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At the Intersection of Sound and Taste: Music, Food, and the Recipe for Jewish Continuity

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Introduction

"When does a Jew sing? When he's hungry."
Mendele Mocher Sforim, *Travels of Benjamin III,* 1878

When people leave their homes to live in a new place, they bring with them intangible cultural heritage that is crucial to the intergenerational transmission of their community. Two of the most important ingredients in this transmission are recipes and songs. Crossing the sea into freedom, the ancient Hebrews sang to God[1]; in the depths of the wilderness, they remembered the fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic they ate freely in Egypt[2]. Marked by displacement and rebirth, Jewish history is marked by determined nostalgia and inventive development. The canon that came to define and link the Jewish community across political borders includes not only sacred textual traditions, but also rich musical and culinary forms. Providing the basis for communal and familial memory, cultural identification, and ethnic affirmation, music and food are profound markers of Jewish identity. Without a geographic center for centuries, Jewish cultural continuity was dependent on the will of individuals and the community. As a perpetual minority without sovereignty for most of their history, non-tangible cultural artifacts became essential modes of cultural transmission. In the thesis that follows, I suggest that the transmission of Jewish culture through music and food reflects two impulses: one to recreate the past, and the other to adopt and incorporate new ways of being as Jews moved from one place to another.

Scholars in the field of ethnomusicology suggest a proximity between the worlds of music and food. In *The Ethnomusicologists' Cookbook,* Sean Williams notes, "Many of us,

[1] Exodus 15
[2] Numbers 11:5

therefore, spend at least part of our lives in the role of musician-researcher-student of cooking."[3] He asks whether we are all "…culinary and musical tourists in disguise, using food and music to explore, satisfy our curiosity, and redefine ourselves…"[4] Others note the similarity between apprenticeship in both cooking and making music; students watch a master, learn through trial and error, and depend heavily on regular practice. One objective of ethnomusicological research is to recognize the temporal and social context in which music is made. Music is not created in a vacuum, and songs have the potential to illustrate essential components of social practices. An approach to Jewish songs about food that utilizes the methods of ethnomusicology leads to a greater understanding of the function and place of food in Jewish history. The repertoire communicates different parts of Jewish culture in history like daily life, nostalgia, the role of women, and the kitchen as an important space of cultural transmission. The budding field of *gastromusicology* is concerned with the intersection of music and food in society. My study seeks to advance the field of gastromusicology by uncovering the essential and vital ways music and food have contributed to the transmission of Jewish culture.

The power of taste and aroma to evoke memory is intrinsic to the human experience. This connection gives food the capacity to be a tangible symbol. Jewish rituals such as the Passover *Seder* use food as a marker of memory and storytelling. Special dishes communicate historical data, like heritage and memory, from one generation to the next. As Fisher writes, "Gastronomy serves as a kind of surrogate, to ease our longings."[5] In a letter to Moses Moser in 1825, Heinrich Heine wrote, "I had Shabbos dinner with Cohn. He served *kugel* and it was with a guilty conscience that I ate this holy national dish, which has done more to preserve Judaism than all

[3] Sean Williams, "World Music, World Food," in *The Ethnomusicologists' Cookbook: Complete Meals from Around the World,* ed. Sean Williams (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.
[4] Ibid.
[5] M.F.K Fisher, "Notes on Cravings," September 7, 1968. *The New Yorker*, reprinted September 6, 2021.

three issues of the *Zeitshrift*."[6] In both religious and non-religious contexts throughout history, and continuing to today, Jewish food stands as a preeminent marker of Jewish identity, communicating important parts of Jewish history and culture.

So, too, with the power of a familiar melody, which has the power to conjure deep memory. A line of *nusach* might be just as potent as a bite of *kugel,* or the smell of goose fat in a Vilna inn. It is baked into the fabric of Jewish time that the melody of prayer, and songs sung around a table, are dependent on the time of year. We sing *V'samachta B'chagecha* only at certain times of the year; we eat round *challot* only for the most special occasions. This activates a similar place of memory and return, particularly useful in transmitting the moods and qualities of various Jewish seasons. Food appears prominently in Jewish music of all kinds, and *vice versa*: music is used to enrich the use of food in Jewish ritual. As the Ladino *Hanukah* song, *Merenda de Janucá* (A Hanukah Snack) reads, "*Damos aceite, el Dio que vo dé un presente / damos harina, el Dio que mos dé vidas.*" ("Give us oil, God will give you a present / give us flour, God will grant us life"). Or as the Yiddish song *Lekoved Shabes* explains, "L*ekoved shabes, fraytik tsu nakht / Esn mir ale fish, un a tsimesl fun merelekh, un a kugel oykhet*." ("In honor of Shabbat, on Friday night / we all eat fish, and a carrot stew, and a *kugel* too.)

In chapter one, I discuss the connection of food and memory and explain on how these elements function in the process of cultural transmission. In the second chapter, I explore the blessings and modes of *kiddush* and *ha-motzi,* the central food blessings. Even the most mundane daily activity of eating is sanctified by words, often spoken, but sometimes chanted or sung; and to end a meal, Jews sometimes thank God for food in song. These blessings are often chanted in an improvisatory manner, but composers have also set them in both *a cappella* and accompanied

[6] Joan Nathan, *Quiches, Kugels, and Couscous: My Search for Jewish Cooking in France* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 248.

treatments. This discussion also notes important changes to the mode based on the Jewish calendar. In chapter three, I discuss songs that incorporate culinary references in their texts. The incorporation of special foods, like *burekas*, *latkes*, and *gefilte fish*, into both folk songs and art songs alike, show the importance of these dishes in Jewish life. Jewish children sing about food because melodies help them remember. The rich body of *Z'mirot* is an abundant source of cultural material, and their performance is a considerable method of transmission. Cultural transmission in Jewish life does not only happen in public communal spaces dedicated to learning; rather, spaces in the home, like the kitchen and festival table, are significant arenas of cultural transmission in Jewish life. These songs reveal the importance of these physical arenas of Jewish cultural transmission.

Because displacement has had a pervasive role in Jewish history, cultural content is brought from one location to another. Over time and through natural processes of change, any given cultural element may be enshrined, adjusted to fit a new home, or forgotten altogether. Especially in today's hyper-nationalistic society, this complicates the understanding and identification of Jewish cultural content. Outside the State of Israel, the Jewish home and Jewish communal spaces are the primary locations of cultural transmission, as opposed to the national or public sphere. It is in the home that food and song have the capacity to convey Jewishness, communicating heritage, values, and historical consciousness. Recipes and melodies, oftentimes transmitted as precious relics, represent the essential knowledge necessary to recreating meaningful dishes and "re-singing" favorite songs. While the content itself varies from home to home and from community to community, displacement and the use of food and music as mechanisms for cultural transmission are ubiquitous elements of the Jewish experience in history.

Chapter 1

Food and Memory

"As it is, the days are made up of meals, formal and impromptu, meals between meals and within meals…"
Chang rae-Lee

In his essay, "How Sea Urchin Tastes," Korean American novelist Chang rae-Lee describes how boredom initiated his interest in food on a family trip to Korea in his adolescence. He mentions the rows of street vendors in Seoul, remarking on the unavoidable omnipresence of food in human life. He remembers his mother's protest to eating sea urchin and recalls his father's expression when the delicacy makes him ill. Even so, the lingering memory of sea urchin haunts him, so he goes back for more the next week. Lee writes that at the time, he did not then know what drew him back, his internal odometer shifting between "anticipation and revulsion."[7] Perhaps it is the power of taste to create and elicit memories that drives us to seek out the flavors and aromas that remind us of home, or simply make us feel something.

Food is a central facet of cultural expression that carries significance and meaning in human society. Jon D. Holtzman writes, "Ethnic identity forms a central arena in which food is tied to notions of memory, although not necessarily framed in those terms."[8] Much of our interaction with food is subconscious, a means to an end. Central to this human process is the formation of memories linked to food. Rachelle Saltzman notes, "From snacks to everyday meals, from seasonal specialties to holiday dishes food communicates aesthetic, religious, family, and community values from one person to another."[9] So too in Jewish culture, memory

[7] Chang-rae Lee, "How Sea Urchin Tastes," *The New Yorker*, August 12, 2002, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/09/06/magazine20020819sea-urchin.
[8] Jon D. Holtzman, "Food and Memory," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 35 (Annual Reviews, 2006): 367, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25064929.
[9] Rachelle H. Saltzman, "Rites of Intensification: Eating and Ethnicity in the Catskills," in *Culinary Tourism*, ed. Lucy Long (Kentuky: University Press of Kentucky, 2004) 227.

plays an important role in how food functions in the transmission of language, values, and memory.

The "sensuousness" of food, that is the physical reaction over the intellectual, is vital to the process of linking taste and aroma to memory.[10] In Jewish life, physical joy created by eating special foods once a week on the Sabbath, or once a year on holidays, is an important component of celebrating holidays. This sensuousness is also connected to the economics of its preparation and how certain foods are perceived by different groups. For example, some foods are relegated to the rich (usually due to the resources needed to prepare them), while other foods are more accessible to a wider consumer base. Research in this arena suggests links between food systems (the whole set of individuals and processes necessary for the food supply to continue) and cultural values, economic realities, and the "social construction of memory."[11] Communal and familial memories linked to the economics of food are a palpable mechanism for communicating personal and communal history.

Regarding the Jewish impetus "to remember," much has been written. The Hebrew imperative *zakhor* – remember – appears dozens of times in the *Tanakh* and throughout Jewish liturgy.[12] Memory and remembering are "part and parcel" of Jewish culture. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* is the preeminent text detailing how

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[10] "Smell is the sense most closely linked to both emotion and memory. There are two neuroscientific reasons for this. The first is that, for every other sense, the information from each sensory part of the brain first goes to the thalamus, before being transmitted to other regions of the brain. However, smell goes directly from the olfactory bulb to the amygdala (responsible for processing emotion) and the hippocampus (responsible for processing memory). The second is that piriform cortex, which processes smell, is itself able to store long-term memories. A likely explanation for these differences is that smell is the oldest sense, dating back to single-celled organisms, and therefore, it both has had the most time to evolve and is also most closely linked with our primal nature." – Dr. Nora Isacoff, contributed for this study.

[11] Du Bois, Christine M. and Sidney W. Mintz, "The Anthropology of Food and Eating." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 31, Annual Reviews, 2002, 100, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4132873.

