְּאֵלְכָלֶנָּה — אֶתְּחַלֵּץ

Especially good is the last line when he expresses freedom in the service of God. This reminds us so much of Berthold Auerbach's beautiful phrase "Frei und eins mit dem Gesetz", and also of R. Jehudah Halevi's lines as given in the footnote.

We have dealt so far with his religio-national poems. We will now examine his didactic poems, as this will give us a better insight in his conception of life. We find in many of them reflected the mystic spirit of the Kabbala, in which the poet certainly believed. Thus in one of his poems he expresses the belief, that sin and passion leave their imprint on the hand and face of man, a mystic notion to which R. Isaac Luria held.

לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים

לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים

(Z.I. III p. 36) — לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים

לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים

לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים

לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים

לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים / לשון חסידים

Sir R. J. Halevi of Harnau, Axiadaf '1893

2. Extracts in third division of Z.I.

Nor was he averse to the belief in 'עוֹנֵקִים', evil spirits haunting in the night

אמאדעק בלעזני
אזוי צו חרד פיליט

אעניקע בלעזני
אכאמז האט אצאמז

(P. 92.)

But note his beautiful poem in which he expresses his Weltanschauung:

רעכט צו אן אפן, אפאמז בלעזני, יקאל בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני

עאלע בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני

רעכט צו אן אפן, אפאמז בלעזני, יקאל בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני

עאלע בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני

רעכט צו אן אפן, אפאמז בלעזני, יקאל בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני

עאלע בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני, בלעזני

(Z.I. III p. 52.)

In the following beautiful poem the poet expresses the nothingness of the world.

אפאמז בלעזני, אפאמז בלעזני, אפאמז בלעזני

אפאמז בלעזני, אפאמז בלעזני, אפאמז בלעזני

אפאמז בלעזני, אפאמז בלעזני, אפאמז בלעזני

¹ In the text is possibly which is hardly right, from the following figure we see that the poet wanted to show that there is no discrimination bet. rich and poor old or young.

וּמִן הַיָּם יִכְתֹּב לְאַחֲכֵרָהּ כִּי אֵלֹהֵי יִצְחָק אֵלֶּיךָ זָמַר

שִׁמְרוּהָ וְעַל כִּתְּקִיָּין דִּין אֱלֹהִים בִּיבֹהֵב וְיִשְׁעַר

וְאֵלֶּיךָ כְּתֹבֶנָה חֲמִינָה וְלִבְּךָ לֶקֶד וְזֶרַע

זֶלֶזֶל וְשִׁמְרוּהָ אֶלֶּיךָ כִּי יִשְׁעַר דָּוִד וְלֵאמֹר

אֶלְכֵּיכָהּ טֹט יִבִּי סוּרָהּ, וְלֵאמֹר עֲרִי חֲמִינָהּ

דְּרֹכֶיהָ חֲמִינָהּ בְּכִינָהּ אֶלְכֵּיכָהּ וְחֲמִינָהּ

כִּי כִּי כִּי כִּי כִּי אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁעַר חֲמִינָהּ

אֶלְכֵּיכָהּ וְחֲמִינָהּ בְּכִינָהּ אֶלְכֵּיכָהּ וְחֲמִינָהּ

אֶלְכֵּיכָהּ וְחֲמִינָהּ בְּכִינָהּ אֶלְכֵּיכָהּ וְחֲמִינָהּ

אֶלְכֵּיכָהּ וְחֲמִינָהּ בְּכִינָהּ אֶלְכֵּיכָהּ וְחֲמִינָהּ

אֶלְכֵּיכָהּ וְחֲמִינָהּ בְּכִינָהּ אֶלְכֵּיכָהּ וְחֲמִינָהּ

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We have seen the poet in various moods, at times depressed, at times mournful, but always hopeful and optimistic. We have seen how masterfully he handles the various metres, how pliant and rich is his language. It truly becomes in his hands like the clay in the hands of the potter or still better like a tapestry in the hands of of an artistic weaver.

His language is never obscure, his hymns ^{are} ~~musical~~ and he never forces words that are recalcitrant and makes them to fit or to rhyme. Though he is punning on words and occasionally refers to the Haggada, he never delights in recondite allusion to the Midrash.

There is always such a tenderness and love in his lines, and it is remarkable to note, that though he begs God to redeem his people, and at times asks for the punishment ^{of his enemies}, but there is never that sharp, revengeful, vindictive spirit such as was at times given utterance to by Prophet and Psalmist

consecrated his muse to become a Levite in the Temple of the living God all his life, aside from his genius and wonderful talent, deserves our admiration, our reverence and love. In this respect Nazara occupies the place of honor in the palace of liturgical poetry, in this respect he stands alone, supreme unapproachable. He is the liturgical poet par excellence.

May his hymns continue to inspire the readers and singers to bring him to a nearer relationship and closer communion with God.

תם וביעלם
שבח לאל בורא עולם