Drops of Inspiration
A Study of Eleazar Kallir's *Tefilat Tal*

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Introduction

Two summers ago, I had the privilege of working as a research intern for Rabbi Larry Hoffman at Synagogue 2000, "a national, not-for-profit institute dedicated to revitalizing and re-energizing synagogue life in North America."[1] When the summer began, I told Rabbi Hoffman that I wanted to study an ancient liturgical poem for my thesis project. As a poet, I thought that studying ancient sacred poetry might inspire my own creative endeavors in the arena of liturgical poetry. As a rabbinical student, I thought it would encourage me to reincorporate some inspiring ancient liturgy into contemporary rituals.

One morning, as I received a phone call that sounded something like this: "Hi, Shoshanah. Larry Hoffman speaking. I have the perfect poem for you—*Tefilat Tal* by Eliezar Kalir. Most Orthodox and Conservative congregations still recite it on the first day of Pesach. What do you think?"

I could not believe my luck. It sounded perfect.

The following spring, I spent a wonderful semester at HUC-NewYork studying and translating the six liturgical stanzas of Kallir's poem with Dr. Joel Hoffman, a linguist and faculty member of HUC-JIR/New York. By the end of that semester, I had written a literal annotated translation of the *piyyut* and a poetic translation.

However, I encountered a daunting discovery the following summer in a meeting with Dr. Menachem Schmeltzer, a librarian at Jewish Theological Seminary—the actual length of *Tefilat Tal* is 40 pages in Goldschmidt's *Pesach Machzor*! Yet, by that point I

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[1] www.s2k.org

was so excited about this poem and engaged in my thesis that I was actually curious to read the rest of the *piyyut*.

The problem is that a person today cannot simply sit down and read his poem. Without footnotes and an intimate familiarity with biblical and rabbinic texts a casual reader is unable to understand this poem. Earlier this year, I showed this *piyyut* to an Israeli friend named Tal. I smiled and teased, "Isn't it great that for thousands of years people have been praying for you?" After trying to read it he responded, "It would make me feel better if I could actually read their prayers!"

It is not clear whether even Kallir's contemporaries understood his poem. Neologisms, unique grammar, acrostics and allusions to Jewish astrology clutter the many stanzas of the *piyyut*. Yet while this makes for frustrating reading or listening for some, for others (like me) this complexity creates a sort of playground.

In that spirit, I have played with the six liturgical stanzas of Kallir's *Tefilat Tal* for over a year. This thesis is a reflection of my process. In it, I first trace the emergence of general prayers for dew and Kallir's particular prayer. Then I closely analyze the liturgical stanzas of this poem and trace the allusions to their sources. In order to better understand *Tefilat Tal* (and because I would like to engage in this same process with its parallel poem), I compare it to *Tefilat Geshem*. Finally, I explore the possibility of incorporating Kallir's *Tefilat Tal* and other meditations on dew into Reform prayer settings.

My hope is that in the process of uncovering the sources of inspiration for Kallir's poem on dew, this project will inspire the modern reader as well.

Chapter 1
Overview of *Tefilat Tal* by Eleazar Kallir

Since Biblical times (and probably before), Jews have petitioned God to wet the land so that they could enjoy a good harvest. Deuteronomy, especially, emphasizes the theology of conditional reward and punishment,[1] especially associated with the land and harvest. If the Israelites behave well in God's eyes, they will be rewarded; however if they behave badly, they will be punished with drought. In Deuteronomy 11:13-17, Moses explains to the Israelites:

> If then you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the Lord your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in your new grain... Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them. For the Lord's anger will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce.

This is the first time that rain is associated with the theological system of reward and punishment and it remains a prevalent theme throughout the prophets and later writings. Hence it gives rise to petitional prayers for rain and dew, blessings from God. In Deuteronomy 33:13 Moses blesses the descendants of Joseph, "Blessed of the Lord be his land/ with the bounty of dew from heaven." One of the blessings in the various blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28 invokes rain in verse 12: "The Lord will open for you His bounteous store, the heavens, to provide rain for your land in season and to bless all your undertakings."

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[1] "Covenant was a vital theological concept for Israel, used to describe the nature of God's relationship to the patriarchs, David and to the nation. Although some scholars trace the covenant concept back to Israel's earliest days, it may be that the prophets and Deuteronomy are the sources for this idea in Israel. The covenant was described as based on God's own past saving acts, shaped by precepts or laws, instituted by a covenant ceremony and empowered by curses and blessings." Richard Nelson, "Deuteronomy" in *HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, ed. James L. Mays, p. 190.