[12] "Remember this day, on which you went free from Egypt, the house of bondage, how the Eternal freed you from it with a mighty hand: no leavened bread shall be eaten." Exodus 13:3
"Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy." Exodus 20:8
"A remembrance of the work of creation." *Me'ein Sheva*

memory functions in the formation and transmission of Jewish culture. In reference to biblical examples of the link between custom and memory, Yerushalmi writes, "Memory flowed, above all, through two channels: ritual and recital."[13] Yerushalmi notes that while content and form of ritualized memory changes over time, it is a well-established paradigm. The ritualization of memory is an aspect of Jewish culture that is expressed through music and food. For the Jewish story, certain moments in history are relegated to memory. A process was inherited from the ancient period and interpreted by rabbis over centuries. In this chapter, I explore how the paradigm of memory meets the symbolism of food as a model and foundation for cultural creativity and expression.

Food as Symbol in Memory

That food carries meaning in Jewish life is established in Judaism's earliest texts. Food appears as a subject throughout the *Tanakh,* and it is used both in literal and figurative applications. The "forbidden" fruit, a birthright sold for a bowl of stew, the taste of manna, what one can and cannot eat, and other examples, constitute a robust theme throughout the bible. [14] Beyond food as a part of narrative, some food stuffs were highly symbolic in the culture of ancient Israel. The use of animal sacrifices, and the consumption or discarding of such foods, were tied into notions of atonement and forgiveness. These rites also marked time, and, such as in the case of the *Pesach* sacrifice, represented the commemoration of a communal memory. In this ancient mode of worship, animals were "selectively killed for a symbolic reason (as opposed

[13]Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (University of Washington Press, 2011), 11.
[14] Genesis 3; Genesis 25; Numbers 11; Deuteronomy 14.

to simply for food.)"[15] While sacrifice is not a focus of this study, the interconnection between food, ritual, and symbolism in ancient Israel is an important point of divergence for the relationship between food and ritual in later Judaism. Over time, food symbolism and its function were renewed as religious symbols in Rabbinic Judaism.

In the medieval period, Rabbinic Judaism further codified what Yerushalmi refers to as "selective memory," wherein historical moments continued to enter communal consciousness. Traumas such as the Crusades motivated the incorporation of disturbing but powerful anecdotes into liturgy.[16] The generations of rabbis and their followers who sculpted Jewish civilization over time also made use of the visceral connection between eating and remembering. Food plays a role in Yerushalmi's system of "ritual and recital," mentioned above. In the Jewish calendar, the quintessential intersection of eating and remembering is the Passover Seder. Yerushalmi's description is a convincing presentation of the capacity of this ritual:

> Here, in the course of a meal around the family table, ritual, liturgy, and even culinary elements are orchestrated to transmit a vital past from one generation to the next. The entire Seder is a symbolic enactment of an historical scenario whose three great acts structure the Haggadah that is read aloud: slavery – deliverance – ultimate redemption. Significantly, one of the first ritual acts to be performed is the lifting up of a piece of unleavened bread (*matzah*) before those assembled, with the declaration: *Ha lahma 'anya* –'*This is the bread of affliction* which our forefathers ate in the Land of Egypt.' Both the language and the gesture are geared to spur, not so much a leap of memory as a fusion of past and present. Memory here is no longer recollection, which still preserves a sense of distance, but reactualization.[17]

Food facilitates "reactualization," i.e., making something a real, sensory, tactile, and cognitive experience. The centrality of the Seder in the Jewish calendar creates a paradigm of ritual and the place of food that inspired other parts of Jewish culture.

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[15] Naomi Janowitz, "Inventing the Scapegoat: Theories of Sacrifice and Ritual," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 25, no. 1, ed. Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew J. Strathern (2011): 15–24, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44368872.
[16] Rabbi Richard S. Sarason, "Eileh Ezkerah: Memorializing Jewish Martyrs on Yom Kippur," in *Reform Judaism*, November 30, 2021, https://reformjudaism.org/blog/eileh-ezkerah-memorializing-jewish-martyrs-yom-kippur.
[17] Yerushalmi. "Zakhor," 44.

Other Jewish holidays incorporate foods that carry meaning and enrich the festival experience, as, for example, the eating of oily foods on Chanukah to symbolize the miracle of the oil. Or, the predilection to eat dairy foods on Shavuot, which is derived from multiple sources, such as the symbol of the "land of milk and honey," or the "nourishment" one gets from both milk and Torah. Unlike the Passover Seder, the eating of these foods is not ritualized. Rather, special foods carry different significance from place to place and from community to community. The development of these food customs is a characteristic of Jewish culture at large, combining both a reverence for the memory and symbols, as well as a need to grow and advance.

Cultural Evolution and Nostalgia

Two elements – cultural evolution and nostalgia – work in tandem to create the unique blend of old and new that defines Jewish foodways. Food has a function in the progression of both forces, affecting both memory and cultural creativity, and thus, the transmission of culture. On one hand, food represents the vital link between Jews in new places and their previous homes (memory). On the other hand, Jewish history also demonstrates the embrace of new material (cultural creativity). The process of cultural evolution connotes looking forward and implies a historical need for change. While they looked back from where they came, Jews adapted elements of new geographic areas into the cultural fold. I present these changes in the framework of "evolution," which is a slow, gradual process, viewed as whole over a long period of time.

In "Cultural evolutionary theory: How culture evolves and why it matters," a particular conclusion appears to apply to Jewish culture. The authors write, "New cultural traits can also originate when existing traits are combined in novel ways, which can lead to exponential rates of

cultural accumulation."[18] In her study of the transmission of Sephardic culture, Diane Matza suggests, albeit casually, that Jews are used to carrying "many cultures at once."[19] Elliott Horowitz notes the growing academic interest in displacement as it pertains to the Jewish story:

> [The] Jewish case has appeared to scholars of food and migration as the most illuminating example of the centrality of food in the everyday life and identity of mobile people, as they created community and nation in motion, and of the vital importance of mobile people in promoting food exchange.[20]

Instead of a detriment to the proliferation of Jewish life, Jews adopted and adapted elements of culture over time, reacting to the environment in which they lived. One must consider this framework in a material and practical way, as opposed to theoretical, because families and communities do not develop in a vacuum. Rather, these forces are malleable, undefined, and difficult to measure.

The Jewish experience of diaspora is a fundamental element of Jewish history that determines the character of Jewish foodways and promotes cultural exchange. Movements of individual families bring beloved foods to new places, and the growth of new communities brings in new foods that further influence the tastes of Jewish food. "Special foods – in some cases everyday dishes, and in others holiday specialties – evoke a sense of security and create the feeling of being at home in a new place."[21] Without a central geographic or political boundary, this analysis is vital for the purposes of drawing conclusions about Jewish food history as a *bona fide* unit, as opposed to unconnected stories with similar themes. American Jewish cuisine and Israeli cuisine are both examples that incorporate flavor profiles from many disparate geographic

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[18] Creanza, Nicole, Oren Kolodny, and Marcus W. Feldman, "Cultural evolutionary theory: How culture evolves and why it matters," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (July 2017).

[19] Diane Matza, "Sephardic Jews Transmitting Culture Across Three Generations," *American Jewish History* 79 (1990): 343. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23884511.

[20] Horowitz. "Remembering the Fish," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 104, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 66. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43298775.

[21] Saltzman, "Rites of Intensification: Eating and Ethnicity in the Catskills." 227.

origins. For a time, the world of Jewish food – despite varying flavor profiles – "achieved consistency by kashrut rules…thus constituting a common, shared, and distinctive dietary idiom, even as Jews literally found themselves on the move."[22] In the modern era, clear breaks with and resistance to the strictures of *kashrut* began to widen the Jewish experience of food. One way of interpreting this change is to suggest the importance of flavor profile *and* cultural significance in determining the Jewishness of a food, instead of focusing on its traditional preparation.

In his essay, "Remembering the Fish and Making a Tsimmes: Jewish Food, Jewish Identity, and Jewish Memory," Elliott Horowitz establishes food as a strong and relevant factor in the formation of Jewishness. Through the lens of food, collective memory is created and passed on. Engaging in what Horowitz describes as "culinary nostalgia," Jewish food writers tend to romanticize the past. Though not the central subject of his essay, Horowitz puts forward a limited number of statements on the internal Jewish perspective. For example, he writes, "...this dish has been recognized as Jewish by Italian Jews themselves and has a distinct place in the annual cycle of holidays, two important factors in my opinion in determining a food's Jewishness."[23] Horowitz demonstrates that Jewish food and collective memory are as nuanced as any other cultural commodity. This process and the force of nostalgia prompt people to point to a food and say: "this is Jewish food."

[22]Simone Cinotto, Hasia R. Diner, and Carlo Petrini. *Global Jewish Foodways: A History* (University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 9.
[23] Elliot Horowitz, "Remembering the Fish and Making a Tsimmes: Jewish Food, Jewish Identity, and Jewish Memory." *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 66.

Food and Cultural Change

Global Jewish Foodways (ed. Diner and Cinotto) is a robust collection of research related to Jewish food culture to date.[24] Covering diverse subject matters, the research reflects different moments across time and space. Much of the research in the collection offers insight into how food functions as a marker of identity. Further, the forces of nostalgia and cultural creativity appear, as Jews return to past dishes or adopt new ones. Organized into four parts, the titles of each section show the breadth of material: "Crossing and Bridging Culinary Boundaries," "Resistance, Resilience, and Adaptations of Jewish Food in the Encounter with the Non-Jewish Other," "The Politics of Jewish Food: Culinary Articulations of Power, Identity, and the State," "The Kosherization of Jewish Food: Playing Out Religion, Taste, and Health in the Marketplace and Popular Culture," and, "The Food of the Diaspora: The Global Identity, Memory, and History of Jewish Food." Under each of these categories, contributors demonstrate the vast capability of a perspective on food to enhance our understanding of Jewish history.

In the chapter, "From the Comfort of Home to Exile: German Jews and Their Foodways," Marion Kaplan first explores how food factored in changes within the German Jewish community from the 18th to the 19th centuries. During the process of acculturation, significant Jewish dishes survived, even as German foodways became more prominent in Jewish homes. Urbanization and a turn away from the strictness of *kashrut* led to an environment in which tastes and culinary preferences rapidly changed. "Nowhere do we see the adoption of food habits more clearly than in the German Jewish adherence to the German ritual of the coffee and cake hour."[25] The endorsement of this German formality underscores the power of foodways as an indicator of

[25] Marion Kaplan, "From the Comfort of Home to Exile: German Jews and Their Foodways," in *Global Jewish Foodways: A History*, ed. Hasia R. Diner and Simone Conotto, (University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 246.

status and acculturation. Even as their environment became increasingly hostile, Kaplan traces how German food became central to the Jewish experience in exile.

Kaplan continues with the experience of German exiles in Portugal and Latin America, where they, too, adopted delicacies such as the *bacalhao* (salted cod) and the plantain. "Yet the German element remained: 'they had beautiful cakes from 'strictly German' recipes.'"[26] This give-and-take is an element of Jewish displacement and mobility that is reflected in an ever-evolving cuisine. This makes identification with certain foods a crucial piece of Jewish identity.