Twice in the Bible petitional prayers for dew and rain appear. Biblical figures who believed themselves to be righteous assumed that their petitions to God would result in a response. If they asked for dew and rain, God would cause it to fall; if they asked for it not to fall, God would withhold it. Interestingly, the two Biblical petitions regarding dew and rain together can both be classified in the latter category. When David found out that Saul and Jonathan were slain in battle on Mount Gilboa, he sang a dirge in which he cursed the land on which they fell:

> Oh hills of Gilboa—
> *Let there be no dew or rain on you*,
> Or bountiful fields,
> For there the shield of warriors lay rejected,
> The shield of Saul,
> Polished with oil no more.[2]

When the prophet Elijah sought to warn Ahab that his worshipping false gods was a sin, Elijah explained that because of this, "[a]s the Lord lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain except at my bidding."[3] Clearly, "[t]he drought means that rainfall is under the control of the Lord."[4]

Jews have petitioned for rain since ancient times during the prayer service as well. However, the formal request for dew in prayer seems to have come later. While in contemporary times traditionally Jews mention dew in the Amidah beginning on the first day of Passover, the Mishnah attests that originally Jews prayed for rain during this time. In Mishnah Ta'anit 1:2, R. Judah and R. Meir argue about how long into the year one should mention the prayer for dew:

> They pray for rain only near to the time for rain. R. Judah says: When the service reader leads the Amidah on Shemini Atzeret, only the service reader of the *musaf*

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[2] 2 Samuel 1:21
[3] 1 Kings 17:1
[4] Nelson, "Deuteronomy" in *HarperCollins*, p. 190.

> service makes mention of rain. On the first Festival-day of Passover, only the *shacharit* service reader makes mention of rain; the last makes no mention of it. Until what time should they pray for rain? R. Judah says: Until Passover is over. R. Meir: Until the end of Nisan, for it is written, 'And he causes the rain to fall, the former rain and the latter rain in the first [month, Nisan] (Joel 2:23).[5]

R. Meir quotes Joel in which the prophet mentions "the former rain and the latter rain;" "former rain" (גשם מורה) refers to rain "which falls in Palestine from the last of October until the first of December. Its opposite term, "latter rain" (גשם מלקוש) refers to "showers of March-April," rains that are important in "strengthening and maturing crops."[6] Clearly, both Mishnah and the Bible before it differentiated precipitation according to distinct harvest times. The concept of two distinct rainfalls may be the precedent for establishing two parallel times for prayer cycles during the year regarding precipitation—one in spring (for dew) and one in winter (for rain).

Both Mishnah and Tosefta, therefore, regard mentioning rain highly. Interestingly, however, neither emphasizes mentioning dew. Still, as Daniel Goldschmidt notes, two sources in the Mishnah record at least the longing for dew if not the actual prayer. The first explicitly couches this longing in the language of "blessing." It is a midrashic interpretation from Mishnah Ma'aser Sheni 5:13. It calls upon God directly to rain down dew from the heavens:

> *Look down from heaven*—we have done what You have decreed concerning us: now do what You have promised to us; *Look down from Your holy habitation from heaven and bless Your people Israel*—with sons and daughters; *and the ground which You have given us*—with dew and wine and with young cattle; as *You swore unto our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey*—that You may give flavor to the fruits.

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[5] All Mishnah translations are based closely on Herbert Danby's translation of *The Mishnah*, Oxford, 1933. I have made slight emendations for reader comprehension.

[6] *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon*, pp. 435 & 545.

The second citation (M. Sotah 9:12) attests to the deuteronomic theology mentioned above. Namely, it expresses the Jewish conviction that they were being cursed because of their transgressions. Hence, the rabbis believed that God punished them by withholding dew from the earth since the time of the destruction of the Temple:

> Rabban Simeon b. Gamliel says in the name of R. Joshua: Since the day that the Temple was destroyed, there has been no day without its curse; and the dew has not fallen in blessing and the fruits have lost their savor. R. Jose says: The fruits have also lost their fatness.

Again, the need for dew is conceptualized in terms of blessing. It is not simply dew that they want, but dew that would fall "in blessing"—a sign that God is still with them. Instead, there has been no dew and their fruits are flavorless and shriveled—as sign that they are cursed.

While Tannaitic literature mentions the people's longing for dew, it never mentions the need to pray for dew. The Amoraic literature, however, raises the question of this requirement in different ways based on Palestinian and Babylonian traditions. The Jerusalem Talmud (Berachot 4:3) records the emergence of this issue as part of a discussion about the obligations regarding the shortened version of the Amidah called the Me'ein Shemoneh Esreh. In this discussion, R. Haggai said:

> If it was [during] the [winter] rainy season, they add, 'Bless our years with the blessed rains'... If it was [during the season of] the dew [the summer], they add, [bless our years] with the blessed dew.[7]

The parallel Babli discussion in the (Ber. 29a) explains that the shortened version of the Amidah[8] cannot be said during winter months because one must recite the request for rain and it will confuse people to have to mention it in the shortened prayer:

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[7] *Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation; Besah and Taanit*, vol.18, eds. William Scott Green and Jacob Neusner, p. 175.

[8] In the Babylonian Talmud, it is called *Havineinu* from the first word of the shortened prayer.

> Rav Bivi Bar Abaye said: The entire year a person may pray the *Havineinu* prayer except for during the winter because he must recite the request [for rain] in the benediction of the years. Mar Zutra objected to this [saying], "But let him incorporate the request for rain into [the prayer] like this: 'and fatten us in the pastures of Your land and give dew and rain.'" [The Gemara rejects this idea by responding] that he may become confused.

This passage illustrates the importance of rain in the Babylonian tradition—or conversely, the relative unimportance of dew. While in the summer months, a worshipper may daven the shortened prayer, making no mention of dew; during the winter months he is obligated to daven the full Amidah at all times in order to mention the prayer for rain. Therefore, we may conclude that the Babylonians cared much more about rain fall than dew.

An important point emerges—the difference between Palestinian and Babylonian traditions regarding precipitation. The Jerusalem Talmud here testifies to a tradition in which rain and dew were mentioned in prayers at separate times of year. The Babylonian Talmud, however, attests to a tradition in which the prayer for rain was privileged. Mar Zutra's suggestion in the Babli passage that they should just write a universal insert that mentions dew and rain (thus, appropriate to be used all year round) implies that the Babylonian Jews also had a tradition of mentioning dew during summer months. However, this request for precipitation in hot weather could be skipped if one needed to daven the *Havineinu* instead of the full Amidah.

Elsewhere in the Jerusalem Talmud, however (Ta'an. 1:1) the Bavli privileging of rain does appear:

> R. Zutra says in the of R. Chaninah... "[If one recites the Amidah and] does not mention dew, [we do not make him] return to the beginning of the blessing. [However, if one recites the Amidah and does not mention] rain [in the appropriate season, we make him] return to the beginning of the blessing. This

> comes to teach that the sages did not make it an obligation to mention dew and wind. If someone who is praying wants to mention dew and wind then he may mention dew and wind.

Apparently the prayer for rain was privileged in both places. In fact, the Babylonian Talmud (Ta'an. 3a-3b) also discusses the of PT 1:1 Ta'an., in asking in why mentioning rain is obligatory while mentioning wind and dew is not. R. Chaninah explains that a person need not mention wind and dew in prayer because these are never withheld. The Gemara cites I Kings 17:1 and 18:1 as proof texts: "And Elijah... said to Ahab, 'As the Lord lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain except at my bidding.'" And in the next chapter, God says to Elijah, "Go appear before Ahab; then I will send rain upon the earth." The Gemara explains that the reason why dew is not mentioned in the second verse is that dew was never withheld from Ahab's land even though Elijah threatened that it would be. But of course, this passage must address the strange fact that Elijah indeed said explicitly that both dew and rain would be withheld. Why would he say that if dew is never withheld? The Gemara answers that a specific type of dew would be withheld—the dew of blessing. While the quantity of the dew never changed, the quality did.