In Andre Acimen's coming of age story, *Out of Egypt,* referred to in Nancy Berg's *Jews and Muslims: Culinary Contexts,* food choices are full of meaning. The reader is intimately introduced to the subtlety of food in the culture of modernized Egyptian Jews. For example, the common Egyptian breakfast of mashed fava beans is considered "food for the poor."[27] Active choices are important: Acimen's grandmother notes that "eating fried food by Arabs on the street [is] unconscionable."[28] The symbolism of food extends to how Jews recall the past and live their present. The account of his family's compulsory exit from Egypt is both unique and reminiscent of other Jewish stories; exile triggers the process of nostalgia known so well in other Jewish communities. Acimen's "impending exile tuns the simple street food into a desired delicacy."[29] Both examples –the German Jews' acculturation and devotion to German recipes, and Acimen's longing for Arab street food despite his grandmother's distaste for it – indicate the complexity of the issue of food and identity in Jewish life. Food highlights the tension between the urge to recreate the past and the urge to "fit in." Cuisine also provides an outlet for the expression of

[26] Kaplan, "From the Comfort of Home to Exile: German Jews and Their Foodways," 253.
[27] Nancy E. Berg, "Jews among Muslims: Culinary Contexts," in *Global Jewish Foodways: A History*, ed. Hasia R. Diner and Simone Conotto, (University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 73.
[28] Ibid. 78
[29] Ibid. 74.

these multiple layers of identity, suggesting food as an important link in the transmission of Jewish culture.

When Chang rae-Lee describes human life as “meals between meals and within meals,” one gets a sense for the sheer number of opportunities one could use to express oneself through food. Great cultural creativity stems from the influence of memory and food in Jewish life. Elements of nostalgia, as well as commentaries on the economic values and perceptions of food, are present in Jewish cultural output. Memory acts as an influential force in this process, both on an individual and communal level; making Jewish ritual “real” through food is common in Judaism. In the following chapters, I explore Jewish music that spotlights food. From the intonation of blessings over food, to folk songs, art songs, and parodies, food is a ubiquitous, if not particular, theme in Jewish music. This music functions on a spectrum from being an effective source of entertainment to a potent force for cultural transmission.

Chapter 2

Blessings Over Food and Wine

It is best to say 'ha-motzi' *on the choicest bread possible.*
Kitsur Shulkhan Arukh 41:8

In his summary of Yosef Caro's *Shulkhan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law), Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried comments on the centrality of the blessing over bread.[30] Ganzfried elaborates on what to do when a person is about to make the blessing over bread, but there are two unequal loaves at hand (one has already been partially consumed). Which of the loaves should one bless? Ganzfried's answer (assuming the breads are made of the same grain), is that one should make the blessing over the full loaf. Even if the full loaf is *smaller* than the partially eaten one, the full loaf is still *"ḥashuvah yoteir,*" (lit., more important/significant, or "choicest") meaning it is preferred to bless that one due to its full and complete nature. This esoteric teaching shows one of the ways in which Jewish ritual intersects food symbolism. In exploring how cultural transmission is facilitated through music and food, I begin with blessings over food. A set liturgy of food blessings links Jewish communities across political and temporal borders. On special occasions, aural and textual changes in the blessings mark the passage of time. Further, the consistent use of food-based prayers is a measure of resistance to the ramifications of displacement and acculturation.

Ahad Ha'am famously said, "More than the Jewish People have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews." Perhaps his famous line can act as a framework for understanding the endurance and tenacity of Jewish culture as passed from generation to generation. While he was not at all referring to the recitation of food blessings, it is important to note his reference to non-

[30] Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch,* trans. Rabbi Avrohom Davis (Uzhgorod: 1864; Metzudah Pub., 1996).

tangible culture, i.e., Shabbat, and a reliance on ideas and ways of life to ensure cultural continuity. As such, studying blessings is important for several reasons. First, the repetition of blessings, especially those said before eating, makes them a frequent occurrence. Second, the obligation to recite them serves as an important mechanism for incorporating religion or spirituality into daily activities. In addition, food blessings are used to sanctify an otherwise mundane and biologically necessary act.

The use of food blessings is realized today differently in divergent Jewish communities. Their use necessitates an awareness of what is being consumed by an individual, i.e., different foods require different blessings, and that knowledge is necessary for the proper application of the blessings. If one were to take a sample of Jews who say blessings before they eat, some Jews would answer that they recite blessings before eating all foods. Others would only *hear* the blessing (perhaps joining along) once a week on Shabbat, in the synagogue setting. The public recitation of food blessings in communal Jewish communities, like camps, is an attempt to incorporate a Jewish element into eating. This is especially potent in the case of progressive Jewish communities in which the recitation of food blessings has shifted mostly from an individual to a communal experience. Still, food blessings are common denominators that link Jewish communities around the globe through a focus on food.

In traditional Jewish practice, one must say a blessing over food before it is permitted to be eaten. Of note as well is that the traditional liturgy *following* a meal is dependent on the blessings recited *prior* to the meal, and the number of diners involved. The earliest recorded discussion of reciting formulaic blessings over food in Jewish text is found in the *Mishnah,* codified in the Land of Israel in the 3rd century C.E. Chapter Six of *Seder Berakhot,* which discusses in some detail the instructions regarding which blessing to recite for which food. Five

blessings and one blessing for wine have been distilled from Rabbinic literature to cover the gamut of edible foods; they are recited before consuming. Unlike some blessings, which are governed by the time of day or the season, blessings for food are spontaneous benedictions governed by a person's natural cravings. Not only are these blessings spontaneous, but they are also usually said individually, only loud enough for one to hear oneself.[31] Each are so-called short form blessings, beginning with the common *Barukh Atah Ado-nai Eloheinu Melech Haolam* (Blessed are You, Eternal Our God, Sovereign of the Universe):

בּוֹרֵא מִינֵי מְזוֹנוֹת *Borei minei m'zonot* (Creator of the various foods.)
בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָעֵץ *Borei p'ri ha'eitz* (Creator of fruit of the tree.)
בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה *Borei p'ri ha'adamah* (Creator of fruit of the earth)
בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן *Borei p'ri ha'gafen* (Creator of fruit of the vine)
שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בִּדְבָרוֹ *She'hakol nih'yeh bid'varo* (Through whose words all came to be.)
הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ *Ha'motzi lechem min ha'aretz* (Who brings bread from the earth.)

The final blessing for bread is a catch-all that is also used to cover an entire meal that includes bread or *challah*. This blessing sanctifies all other foods present, except wine, which requires its own blessing.

Deuteronomy 8:10 states: וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבָעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת־ה אֱ-לֹ-הֶיךָ עַל־הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לָךְ: "You shall eat, be sated, and bless the Eternal for the good earth given to you." This biblical instruction is realized in Jewish life through rabbinic interpretation in the *Birkat Hamazon,* commonly translated as Grace After Meals. Jewish law, as reflected through arguments in the Talmud, and codified *Halacha,* regulates the types of blessings that are required for which meals. For example, meals that include bread (and over which the *Ha-Motzi* was said,) necessitate the recitation of the full *Birkat Hamazon.* In other cases, a shorter version, known as *Birkat Me-ein Shalosh* is recited individually.

[31] Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Berachot*, Chapter 1, Paragraph 7.

The full text is made up of an introductory passage, whose text depends on the day, and four main blessings. The first blessing thanks God as giver food, the second blesses the land and the food consumed (the second blessing also includes portions that change depending on whether it is a holiday or other special time). The third blessing recalls the centrality and safety of Jerusalem. Finally, the fourth section includes a litany of benedictions evoking God's compassion (*Ha-Rachaman)*. This section constitutes devotional paragraphs that profess gratitude to God for the good in life. On Shabbat and Festivals, *Birkat Hamazon* is sung or recited communally, usually including everyone at the meal. In addition, when celebrating new couples, additional *Sheva Berachot* blessings are included in the *Birkat Hamazon.* The centrality of these after-meal blessings is suggested in the expansive use of "*benchers*" for special occasions, i.e., small, printed books in which *Birkat Hamazon,* and usually lyrics of well-known songs are provided to guests.

On Shabbat and festivals, the blessing for bread, commonly referred to as "*Ha-Motzi*," and the blessing for wine, *kiddush,* are central to the Shabbat table and typically recited as communal blessings. Home-based rituals include the chanting of these blessings on behalf of all gathered. We know from discussions in the Jerusalem Talmud that, at least in some communities, wine was "sanctified" as part of the worship service in the *beit k'nesset*.[32] In an article by Shlomo Tal, he describes a lack of wine in *Bavel*, where individuals could not get wine. It was at that time that *kiddush* may have entered the synagogue to cover those gathered.[33] Many communities bless wine and bread at the end of the Shabbat evening service, as well as in the morning, to begin communal lunches. The perceived importance of reciting blessings over

[32] *Talmud Yerushalmi,* Berakot 8:1. This section discusses how to proceed if one does not have wine on hand.
[33] Shlomo Tal, "*Birkat 'M'ein Sheva'"* in תרביץ .מ"א 1971. (Thanks to Rabbi Dr. Dalia Marx for illuminating the use and entrance of *kiddush* into the synagogue service.)

food is underscored by their incorporation into public ceremony. One cultural ramification of this sanctification of eating is the use of music to enhance the prayer on certain occasions.

Food and Wine are Blessed in Major

At a basic and essential level is the mode or *nusach* in which these blessings are intoned. This aural tradition was once passed down solely through oral transmission, offering a musical foundation to base chanting. In the modern era, composers further enhanced these blessings by setting the full text of the Shabbat or Festival *kiddush* to music, often ornate. Many of these compositions are based on elements of the basic mode. With some small exceptions, food and wine in Judaism are blessed in a major tonality, or more precisely, in the *Hashem Malach* mode. See Figure 1.1 for an example of one variation of the blessing for bread as chanted on Shabbat.

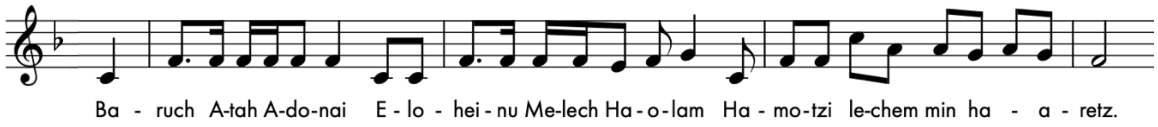
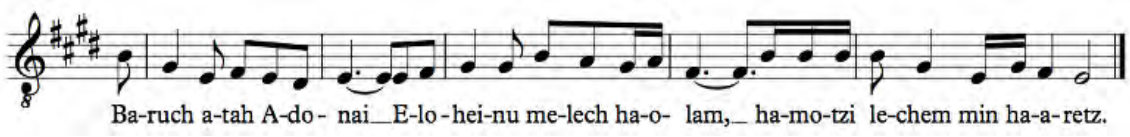


Figure 1.1

Variations on this blessing might incorporate other typical opening or closing phrases within the *Hashem Malach* mode. This is evident in Figure 1.2. The blessing for bread is again chanted in a major tonality, this time with the full root chord outlined immediately. The transcription is based on a recording of Shabbat evening from *Círculo Israelita de Santiago* (Chile). In reviewing recordings and transcriptions of the chanting of *Ha-Motzi* on Shabbat, each one employed the use of a major sonority. The *Hashem Malach* mode is used in both the home and in the synagogue setting.