According to the citation in the Babylonian Talmud, there was no specific time of the year designated for the mentioning of dew. While mentioning rain was restricted for the winter months, a worshipper was permitted to mention dew at any time of the year. This may be because the dew that they were praying for was not just a natural phenomenon, but "the dew of blessing" mentioned in BT Ta'anit 3b. Therefore, two different dynamics emerge with regard to precipitation and the request thereof. On the one hand, ancient Jews concern themselves with the reality on the ground: crops, war,

famine, disease. They pray for precipitation to help them in their daily lives on earth. On the other hand, ancient Jews want the benefits of the Messianic Age. Thus, they pray for God to show them signs that this time will come soon. In what follows, dew connotes both.[9]

As we would expect, the *payyetanim* follow the tradition of the Yerushalmi, not the Bavli—they are Palestinian after all. Hence symmetry was created in the Jewish worship year: the prayer for rain beginning on Shemini Atzeret was paralleled by the prayer for dew on the first day of Pesach. Daniel Goldschmidt hypothesizes that this parallel tradition reflected the *payyetan*'s urge for creation and the natural world to show balance. Additionally, the land in Palestine was more arid than the land in Babyonia. Without dew, a heat wave in the summer could devastate their crops. Therefore, the prayer for dew carried greater important for Palestinian farmers. They needed weeks of moisture around the time of Pesach. This anxiety gave rise to the great emphasis on davening *Tefilat Tal* on Pesach and making a general mention of dew on hot days.[10]

So while rain and dew were desired in antiquity, the mention of rain was required while the mention of dew—especially in Babylonia—remained optional. One reason for this may lie Amoraic Literature's term: "dew of blessing." We may hypothesize that because dew is associated with a sign of messianic salvation its mention was optional, whereas the mention of rain that would sustain the crops was obligatory. However, the moisture of dew helped the maintenance of crops in arid summer months in Palestine. Therefore, Palestinian *payyetanim* created *piyyutim* both to provide anxious farmers with

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[9] Jakob Petachowsky and Joseph Heinemann note how this dynamic surfaces in the liturgical stanzas of Kallir's *Tefilat Tal* in *Literature of the Synagogue*, pp. 237-238.
[10] P. 17, fn 62

a prayer for moisture in summer months and to establish symmetry in the Jewish liturgical year.

Just as the *piyyut* for rain was mentioned in the winter after the first line of the *gevurot* in the Amidah, in the Land of Israel, the *piyyut* for dew was mentioned in the same place in the summer. This parallel further shows the fact that in and around Israel in ancient times, the formula for rain and dew seem to have been identical: משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם/הטל,[11] even though today the formula for mentioning dew in many Jewish places of worship has been shortened to merely: מוריד הטל. The earliest prayer books, however, make no mention of dew at all. In Rav Amram's siddur he explicitly notes, "[I]n the days of summer, one needs only say 'מכלכל חיים בחסד'" thereby bypassing any mention of dew. Likewise, Saadyah Gaon's prayer book makes no mention of dew in the prayer for the revivification of the dead. We should look next then at how "dew" finds its way into the traditions as we have them.

According to Goldschmidt, the tradition of mentioning dew dates back to ancient times in the Sephardic tradition and its focus on Zion. Worshippers were especially attuned to dew's gifts in Palestine— both its ability to refresh the parched Land of Israel and to redeem Jerusalem in the Messianic Age. However, the Ashkenazic inclusion of dew came later. *Machzor Vitry* requires the mentioning of rain, yet makes no statement regarding dew. In ancient Italy, they first followed the tradition of ancient Israel and mentioned dew in the Amidah but they later followed the custom in Seder Rav Amram and omitted it. The fixed tradition of mentioning dew did not begin until the advent of Hasidei Polin, in the 18th Century. It then spread to the rest of Ashkenaz. However, it

[11] Geniza Specimens, JQR X, 1898.

was still not an obligation to mention it in many places throughout Ashkenaz. Yet, Jews of Sefarad and Provence did mention dew and the Meiri (13th Century) explicitly required those who do not do so go back and repeat the entire Amidah. No doubt it was still a debated point at the time, and Meiri felt the need to argue his case with sanctions. By the end of the15th Century, the tradition of mentioning dew had taken hold as far away as England.

After time, the requirement to mention dew became an opening to create new liturgy. According to Ezra Fleischer[12] *piyyutim* began to appear in the Land of Israel as early as the 4th century. A Twelfth Century report in Judah ben Barzillai al-Bargeloni's *Sefer Ha'itim* claims that *piyyutim* were created in response to the persecution of Jews:

> The enemies decreed that Israel must not occupy themselves with the Torah. Therefore the Sages among them ordained for them, in the midst of prayers, to mention, and to warn the ignorant about... the rules of the festivals... by way of praises and thanksgivings and rhymes and *piyyutim*.[13]

Some scholars believe that this refers to Justinian's decree of 553 that prohibited Jews in the Byzantine Empire from "*deuterosis*, a word which is generally taken to mean the aggadic exegesis of the Midrashim."[14] However, Raymond Schiendlin cautions against concluding anything about the origin of the *piyyut* from this data. "The art of the *piyyut* could, of course, have developed during the previous centuries without any connection to the persecutions."[15]

While many of our extant *piyyutim* may have emerged in the Sixth Century, modern scholars disagree about the date when *piyyutim* first came into being as a

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[12] *Shirat-HaKodesh Ha'ivrit Bimei-Habeinayim*, p. 11.
[13] *The Literature of the Synagogue* eds. Joseph Heinemann and Jakob J. Petuchowski, p. 206 . Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, p. 222.
[14] *Literature of the Synagogue*, p. 206.
[15] Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, p. 224.

liturgical art form. Jefim Schirmann and Salo W. Baron contend that the *piyyut* is as old as the oldest standard prayers themselves.[16] Aaron Mirsky holds that the *piyyut* originated in the time of the Talmud, presumably c. 200-550 CE. He cites as evidence for his argument the similarity in thought and speech between the Talmudic lore and early *piyyutim*.[17] Ezra Fleischer, argues that the emergence of *piyyutim* did not occur until after the prayers were crystallized into standard form,[18] making the *piyyut* a product of the Fourth Century and beyond.

Ezra Fleischer[19] posits three phases to what he calls: "The Eastern *Payyetanut* Period" which occurred in and around the Land of Israel between the Fourth and Eleventh Centuries. The first phase was the Anonymous *Piyyut* Period or the Pre-Classical *Piyyut* Period in the Fourth through Sixth Centuries. In this stage, the first named *payyetan* emerges, Yose b. Yose among the other nameless *payyetanim*. Many of the most prevalent *piyyut* types emerge, but they are not finalized at this time. The next phase is called the Classic *Piyyut* Period. The two best-known *payyetanim*, Yannai and Eleazar Kallir emerge in this phase that Fleischer estimates as spanning the Sixth to Eighth Centuries. The Late Eastern *Payyetanut* Period begins in the mid-Eighth Century. This is a very creative period in which many later *payyetanim* imitate the Kalliri style.

It is in the second phase of the Eastern *Payyetanut* Period—the Classical *Piyyut* Period—that a highly structured prayer for the mentioning of dew in the Amidah emerges. This prayer is attributed to the most famous *payyetan*: Eleazar Kallir. An acrostic in the *piyyut* identifies its author as אלעזר בירבי קליר מקריית ספר, Eleazar b. R.

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[16] *Literature of the Synagogue*, p. 208.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Fleischer, *Shirat-HaKodesh Ha'ivrit Bimei-Habeinayim*, p. 11.

Kallir from Kiryat Sefer. The location of Kiryat Sefer, a locale mentioned in Joshua, is not known precisely. Suffering originally from a misunderstanding about Kallir's dates, postulated that he was from a Tenth Century Italian city where Jewish academies flourished. Another postulate was the reading of Kallir's acrostic *qiryat sefar* not *sefer* as "coastal city" rather than "center of learning." Hence, they placed Kallir in the Italian coastal cities of Bari, Cagliari, Civitas Portus and Rome.[20] Others, however, placed him in Babylonia, assuming Kiryat Sefer referred to Pumbedita.

However, further scholarship has shown that Kallir's homeland was Palestine. It was only there that a liturgical poet had the freedom to be so creative with the liturgy. This type of payyetanic creativity was forbidden in Gaonic Babylonia. Additionally, Kallir's poems imply that there was only one festival day. The most convincing evidence that he was in fact from Palestine is that he bases his *piyyutim* on the Palestinian version of the *Amidah*. Most modern scholars therefore conclude that Kallir wrote in Palestine or (virtually the same as it was in the Palestinian liturgical orbit) in nearby Syria.[21] Two current hypotheses exist about the location of his hometown. Some think that it was in the city of Edessa (ancient city of Mesopotamia, on site of present-day Urfa, Turkey) a huge center of learning. However, no evidence exists that there was a Jewish settlement there. Hence, others speculate that the "city of the book" to which Kallir refers is none other than Tiberius, the long-time hub of Jewish study in Galilean Palestine.