[34]

Figure 1.2

An American phenomenon of note is the prayer, "We Give Thanks (Ha-Motzi)," first published by Transcontinental Music Publications in 1954. Samuel Adler, born in Mannheim, Germany, son of Hugo Chaim Adler, and classical composer, composed the music for this simple but essential song. Raymond Israel wrote the text, which appears below.

> *Hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz*
> We give thanks to God for bread;
> Our voices join in song together,
> As our joyful prayer is said:
> *Baruch Atah Ado-nai Eloheinu Melech Haolam Hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.*

Set in a major key, the song's opening phrase and the blessing at the end are based on the typical *nusach*. Jewish children of all ages throughout the United States encounter this prayer in various settings, typically being prompted by guardians or counters to sing it before eating. Primarily used in the progressive Jewish world, this simple prayer is pervasive. This version of the blessing for bread is most popular at Jewish summer camps and supplemental religious schools but can be found in day schools and any number of other settings. It acts as a mechanism for cultural transmission, incorporating both Hebrew and English, and being geared toward a younger generation. Using this song before eating acts as a new cultural phenomenon for those Jews who are not accustomed to praying prior to all eating. This song is a common denominator that connects progressive Jewish communities across North America. One confirmation of this universal quality is that through natural processes, alterations in text have emerged in different

[34] Courtesy of https://offtonic.com/nusach/index.html?service=ShabbatShabbatDinner

parts of the United States. For example, “our voices join in song,” becomes, “our voices rise in song,” and “our joyful prayer,” becomes “our daily prayer.” This is to be expected through oral transmission over five decades.

On holidays and festivals, the blessing for wine is expanded. Additional text is included that states the holiday and characterizes it (i.e., *the holiday of Sukkot, time of our rejoicing*). Changes in the *nusach* signal a special time of year, and increasingly ornate melodies may be employed. For the *Shelosh Regalim* (*Pesach*, *Sukkot*, and *Shavuot*) and *Rosh Hashana*, the text is expanded and the major tonality is retained. With the special texts comes incorporation of an aural signifier: the *akdamut* mode. The source melody of the mode comes from the chanting of the *Akdamut Milin* piyyut on *Shavuot*. The evocative so-called Ashkenazi melody that accompanies this 11th century Aramaic text comes from the medieval period and is considered part of the *“mi-Sinai”* melodies.[35] The association with Shavuot gives the melody an association with the giving of the Torah.[36] Since the Festival *Kiddush* is enhanced using quotations from this same melody, wine becomes a vessel for connecting the cycle of Jewish life to the sanctity of the Torah.

This preliminary discussion outlines an introduction to ritual-based connections between food and music in Jewish life. The mundane act of eating and drinking is sanctified through the recitation of blessings. In an ideal world, these customs are passed from one generation to the next, ensuring the sanctification of eating in the future. Focusing on prayer before eating may seem like an insignificant or even common feature of religious communities. However, I argue that this is a telling cultural marker that continues to facilitate the transmission of the value of

[35] “*אקדמות מלין – מילים, ביצועים, פירושים ותווים | אתר הפיוט* ”.אקדמות מלין – מילים, ביצועים, פירושים ותווים: אתר הפיוט והתפילה *והתפילה*, https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/he/Song/Pages/Song.aspx?SongID=717#3,138,2253,486.
[36] Andrew Bernard, *The Sound of Sacred Time: A Basic Music Theory Textbook to Teach the Jewish Prayer Modes*. (Andrew Bernard, 2006): 44.

food appreciation. Whether through daily incorporation of prayer before and after eating, or through camp or communal prayer, the blessing of food and the singing of these same blessings can be traced back through many centuries in as many places as Jews found themselves living.

Chapter 3

Finding Food in Jewish Song

"Man comes from dust and ends in dust [High Holy Day *Musaf* prayer] – and in between, let's have a drink."
Yiddish Proverb

The repertoire explored in this chapter enriches our understanding of the day to day lives of Jews in certain places throughout history. A meeting of generations happens in the kitchen, a central place in the Jewish home. The kitchen and festival table are exposed as two central spaces of cultural transmission in Jewish life. In the kitchen, cooking becomes a method of resistance to changes out of one's control. Jewish songs about food confirm the place of food as a celebration of history. Women's roles in the process of teaching both recipes and songs are an undeniable and noteworthy element discussed in this chapter.

Folk songs, art songs, liturgical, and popular music in, Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, English, and other languages, feature Jewish fare. This broad spectrum demonstrates how important food is in Jewish identity, in different places and times. These songs suggest the existence of a paradigm within Jewish culture to integrate food into music as a method of preservation, cultivation, and storytelling. Like poetry, food and music have the capacity to communicate a great deal of information. In this chapter, I explore a sampling of this repertoire, highlighting the deep connection between these two great cultural domains. Most of the repertoire fits loosely into four categories: biblical texts, foods of Shabbat, foods of Jewish holidays, and songs about food beyond specific holidays. Important to note are the porous boundaries between these categories; some music might fit into more than one category, or perhaps not squarely in one specific category. Presenting these songs in this fashion is a starting point for categorizing this unique and substantial Jewish repertoire. The Jewish values and elements of Jewish history in

each song are transmitted from one generation to the next in a fluid process of musical and culinary instruction.

Music Set to Biblical Text

As described in the previous chapter, texts from the *Tanakh* incorporate food in both literal and symbolic ways, and music reflects this usage. These texts represent important points of departure for how food functioned early in the Jewish story. Compared to the other categories, these texts are unique in that many of the foods mentioned in the *Tanakh* are broadly identified foodstuffs (with exceptions such as *matzah*) (*e.g., raisin cake*[37]), as opposed to more narrowly identified Jewish foodstuffs (*e.g. gefilte fish).* In other words, the music is only tangentially related to the food mentioned; rather, the texts they set reflect a heavily symbolic use of food in Ancient Hebrew text. Food is used as a medium to describe different relationships, both interpersonal and between humans and God.

Shir Ha-Shirim (the Song of Songs) demonstrates the ways in which food is used in the Hebrew Scriptures. Wine is the most prominent consumable mentioned in the book, appearing nine times, and it is used throughout in different ways to enhance the sensual quality of the text. Wine is a luxurious commodity, the winery a private setting, both a vessel for literary imagery. "For your love is greater than wine."[38] "He has brought me to the house of wine; and love is his banner over me."[39] "And your mouth like the choicest wine: let it flow straight to my beloved, gliding over the lips of sleepers."[40] While the love between two people is the main theme, wine emblematizes the intoxication of being in love.

[37] Song of Songs 2:5
[38] Ibid., 1:2
[39] Ibid., 2:4
[40] Ibid., 7:10

A.W. Binder sets the text of Songs of Songs 2:1-5 in his composition, "*Ani Havatzelet Hasharon*." Three out of five of these verses use metaphor based on food or taste sensations.

> 1 I am a rose of Sharon; a lily of the valleys.
> 2 Like a lily among thorns, so is my darling among the maidens.
> 3 Like an apple tree (*k'tapuah)* among trees of the forest,
> so is my beloved among the youths. In his shade, I delight to sit,
> and his fruit is sweet (*u'firyo matok*) to my mouth.
> 4 He brought me to the 'house of wine', and his banner of love was over me.
> 5 'Sustain me with raisin cakes (*ashishot)*, refresh me with apples (*tapuhim)*,
> for I am faint with love.'[41]

The primary purpose of fruit and sweetness is to remind the reader what love "feels" like. The reader does not have to remind him/her/themselves what "sweet" tastes like or that it is generally considered pleasurable. Again, this puts the music in its own category, as it is not actual dishes to which reference is made, but rather, the deep emotional connection humans have to the sensual experience of eating and drinking. Loving, eating, and drinking represent life itself, perhaps the most celebrated and cherished thing in Judaism. Still, as I outline below, Binder's musical and textual choices seem to highlight these very metaphors.

For example, tempo marking is "Slowly and very sweetly." Using E as a tonal center throughout, Binder oscillates between minor and major tonalities at points of rest. His use of accidentals, though, colors the opening of the piece and complicates the harmonic center. With E as tonal center, Binder sharps both A and C in the opening sequence, bringing out a Ukrainian Dorian quality, adding to the mysterious and sensual mood of the music. The first two verses of the text are set over the opening ten measures, with E minor triads recentering the harmony. This minor tonality continues up to the opening of verse three.

Upon chanting the text, "Like an apple tree…" the key changes, and E major harmonizes the voice above. This jarring and sudden move from minor to major follows the excitement of

[41] Song of Songs 2:1-5

the scene, as the subject considers their beloved. Beyond harmony, Binder takes literary liberty by repeating this verse three times. Each time, shorter note durations increase the speed at which the words are chanted. The last two times, an E major triad outlines the phrase, "like an apple tree." Continuing still in the second half of verse three, the E major center gives way to a sudden return to E minor on the words "in his shade." The vocal line reintroduces the use of the A#, further impressing a Ukrainian Dorian quality. Here, Binder repeats the end of the verse two times, "and his fruit was sweet to my mouth." And, he further repeats the word *matok* (sweet), four times, in half as many measures. At this central point in the piece, the E center shifts with the use of a much-anticipated F# major triad, leading to a B minor cadence. The "sweetness" of love is communicated through both text and music.

The intensity builds as the lovers enter the "house of wine" in verse 4, which is repeated twice over held diminished seventh chords. With the first half of the final verse, "sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples," Binder brings a strong major tonality, harmonizing a major IV on A from the previous E minor cadence. Finally, with the words "for I am faint with love," Binder returns to the intensity created by long, rich, dissonant chords over a modal vocal line. The second half of verse 5 is repeated six times, until a final declaration leads to a strong V – I cadence to E minor. Binder colors the final accompaniment line of the piece by reintroducing an A# into the E minor pedal tones. Throughout this piece, the sensuous nature of the text is reflected in Binder's musical choices.

Binder's piece is a sublime example of Hebrew art song, engaging modal harmonies to evoke the pastoral love scene portrayed in the text. Food is not the main subject, but it facilitates a connection to the text that readers of the story, and consumers of this music, understand today.

By highlighting elements of taste, inebriation and love through music, Binder's setting enriches our understanding of and connection to the world of the *Tanakh.*

Songs of Shabbat Foods

Of the countless ways Jews celebrate the Sabbath, music and food are two prevalent elements found in most places. The development of Shabbat practices was and is not limited to a geographic place or favored in one community over another, but as Jews exchanged ideas and practices, some customs and rituals became common throughout the Jewish world. In her masterwork, "Voices of a People," Ruth Rubin notes that many Yiddish folk songs "deal with the food which was so heartily consumed and so carefully prepared for the Sabbath."[42] The centrality and frequency of Shabbat make it a major source of Jewish cultural creativity. And pieces of these precious Shabbat celebrations are contained in and communicated through music.

Three main meals – Friday evening, Shabbat day, and late Saturday afternoon – are a common framework of communal eating during the Sabbath. The holy and elevated quality of the day of rest calls for the preparation of special foods for these meals. Many Jewish households prepare food for these meals in advance, which is based on biblical and Rabbinic restrictions on the type of work one may do on Shabbat. Even in those circles where the three-meal framework is not the norm, a central communal meal is usually an important piece of Shabbat rituals. As such, the preparation, enjoyment, and anticipation of foods that are significant to individual families, and to the community at large, are a formidable force for cultural transmission. While enjoying special delicacies on Shabbat may find meaning in most Jewish communities, what varies are the specific food items involved. Likewise, the music in this category features fare

[42] Ruth Rubin, *Voices of a People: Yiddish Folk Song*, (New York: T. Yoseloff, 1963), 137.

from many corners of the globe. Below, I analyze three examples, in Yiddish, Hebrew, and English that represent the wide reach of Shabbat food as a subject in Jewish music.

The first example, *L'koved Shabes* (In Honor of Shabbat), is from the Yiddish folk tradition. Printed in 1957 by Yehuda Leib Cahan in *Yidishe Folkslider mit melodyes, L'koved Shabes* is popular in a folk context, as well as academic contexts.[43] Ruth Rubin uses this folk song as an example in her chapter, "Customs and Beliefs." The song is clever in its use of three sections, each corresponding to one of the three Sabbath meals. Two nearly identical forms of the song exist, with only a few of the food items exchanged for others. Below, the text of Lazar Weiner's dramatic and colorful arrangement:

> In honor of Shabbat, on Friday night,
> we all eat fish -
> and a *tzimmes* (stew) of parsnips,
> and a *tzimmes* of carrots.
> And a *kishkele* (stuffed derma)?
> And a *kishkele,* too.
> *Kishkele* is your name, you stand in the oven,
> and you melt in the mouth - in honor of Shabbat.
>
> On the holy Sabbath, in the morning,
> we all eat *p'tcha* (jellied calves feet) -
> and *kashkele* (buckwheat) with beans,
> and *kashkele* with chickpeas.
> And a *kugel* (casserole)?
> And a *kugel*, too.
> *Kugel* is your name, you stand in the oven,
> and you melt in the mouth - in honor of Shabbat.
>
> On the holy Sabbath, in the evening,
> we all eat cold fish -
> and *teigekhtsl* (pudding) with noodles,
> and *teigekhtsl* with croutons.
> And a *fledele* (pancake)?
> And a *fledele*, too.
> *Fledele* is your name, you stand in the oven,
> and you melt in the mouth - in honor of Shabbat.[44]

[43] Rubin, *Voices of a People: Yiddish Folk Song*, 137
[44] Translation by Joyce Rosenzweig and Samuel Rosen

Each stanza has a structure that is altered for each of the three meals. This is a true rhapsody to Shabbat foods of Eastern European origin. In each section, the melody and rhythm move us toward the climax, which appears at the end of the stanza: "*[food]* is your name, you stand in the oven, and you melt in the mouth – in honor of Shabbat." The original Yiddish text uses a rhyming scheme to push forward the song, repeating two times in each case.

> *[Kishkele]* heistu,
> in oivn shteistu,
> in moil tzegeistu, l'koved Shabes.

By putting special foods on a pedestal, and describing the physical experience of enjoying them, the song romanticizes the preparation and enjoyment of the Sabbath meals.

The foods mentioned in *L'koved Shabes* carried meaning and significance for the original folk consumers, and they have the capacity to teach future generations. Not all of these foods are familiar to Jews today. There is disagreement about the meaning of the word *fledele,* which is translated above as pancake, though sometimes a fruit pastry. Another example, *p'tcha* (jellied calves feet), mentioned in the second stanza, is a delicacy among Jews of Eastern European origin. Based on a poll of students from the New York campus of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 20 students had never heard of the dish, though 5 had heard of it. On the other hand, *p'tcha,* which goes by other names, like *gala*, is still prominent in some Jewish communities. This further underscores the fluid nature of which elements of culture are transmitted and to whom. I was introduced to *p'tcha* in researching for my Senior Recital, further expanding my understanding of Jewish cuisine. *P'tcha* is truly a food of the impoverished, taking hours of boiling and preparation to transform the lowest cut of beef – feet – into an aspic jelly for the holiest day of the week. This communicates deep cultural values, such as not wasting any

usable food and investing time and resources into preparing food for the Sabbath, and further improves our understanding of Jewish life in past centuries.

The Israeli pop song, *Fasoulia,* is another example of a song that raises up a Sabbath specialty. Recorded in 1984, with music by Hanan Yuval and words by Dudu Elharar, *Fasoulia* was made famous by Jackie Mekaiten. A singer and prolific composer of Yemenite origin, Mekaiten was part of the bourgeoning of Mizrahi popular music in Israel of the 1970s. He wrote for and performed with such musicians as Zohar Argov through the eighties, until his turn to more strict Jewish observance limited his performing for secular audiences.[45] Unlike *L'koved Shabes* in which a considerable number of delicacies appears, this song orbits around a single favorite: *fasoulia,* i.e., white beans in tomato sauce. In the text below, one finds other foods, though they are not as special as what one enjoys on Shabbat.

> (Chorus) *Fasoulia* means '*yom menucha'* (day of rest.)
> *Fasoulia* for all 'in the know.'
> *Fasoulia* for me and for you.
> *Fasoulia*! One more week has passed.
>
> Black bread, thin porridge,
> Clear broth, hard-boiled egg.
> And the main thing is: *Fasoulia…! (chorus)*
>
> Coffee or tea, they're the same color
> and the same taste, sometimes lightened/whitened.
> And on Shabbat day: *Fasoulia…! (chorus*)
>
> Rice and mashed potatoes are very similar
> Small snacks with half a tomato.
> And on many-a Shabbat: *Fasoulia…! (chorus)*

The cyclical nature of Shabbat is reflected in the song, as it circles through regular foods, returning each time to the much-beloved white bean stew. Both the dish and the song *Fasoulia*

[45] Assaf Navo. "Jackie Mekaiten Halach L'olamo." *Mako*, March 6 2012, https://www.mako.co.il/music-news/local/Article-4b424c06498e531006.htm. Hebrew. Accessed 23 Jan. 2022.

survive through to today, holding special meaning in Israeli popular culture as well as at Shabbat tables in the greater Jewish world.

The third example is a performance piece that celebrates a Shabbat food in a way that reflects American Jewish mores of comedy and nostalgia that developed in the middle of the 20th century. Cantor Seymour Rockoff set new, comedic text to the music of Jerome Kern's "Ol' Man River." The dramatic performance of the piece cannot be separated from the music and lyrics. In other words, this song does not exist in any type of folk context; rather, it is an example of entertainment. Taking a well-known melody and setting it to comedic text is a form understood in Jewish culture, as discussed below. Rockoff writes his ode to a Jewish favorite: chopped liver.

> When I return to my Shabbos table
> after I spend so much time in shul.
> I am so hungry that I'm not able to keep far away
> from that dish so cruel.
> Every week I take one taste,
> I spread it on a cracker like a *fleishig* (meat) paste.
> It tastes so good, I clear my plate.
> A few hours later I don't feel so great.
>
> Cold chopped liver, you heart burn giver -
> I shouldn't choose it, but I can't refuse it.
> That cold chopped liver -
> what keeps me groanin' *oy vey!*
>
> I don't eat taters, I skip the chicken
> Although each shtikl is finger-lickin'
> That cold chopped liver -
> what keeps me groanin' *oy vey!*
> Some matzo meal, a little chicken fat
> keeps the chopped liver from fall'n flat.
> Salt and pepper give it *ta'am* and spice.
> I chop in a few onions and I pay the price.
> I must promise that come next Shabbos,
> I won't surrender to that stomach bender.
> That cold chopped liver -
> what keeps me groanin' *oy vey!*

This song is representative of the comedic style popular in Jewish resorts in the Catskills of the 20th century, commonly referred to as the Borscht Belt. These hotels presented Jewish vacationers with fully Jewish experiences. Other immigrant groups developed similarly specific escapes from city life that emulated Italian, German, or Polish culture. For Jewish proprietors, like the famous Jennie Grossinger, a Jewish atmosphere was created by infusing the menus with Jewish fare, listening to Jewish music, and booking Jewish comedians and performers.[46] These resorts represented a home away from home for many Jews who experienced leisure for the first time. "The Catskills, by having kosher food gave Jewish immigrants a kind of sense of being at home. You knew what to expect. Friday night you had chicken soup. And there were many other delicacies from home that you could enjoy in the Catskills."[47] In this environment, a sense of nostalgia and creativity were both present, inspiring Jewish cultural creators such as Melvin Kaminsky, better known as, Mel Brooks, who began trying out material in the Catskills in the 1940s.[48] These comedians integrated "slapstick, horseplay, physical humor, and practical jokes onto the traditional Jewish staple of caustic verbal wit."[49] The hotels and resorts of the Borscht Belt sought to recreate an idyllic world wherein meals, aromas, and experiences reflected Jewish tastes.

In Rockoff's parody, he goes beyond chopped liver, using Jewish language and other typical Jewish foods for imagery. There is sheer enthusiasm for the preparation and enjoyment of chopped liver, as well as a groaning and comic pain. This droll parody is an imaginative and playful synthesis of food and song. This song uses a specific dish to appeal to associations of the

[46] Raphael D. Silver and Stephen M. Silverman. *The Catskills: Its History and How It Changed America* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 303.
[47] Ibid., 306.
[48] Ibid., 310.
[49] Ibid., 315.

past, as well as a specific Jewish ethnic heritage. A continued association between chopped liver and Jewish culture gives this song the capacity to contain and present the heritage of Jewish comedy and entertainment. Though the Jewish resort culture peaked in previous decades, this nostalgic song can continue to communicate the importance of both this dish and this style of entertainment in the formation of American Jewish culture.