Just as it is hard to locate the place of birth of Eleazar Kallir, so too is it to find out any factual information about the author by his name. While Eleazar was a popular name, Kallir does not occur anywhere else. Thus, speculations run wide about the

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[20] *Jewish Liturgy* p. 242.
[21] Ibid., p. 243.

meaning of this strange second name. Some think that it was the name of his father while others think that it may have been a nickname of sorts. Perhaps the most bizarre suggestion is that it is derived from the Syriac word for cake, "qalora," a nickname occasioned by the tradition of rewarding young children for their learning with cakes. As a gifted child, Eleazar was nicknamed "Cake Man."[22] Others believe that Kalir denotes his city of origin, perhaps Cagliari. The name is also similar to *Celer*, a name that was found on Jewish gravestones from Italy. Yet, the name also bears a resemblance to a popular name in eastern Roman Empire, *Cyrill.*[23]

There are other mysteries about the way Kallir signed his name. Oftentimes, there are many other names listed along with his signature. Scholars are not sure about the relationship between Kallir and the people whom he lists. Fleischer speculates that they might be his sons.[24] Possibly they were other writers who helped him complete the hundreds of poems he wrote. This tradition of listing many names besides the author's continued after Kallir's time.

Kallir's *Tal* is a variation on a type of *piyyut* that he made famous—the *kerovah.* The term *kerovah* refers generally to any *piyyut* that is embedded in the *Amidah.* The name is derived from the word used in *Leviticus Rabbah* 3:19 and PT *Berachot* 1:1 for the one who offers the Amidah.[25] There are many variations in the form of the *kerovah.* This particular one was written for the *Musaf* Service on the first day of Passover. The *piyyut* goes only through the second benediction of the *Amdidah,* beginning with two

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[22] Ibid., p. 242.
[23] Ibid.
[24] *Shirat HaKodesh*, p. 129.
[25] *The World of Prayer*, p. 108.

five-line poems: one before *magen Avraham* and the other after the line that begins *atah gibor.*

The introduction and six stanzas of Tefilat Tal that remain part of traditional liturgy are only a fraction of a much longer *piyyut* attributed to Kallir. Elbogen summarizes the structure of Tefilat Tal in his article entitled "Kalir Studies."[26] He explains that it consists of two smaller sections and some larger ones. The first of the larger sections introduces the *payyetan* and his petition that his prayers be answered. This section consists of eleven stanzas with four couplets per stanza. Each of the couplets rhymes and belongs to one letter of the alphabet.

The second section is composed of twenty-two stanzas alphabetically arranged, each with four lines per letter. The third section contains twenty-two couplets, this time in reverse alphabetical order. The second word in each line spells out the acrostic, "אלעזר בירבי קליר מקדיש ספר". Sections two and three are linked thematically. As Elbogen elaborates, "they deal with the significance of dew... in the work of Creation and in the course of history of Israel as depicted in the Bible, and they close with a view of the significance of these natural phenomena in the time and the events of the days of the Messianic redemption" (216). Additionally, both sections have the same rhyme scheme of טל. This rhyme occurs 110 times.

The fourth section deals with the signs of the Zodiac. In it, the themes of the twelve months of the year, the twelve tribes and the signs of the Zodiac are connected. According to Elbogen, the cosmic connections were probably no longer understood by the poet, yet these ideas were still deeply rooted in religious thought. The twenty-one,

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[26] Ismar Elbogen, "Kalir Studies," *Hebrew Union College Annual4* (1927): pp. 215-224.

four-lined stanzas in this section follow the alphabet. Lines one and three in the stanza begin with the same letter; and lines two and four begin with the word טל.

> Elbogen explains the rhyme-scheme as follows:
>
> Every two lines have the same doubled rhyme. In stanzas 1, 3, 5, etc. the first line rhyme is determined by the months of the Hebrew year (סיון, ניסן, אייר) and in stanza 2, 4, 6, etc. by the Hebrew names of the signs of the Zodiac (טלה, שור, תאומים) the second rhyme of each stanza was selected *ad lib.*[27]

The poet ran into a challenge with the alphabetical scheme matching the rhyme scheme because while there are twelve Zodiac signs and twelve months, there are not twenty-four letters in the Hebrew alphabet, but only twenty-two. Therefore, in the sections for Tevet and Shevat, there are only two stanzas for each instead of four. Additionally, the *payyetan* allotted only 21 stanzas to this section. Thus, he united the month and the sign of the Zodiac for the month of Adar.

The two smaller sections consist of two five-line stanzas that rhyme all the way through. The first stanza begins *b'dato*. The second begins *t'homot*. In both, the third line begins with *tal*. The fifth lines' opening words show the beginning of the acrostic "אל עזר".

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[27] Ibid., p. 216.

Chapter 2
Analysis of *Tefilat Tal*'s Liturgical Stanzas

For well over a thousand years, Jews have davened Kallir's *Tefilat Tal* in the *musaf* Amidah on the first day of Pesach. However, while communities once recited *Tefilat Tal* in its entirety, today even traditional congregations generally recite only the piyyut's introduction and six short stanzas. Therefore, these stanzas deserve special attention. Tracing the allusions, exploring the language and discovering ways in which this early payyetan played in poetry can offer deeper meaning to congregants who recite this prayer.

The six stanzas are arranged in reverse alphabetical order, one line per letter except the final stanza that contains two lines per letter. However, the first line in each stanza begins with the word "tal." Therefore, the second word in the first line follows the order of the stanza. To better display the reverse alphabetical order in the stanzas, I have set the word "tal" that begins the strophe a little to the side in bold. The final word in each line rhymes with the others by virtue of its ending syllable. For example, the four lines in the first stanza conclude with the words: "*artzach / b'ditzach / b'hafritzach / cheftzach.*" While this rhyme-scheme no longer fits today's poetic sensibilities (it is equivalent to "rhyming" raiding, birding, wedding and folding), this system pervaded Kalliri piyyutim.

I provide my own translation of the poem below. I consulted Philip Birnbaum's *Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem*: *Daily Prayerbook* and *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur: Weekday/ Sabbath/ Festival* for guidance in this endeavor.

Stanza 1

1 טַל תֵּן לִרְצוֹת אַרְצָךְ,
2 שִׂיתֵנוּ בְרָכָה בְּדִיצָךְ,
3 רֹב דָּגָן וְתִירוֹשׁ בְּהַפְרִיצָךְ,
4 קוֹמֵם עִיר בָּהּ הֶפְצָךְ,
בְּטַל.

Give dew to favor Your land,
Make us blessed through Your rejoicing.
You cause grain and wine to increase and make it abundant,
Restore the city in which You delight through dew.

Line 2: שיתנו ברכה בדיצך
שיתנו-shitenu

In the second line of the first stanza, Kallir uses the word שיתנו "shitenu" with the root sh-y-th (שית) meaning "to place." Forms of this verb appear often in the Bible so it may be unlikely that Kallir chose this word to point the reader (or in his time, the listener) to a Biblical text. Yet it is clear that he has chosen it because of its play on the word שתה "shateh" with the root sh-th-h meaning "to drink." Hence, in a prayer that requests dew for the land to drink, Kallir cleverly uses a word that illustrates this point.

Due to the frequent occurrence of verbs with the root sh-y-th in the Bible, it is difficult to conclude that Kallir uses this root here in order to reference a specific text. However, based on the fact that he later alludes to Jacob's blessings of abundance in Genesis 30, we may speculate that he directs the reader to this chapter here with his use

of this word. In this chapter in the Bible, Jacob realizes that God has favored him. In verse 40, Jacob produces (*vayashet*) special flocks for himself alone by dealing separately with his sheep and does not place them (*shatam*) with Laban's flocks. In the very next line, Kallir makes another allusion to Genesis 30, a chapter that illustrates how God bestows favor on Jacob (Israel) through abundant offspring and livestock.

Line 3: רב דגן ותירוש בהפריצך

דגן-*dagan*, תירוש-*tirosh*

These words in the third line immediately evokes the Shema in the worshipper:

וְנָתַתִּי מְטַר־אַרְצְכֶם בְּעִתּוֹ יוֹרֶה וּמַלְקוֹשׁ וְאָסַפְתָּ דְגָנֶךָ וְתִירֹשְׁךָ וְיִצְהָרֶךָ

"I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late. You shall gather in our new grain and wine and oil." (Deut. 11:14) The "late rain" refers to dew.

The savvy worshipper will recognize the allusion to Deuteronomy 33:28:

וַיִּשְׁכֹּן יִשְׂרָאֵל בֶּטַח בָּדָד עֵין יַעֲקֹב אֶל־אֶרֶץ דָּגָן וְתִירוֹשׁ אַף־שָׁמָיו יַעַרְפוּ טָל׃

"Thus Israel dwells in safety, Untroubled is Israel's abode, in a land of grain and wine, under heavens dripping dew."