Songs of Holiday Foods

Much like Shabbat, though with less frequency, Jewish holidays present times of year in which special foods are enjoyed and holiday-appropriate songs are sung. The first example in this section is the Yiddish art song, *Seider Nacht*, with music by Israel Alter, set to text by the admired and prolific Yiddish poet, Aliza Greenblatt. Born in a *shtetl* in Bessarabia, Greenblatt moved to the United States at age 15. She spent much of her life involved in Zionist activism, while expressing herself through Yiddish poetry.[50] Susanne Shavelson notes Greenblatt's "satisfaction in the transformation of her poems into Yiddish folk songs,"[51] which happened frequently. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Passover Seder is full of symbolism and incorporates foods to help retell the story of the Exodus. Such is the case with Alter's setting of her poem *Seider Nacht,* an extraordinary text full of imagery and memory.

1 Our table stands dressed in white:
2 The silver candlesticks, the four cups -
3 Everything is already prepared for the seder:
4 *Shmurah matzah* and *charoset*.
5 Father sits at the table dressed in his white *kitel*,
6 He sits on his soft cushion, my mother by his side.
7 And I ask the four questions:
8 *"Mah nishtanah halailah hazeh?"* (Why is this night different from all other nights?)
9 Father tells enchanting stories, and I listen in amazement.

[50] Susanne A. Shavelson, "Anxieties of Authorship in the Autobiographies of Mary Antin and Aliza Greenblatt." *Prooftexts*, vol. 18, no. 2, (Indiana University Press, 1998): 165. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20689513.
[51] Ibid., 177.

10 '*Avodim hoyinu*...'
11 'We were slaves under the evil Pharaoh in Egypt.'
12 God saw our suffering, and brought us from slavery into freedom.
13 I drink a cup, I say the *ha-motzi,*
14 And we lift the cup off the table.
15 I dunk the *maror* in the *charoset*, and spread it on the fish.
16 Father continues to sing; he is happy and smiles with so much love.
17 My mother brings us great delicacies
18 and it seems as though the room is dancing.
19 Elijah's cup stands full, with sparkling red wine.
20 Our door is open wide - Elijah the Prophet - come join us![52]

One can imagine what each member of the family is doing during this cherished ceremony. Greenblatt's poetry is full of Jewish knowledge, and there is a deep sense of attachment to this rich cultural and spiritual tradition. The use of the term *ma'adanei melekh* shows the expansive knowledge of foundational Jewish texts in Yiddish poetry: from line 17 above, *di mame brengt "madanei melekh."*[53] Many important ceremonial foods are mentioned like *charoset* and *maror*, and even the small gestures, like dipping, highlight the centrality of ritual.

In Israel Alter's setting of Greenblatt's poem, one finds the blending of aural poetry with the written word. Ray Smith's piano arrangement displays great depth with quotations of a popular Passover song (*Adir Hu*) hidden within the accompaniment. The piece begins by setting F minor as a tonal center. With the entrance of the vocal line, Alter harmonizes up to Bb minor, the minor iv, giving an immediate Jewish flavor to the musical movement. The rhythm suggests a parlando style that reflects the conventions of *nusach*, utilizing minor thirds and triads to communicate proper syllabic emphasis (see Figure 1).

[52] Translation, Joyce Rosenzweig and Samuel Rosen
[53] Genesis 49:20

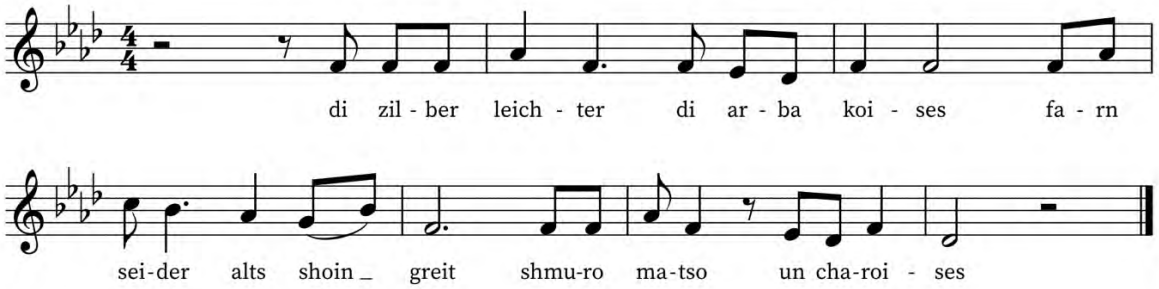


Figure 1

The impression of storytelling is clear throughout the song. With the entrance of the text beginning line 7 as the child begins asking the four questions, Alter temporarily modulates to F major. This continues until father begins recounting the Exodus story in line 10, "*Avodim Hoyinu,"* immediately returning to F minor. Alter sprinkles in an allusion to *chazzanut* that colors the father's storytelling. A declamatory opening sequence, parlando open fifth interval, and Alter's signature repeated notes on the second half of the word "*mitsrayim,"* stress this cantorial style. He also utilizes Ukrainian Dorian to represent the pain of bondage (Figure 2).

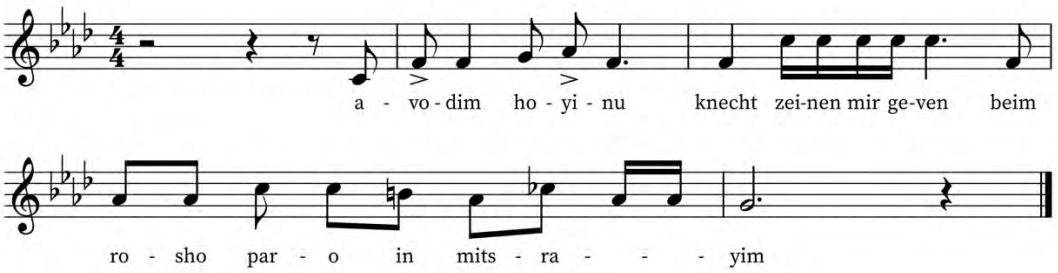


Figure 2

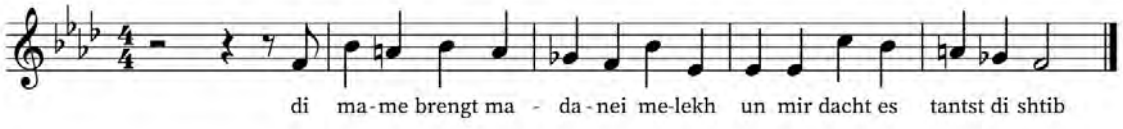


Figure 3

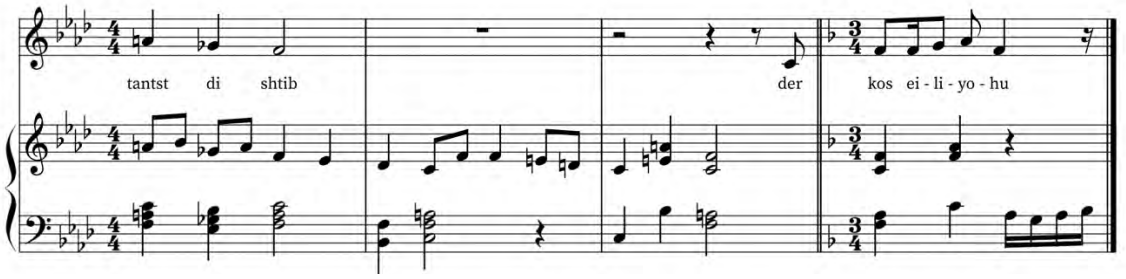


Figure 4

By the end of line 12, when the slaves are freed, we return to F major. But with the descriptions of the seder in the following lines, Alter immediately proceeds to lowering the 2, giving a distinct *Ahavah Rabah* character. This is further underscored with the harmonization of Eb minor, the minor vii chord, leading back to an F major triad, a typical Jewish cadence (Figure 3). Smith uses this moment of transition to quote *Adir Hu* (Figure 4), which he does again to close the piece. With the entrance of the Cup of Elijah, looking ahead toward redemption, Alter brings the music squarely into F major to end the piece.

Seider Nacht is an extraordinary example of Yiddish art song, combining a text containing magnificent imagery with a melody brimming with Jewish literacy. Sounds, tastes, and other sensations are told through Greenblatt's text. The use of quotations from familiar Passover melodies and the sensuous "reactualization" of the *seder*, illustrates the function of using music and food to transmit vital cultural and historical information.

The Ladino folk tradition also includes songs that reflect similar themes of family, food, and holiday joy. Flory Jagoda, a prolific songwriter, singer, and performer, was widely celebrated for her efforts to preserve Ladino music and Sephardic culture. *The Flory Jagoda Songbook* (Tara Publications, 1993) is a compendium of her music that includes a biography, as well as short anecdotes about each song. She was born in Sarajevo, Bosnia into a Sephardic Jewish community in 1921. In her youth, Flory learned Ladino songs from her grandmother,

which had been passed down in her family for generations.[54] Following the Holocaust, after escaping the destruction of Sarajevo's Jewish community, Jagoda came to the United States. Most of the music and texts are attributed to her, or to traditional Ladino poems onto which she set new music. Other songs are attributed to either her grandmother, the Sarajevo romanza tradition, or the Bosnian folk influence.

The prevalence of food in *The Flory Jagoda Songbook* is a telling litmus test of the centrality of food in the transmission of Sephardic culture. Of the 39 Ladino songs included, 13 mention food or describe its preparation. See below, the first stanza of Jagoda's *Pesah ala Mano* (Passover is at Hand).

> Purim, Purim, Purim is over
> Passover is at hand
> *Matzot* are being made
> The *yaprakis* (stuffed grape leaves) are being baked – *Aman!*
> Almighty God gives us good fortune – *Aman!*[55]

Pesah ala Mano is a song about the weeks between Purim and Passover in which preparations for the Passover holiday orbit around the kitchen and cleaning the home. In the next example, we do not just hear about the foods; we imagine the experience of preparing the food. Cooking is as an important moment of transmission – the kitchen a fundamental setting of family education. See below, the text of Jagoda's *Chiko Ianiko*.

> Little Ian, like a birdie
> He's Making *burek* (savory filled pastry) for us
> With cheese and butter
> Little Ian, like a birdie
> With a rolling pin and flour
> He's making a fine dough.[56]

---

[54] "Those years with Nona were the happiest a child could know. All of the longlasting feelings that I have for my Sephardic culture, its stories and especially its songs, were a loving gift from her to me. She taught her daughters and granddaughters the women's *Birahas* and *Benediziones* (prayers and benedictions) that she had learned from her Nona and Biznona (grandmother and great-grandmother)." *The Flory Jagoda Songbook: Memories of Sarajevo,* Tara Publications, 1993. 12.

[55] Flory Jagoda, *The Flory Jagoda Songbook: Memories of Sarajevo* (Tara Publications, 1993), 25

[56] Ibid., 68.

In an anecdote introducing this song, Jagoda writes,

> Oh what fun to bake with Nona (grandma). I remember the delicate pastry dough the Sephardic women took such pride in making. But when the grandchildren 'helped' the flour was everywhere and the kitchen was a mess…but Oh! We had such fun! Now I am the Nona and my greatest pleasure is to make *burek* with my own grandchildren.[57]

Jagoda's words reinforce the concept of the kitchen as an essential space for the transmission of Sephardic recipes and songs.

These moments of learning occur between members of extended family, too. The song *Las Tias* (The Aunts) mentions different holidays and multiple aunts who each host their own holiday celebration. The 7/8 time signature (3+2+2) gives this piece a distinct rhythmic quality reminiscent of classical Mediterranean music. In performances of the song, Jagoda would begin by clapping the base rhythm, encouraging audience participation, and adding to the joyful nature of the story being told.[58]

> Aunt Mazalta will invite us the night of Hanuka.
> Aunt Gracia will invite us the night of Hanuka
> to light the little candles with the whole family.
> The menorahs of white silver must be cleaned.
>
> Aunt Luna will invite us the night of Passover.
> Aunt Safira will invite us the night of Passover,
> to eat *albondikas* (meatballs) with the whole family.
> We will sing "*Had Gadya*" after the prayers.
>
> Aunt Paloma will invite us to eat in the Sukkah
> Aunt Estreia will invite us to eat in the Sukkah
> With fruits and flowers of many colors
> With the whole family.[59]

[57] Ibid.
[58] "Flory Jagoda -Laz Tiyas." Abby Steinberg, *YouTube*, YouTube, 3 Feb. 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFuDxm41wS0.
[59] Jagoda. *The Flory Jagoda Songbook*, 64

In her anecdote prior to the song, Jagoda writes, "The whole *mishpaha* (family) would gather at the home of a different aunt each night to eat and sing, carrying on the custom of family closeness which had helped preserve our culture for more than 450 years."[60] *Las Tias* embodies these vibrant and rich scenes of familial celebration. The vital place of women in the transmission of Sephardic culture is expressed here in song and word. In her article, "Home, Cooking: Why Gender Matters to Food Politics," Tracey Deutsch writes that women's role in family life, "lets us see kitchens and home cooking as places of joy *and* power, authority *and* possibility, tradition *and* resistance."[61] The concept that the kitchen is a complex space holding many dualities broadens our understanding of the Jewish experience. In *Las Tias,* the aunts, and their work preparing for each holiday, are what bring the family together on special occasions.

The next example comes in the form of a Ḥasidic song. *Ichlu Mashmanim* is an Ashkenazi *piyyut* attributed to an unknown *paytan* who might have been named Avraham, since the acrostic spells this name. The text is printed in the "*Zemer Chanukah*" section (second only to *Ma'oz Tzur)* in "*Birkat Hamazon U'zmirot"* of Prague, 1514.[62] Being printed in this book suggests that the song would be sung around a festival table. *Ichlu Mashmanim* is not a serious song. On the contrary, its light and comic playfulness is exceptional, and its printing points to a widespread popularity. The song even prompted backlash from rabbis who took umbrage with the song's suggestion that eating fatty foods is part of *halakah* (Jewish law), which it, in fact, is

[60] Jagoda. *The Flory Jagoda Songbook*, 64.
[61] Tracey Deutsch, "Home, Cooking: Why Gender Matters to Food Politics," in *Food Fights: How History Matters to Contemporary Food Debates*, ed. Charles C. Ludington and Matthew Morse Booker (University of North Carolina Press, 2019): 208–28. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469652917_ludington.16. 211
[62] "*Birkat Hamazon U'zmirot*." Beta.otzar.org, (Prague) https://beta.otzar.org/#/b/143000/p/1/t/1643041330351/fs/0/start/0/end/0/c. 54

not.[63] It is noteworthy that there is also no connection to the Chanukah story, promoting, rather, the festive quality of the holiday.

(A) Eat fattening foods, and bread baked well.
With pigeons and red wine on this Shabbat and Chanukah.

(B – Chorus) *Hai, Hai!* Your possessions and your lands, go pledge them,
go and sell them in order to have money for the Chanukah feast.

(C) Capons of the finest breed off the well-turned spit,
the roasts that come next will be palatable.

(A) Tender, young poultry and rich cakes brown in a pan.
We answer "*V'imru Amen*!" and eat in laughter. (to Chorus)

(C)Their voices cease over the sound of water;
In the winery we will lodge, twice a day.

(A) *Mikolot mayim rabim*:* your ears are saved from hearing.
And all the cups of red wine will not depart from your mouths.
*From Psalm 93

The inspiration for this *piyyut* comes from the Book of Nehemia chapter 8 verse 10, in which the inhabitants of Jerusalem hear the reading of Torah for the first time. Following is Nehemia's call to the people:

> [He] further said to them, 'Go -- eat fattening foods (*ichlu mashmanim* – אִכְלוּ מַשְׁמַנִּים**)** and drink sweet drinks, and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for the day is holy to the Eternal. Do not be sad, for your rejoicing in the Eternal is the source of your strength.'

Festive and rich foods are mentioned throughout, with wine and drink being an important aspect of the festivities. The winery as setting of sensual experience, similar to the use of the "house of

[63]Harav Yaakov Shmuel Spiegel, "*Al Hashir 'Ichlu Mashmanim' L'shabbat Chanukah*," Beta.hebrewbooks.org, in *Or Yisrael*, *Kovetz L'inyanei Halacha V'minhag,* https://beta.hebrewbooks.org/pagefeed/hebrewbooks_org_13608_144.pdf.:144-147.

wine" in the Song of Songs, appears too. The *paytan* viewed their own oily Chanukah feast as parallel to the wonderous, fatty first feast of Torah. One rededication parallels another.

The version of *Ichlu Mashmanim* analyzed here is attributed to the Sanz and Bobover Hasidim.[64] The song is comprised of three sections that oscillate between different scales. I indicate these with letters next to each couplet above, (A) *Ahavah Rabah,* (B) major, and (C) minor. As set in Cantor David Berger's arrangement of the Sanz/Bobover melody, the song begins in the lower part of E *Ahavah Rabbah*, moving to D Major, and then to A minor, including the highest note of the song. Common tones of E and A facilitate the transitions between the modes and sections (see Appendix for the score). These modulations give the song a sense of moving forward, with one section leading smoothly into the next. The aural movement adds to the complexity of the melody as a whole; each third, so to speak, could theoretically exist as a song on its own, but together they make a developed melody. The percussive rhythm drives the song, using both word play and nonsense syllables (*hai, hai*) to increase intensity with each repetition.

[64]According to *Atar Hapiyyut Ve'ha'tefilah* (the *Piyyut* and Prayer Site of the National Library of Israel), this melody is attributed to Sanz and Bobover Hasidim. It is important to note the unusual case here, given the differences between these two Hasidic groups. Despite their differences, these two dynasties are linked by the founder of the Sanz dynasty, Ḥayim ben Aryeh Leib Halberstam (1797-1876). It was his grandson, Shelomoh (sic) Halberstam (1847-1905), who founded the Bobov dynasty, in Bobowa, seventeen miles from Sanz. Given the *piyyut's* printing in 1514, which established the text into the canon, and considering the familial and geographic connections between the two groups, it is conceivable that the melody would be prevalent in and feasibly attributed to both, despite their detachment from one another in both theory and practice.

David Assaf, "Sandz Hasidic Dynasty." *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* October 27, 2010, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Sandz_Hasidic_Dynasty>.

"*אכלו משמנים – מילים, ביצועים, פירושים ותווים* ".אכלו משמנים – מילים, ביצועים, פירושים ותווים: אתר הפיוט והתפילה" *אתר הפיוט והתפילה* | , https://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/he/song/pages/song.aspx?songid=622#41,100,1972,490.

General Foods in Jewish Folk Song

Jewish songs also feature foods that are not connected to Shabbat or a specific holiday. Most of the foods are general – like potatoes, eggplant, bread, or "meat" – as opposed to specifically Jewish foods, like the *kishke* mentioned in *L'koved Shabes.* These examples uncover even more about the Jewish experience in history, like their economic condition. No single comment can contain the economic experience; some Jews experienced great riches, others great hardships, and others still what lies in between. But a person's economic status has a direct impact on the food they eat, and this is reflected in song. Inexpensive foods represent the experience of families constrained by modest means. The song *Bulbes* (Potatoes) is a whimsical folk song that describes the monotony of eating potatoes every day.

> On Sunday potatoes, on Monday potatoes,
> on Tuesday and on Wednesday - potatoes.
> On Thursday and on Friday potatoes.
> On Shabbat for a change - a potato *kugel*!
> On Sunday more potatoes.
>
> Bread with potatoes, meat with potatoes,
> dinner and supper - potatoes.
> Again and again potatoes
> Once, for a change: a potato *kugel*!
> On Sunday more potatoes.[65]

Unlike other songs that put a dish on a pedestal, this song tells the story of what people eat when they do not have the means to diversify their diet. In few words, *Bulbes* contains multiple layers of meaning, from sarcasm to the recognition of one's status. The simplicity of the minor melody

[65] Translation by Joyce Rosenzweig and Samuel Rosen

and the important lesson it teaches continue to inspire its transmission from one generation to the next.[66]

The Yiddish folk song, *Lomir Ale Zingen* (Let's All Sing), masterfully communicates the differences between what food means for the rich (*negidim*) and what it means for the poor (*kabtsonim*). The song uses binaries to make its points: the rich eat a fresh roll, the poor a stale crust; the rich eat roast duck, the poor eat a lung and a liver, etc.

(Chorus) Let's all sing a song!
Lechem is bread, meat and fish
and all the desserts.

Tell me Rabbi, what is bread?
For the rich, bread is a fresh roll.
And for the poor, oy for the poor -
bread is a stale crust, *nebekh* (unfortunately)!

Tell me Rabbi, what is meat?
For the rich, meat is a roast duck.
And for the poor, oy for the poor -
meat is a lung and liver, *nebekh*!

Tell me Rabbi, what is fish?
For the rich, fish is a trout.
And for the poor, oy for the poor -
fish is watery herring, *nebekh*!

Tell me Rabbi, what is dessert?
For the rich, dessert is a tasty *tsimmes*.
And for the poor, oy for the poor -
dessert is *Gehakte Tsures* ("chopped up troubles"), *nebekh!*[67]

Like other Yiddish folk songs, this song also appears in other versions with slightly altered foods mentioned. The song exemplifies the technique of word painting, with the highest note used in

[66] "I came to love *Bulbes* from listening to a record of Yiddish folk songs, sung by Mark Olf, that was in my parents' record collection. I later researched and wrote a paper on Yiddish folksongs for a social history class I took in rabbinical school, for which I taught myself to sing all the verses to *Bulbes*, *In An Orem Shtiebele, Tumbalalaika*, and others. When my children were babies I sang some of these songs to them as lullabies, and they will still let me sing them to them... occasionally." Rabbi David Adelson

[67] Translation by Joyce Rosenzweig and Samuel Rosen from text printed in Ellstein's arrangement, (New York, NY: Jos. P. Katz, 1927)

the description of the rich. And as the poor are mentioned, the vocal line moves down a whole octave. Abraham Ellstein's arrangement is a playful and humorous setting. Perhaps most inventive is the final verse, describing dessert. While the wealthy enjoy rich sweets, the poor suffer "*gehakte tsures"* (chopped up troubles). This play on words is a powerful and effective literary tool. As seen in other parts of Jewish life, comedy is used to show a level of indifference or even "mastery" over and acceptance of one's lot in life. In this case, food serves as the distinguishing factor between the haves and the have-nots.

Folk songs from the Ladino-speaking world also incorporate popular foods. One of the great songs from this repertoire is *Siete Modos de Guisar La Berenjena* (the Seven Ways to Cook Eggplant). Sephardic food historian, Hélène Jawhara Piñer writes, "eggplants are the very essence of Sephardi cuisine."[68] She describes an enduring relationship between Sephardic Jews and the vegetable, including both positive and negative associations.[69] The infatuation with eggplants is communicated in this song, based on a Ladino *copla,* describing thirty ways to prepare the vegetable.[70]

> There are seven ways to cook eggplant.
> The first recipe is Elena's specialty:
> She cuts it into bite-sized pieces and serves it for dinner.
> This meal is [simply] called a dish of eggplant.
>
> (Chorus) My uncle, Çerasi, likes to drink wine - lots of it!
> With all the wine, he feels great.
>
> The second one who makes it is the gabbai's wife:
> She hollows it out and fills it with herbs.
> This meal is called "dolma."
>
> The third one who makes it is my cousin, Ester de Chiote:

[68] Hélène Jawhara Piñer. *Sephardi: Cooking the History. Recipes of the Jews of Spain and the Diaspora, from the 13th Century to Today*, (Academic Studies Press, 2021), 71.
[69] Ibid.
[70] S. Rafael, "שיר תהילות החציל." *Ladinar* Vol. 3, *ha-Makhon le-ḥeḳer ha-Ladino. Ne'imah ye-Yehoshu'a Salṭi.* (Bar Ilan University. 2004): 65-84.

She hollows it out and fills it with rice.
This meal is called "*almondrote*."

The *alburnia* is a tasty recipe, both for its color and aroma.
Come, let's make a supper to enjoy together
before the worm comes and takes the flavor away

On the festival tables, the *jandrajo* (eggplant pastry) always shines.
We make little pastries out of it; they shine on the plates,
waiting to be served with hard-boiled eggs.

The *maljasina* salad is rich and tasty.
My neighbor makes it with a lot of olive oil.
This dish accompanies leftover hen.

The seventh way it's made is the best and most exquisite.
Filisti makes it – she's the neighbor's daughter –
She puts it in the oven, in an open dish with oil and pepper
and they call it a *meyina*.

Each verse of the song introduces a new way to prepare eggplant, usually naming the dish for clarity. Some of the dishes are attributed to specific people, others are simply described on their own through taste and preparation. Stewed dishes that take a long time to prepare, stuffed dishes, tangy salads, and pastries, define many vital aspects of Sephardi cuisine[71], all included here. The chorus returns to a familiar theme: wine, a source of great joy. *Siete Modos de Guisar La Berenjena* offers a fascinating exploration into the history of food, music, and their importance in the cultural life of Sephardic Jewry.

The foods mentioned in Jewish song may be considered suspended in time, pointing to popular tastes, meaningful dishes, or stories about Jewish life. Each song presents a different slice of life to be analyzed in its appropriate context. As a whole, the repertoire illuminates the fluid and dynamic modes of cultural transmission at work in different places and times throughout Jewish history. While each presents unique melodies and foods, the spaces of

[71] Piñer. *Sephardi: Cooking the History*, 105.

transmission revolve around the home. Examples in different Jewish languages demonstrate the prevalence of food as a crucial cultural marker wherever Jews live. From the importance of women's roles in the communication of essential cultural artifacts, such as recipes and songs, to glimpses into the economic experience of Jews, food in music has the capacity to illuminate otherwise underexplored areas of Jewish history. Some examples appeal to nostalgia, whereas others reflect economic realities. Other examples still seek to preserve the memory of certain dishes or lift them up as central subjects. Each uses the intersection of music and food to communicate important values and definitive pieces of the Jewish experience.

Conclusion

Music and food are fundamental elements of human life expressed in diverse ways throughout the world. In Jewish history, displacement and minority status made the non-tangible knowledge of songs and recipes vital for the process of cultural transmission from one generation to the next. Wanting both to recreate the past and adopt novel forms to reflect new places, the forces of nostalgia and cultural evolution affect the development of Jewish music and food. These forces also complicate defining music and food as Jewish. The fluid nature of cultural development is a variable in this system that creates a porous border between Jewish and non-Jewish culture.

From the ancient period to today, food has been attached to memory and ritual in Jewish life. The Jewish calendar includes special times each year in which unique foods and music are used to celebrate. With the development of Rabbinic Judaism, the connection between memory, food, and storytelling was codified in the Passover Seder. The observance of saying blessings over food before eating makes a mundane act a spiritual one. Jewish communities, especially progressive circles, have adapted novel ways, like communal songs, to incorporate blessings over food when traditional practice waned.

Singing, which frequently accompanies Shabbat and holiday meals, brings the two worlds of music and food close. The differences between the food consumed on regular days versus holidays inspired composers to write about the exceptional and rare foods of Shabbat and holidays. These songs preserve the names of Jewish foods, teach about how Jews lived in the past, and even describe the preparation of special foods. Songs like *Siete Modos de Guisar La Berenjena* highlight a history of Jewish trading and the importance of certain foodstuffs (here,

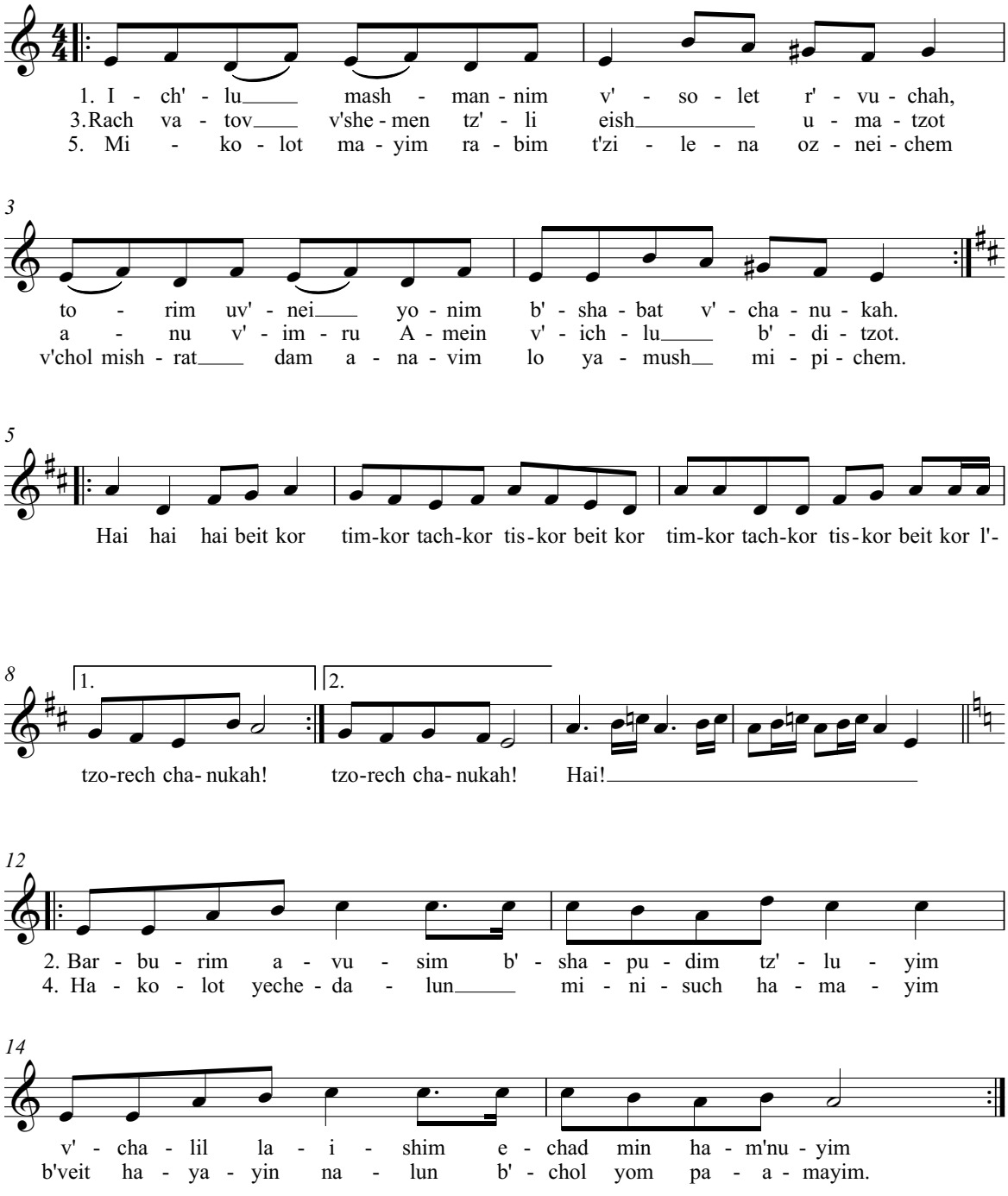
the eggplant) to the domestic life of the Jews in the communities from which these songs emerged.

The Jewish practice of adapting and adopting while at the same time preserving and retaining, can be traced through music and food. This study also highlights the alternate spaces in which cultural transmission occurs: the kitchen and the festival table. It highlights the wisdom passed by women in multiple forms – songs and recipes – both consciously and subconsciously. A close reading of songs from different Jewish communities establishes a commonality over time and political borders. Songs in different Jewish languages and dishes from various geographic origins highlight diverse Jewish ethnic customs. Food and music are used to celebrate history *and* enhance the present experience. At the intersection of sound and taste lie the stories of Jewish individuals and families who have moved throughout the world for centuries using music and food to preserve, evolve, and survive.

Appendix

Ichlu Mashmanim

Chassidut Sanz/Bubov
Edited by David Berger



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