רב-*rov*, בהפריצך- *b'hefritzach*

The words that open and conclude line 3, רב...בהפריצך (rov ... b'hefritzach) allude to Genesis 30:30, in which Jacob explains to Laban, "The little you had before I came has grown to much— יפרוץ לרוב (yifrotz l'rov)— since the Lord has blessed you wherever I turned." Through his poem, Kallir appeals to God to bestow blessing on the people of

Israel by making their harvest abundant as He made Jacob's flock abundant when he lived with Laban.

Line 4: קומם עיר בה הפצך
עיר-*ir*

Jerusalem

Stanza 2

1 טַל צַוֵּה שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְעֻטָּרֶת
2 פְּרִי הָאָרֶץ לִגְאוֹן וּלְתִפְאֶרֶת,
3 עִיר כַּסֻּכָּה נוֹתָרֶת,
4 שִׂימָה בְיָדְךָ עֲטֶרֶת,
בְּטָל.

Grant dew for a year that will be good and crowned,
And the splendor of the land will give dignity and majesty.
The city that was like a deserted booth,
Let Your hand make her as a crown with dew.

Line 1: טל צוה שנה טובה ומעטרת
שנה טובה- *shanah tovah*

The first line of the Hebrew in most editions of contemporary *siddurim* used in Ashkenazi prayer settings reads: טל צוה שנה טובה ומעטרת.[1] However, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur - Nusach Sefard* simply reads, טל צוה טובה ומעטרת "tal *tzaveih tovah*

[1] *Ha-Siddur Ha-shalen, Artscroll- Nusach Ashkenaz, Siddur Sim Shalom*

umtzuteret" (literally, "command dew good and crowned"). However, the English in this siddur inserts the word "year." Hence, the English reads, "Dew—decree it for a year that is good and crowned." This testifies to a counter tradition, possibly based on different melodies or source texts.

Line 2: פרי האדץ לגאון ולתפארת

The second line is taken directly from a phrase in Isaiah 4:2:

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה צֶמַח יְהוָה לִצְבִי וּלְכָבוֹד וּפְרִי הָאָרֶץ לְגָאוֹן וּלְתִפְאָרֶת לִפְלֵיטַת יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

"In that day the radiance of the Lord will lend beauty and glory, *bestow fruit of the land with majesty and splendor to the survivors of Israel.*"

Line 3: עיד כסכה נחרת

Line three, עיד כסכה נחרת "the city that was deserted like a booth," alludes to Isaiah 1:8: וְנוֹתְרָה בַת־צִיּוֹן כְּסֻכָּה בְכָרֶם "Fair Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard." The image of a deserted booth is an agricultural reference that poignantly represents uncertainty and vulnerability of the harvest season. Blenkinsopp points out in his commentary on *Isaiah* in *The Anchor Bible* that a shack is an impermanent and precarious structure. Whereas in *Isaiah* the image represented Israel's vulnerability to hostile forces, in this poem, the image serves to illustrate Israel's heightened awareness of their dependence on God during the harvest season in which they call for dew.

Line 4: שימה בידך עטרת

שימה-simah

To the reader of Modern Hebrew, it appears that Kallir parts from his acrostic in line four. Instead of using a word that begins with a *samech* (ס), thus keeping his reverse alphabetical acrostic, he uses the word "*sim*" (שים) that begins with the letter *sin*(ש). It is unclear why this is the case. However, in Kallir's time, these two letters were interchangeable.

עטרת-ateret

Ateret tiferet (crown of glory) is a phrase used often in the Bible: Isaiah 62:3; Ezekial 16:12, 23:42; Proverbs 4:9, 16:31. Here, the idiom is divided and used as separate phrases in the rhyme scheme of the poem. The first and last verses in this stanza end with a form of the word ע-ט-ר-ת "*ayin-tet-reish-tov*," "crown." This serves to emphasize the theme of Israel's request for majesty in this stanza.

Stanza 3

1	טַל	נוֹפֵף עֲלֵי אֶרֶץ בְּרוּכָה,
2		מִמֶּגֶד שָׁמַיִם שַׁבְּעֵנוּ בְּרָכָה,
3		לְהָאִיר מִתּוֹךְ חֲשֵׁכָה,
4		כַּנָּה אַחֲרֶיךָ מְשׁוּכָה,
	בְּטַל.	

Wave dew upon the blessed land
From the gift of the heavens sate us in blessing.
Grant light from amid the darkness
For Israel that is drawn after You in dew.

Line 1: טל נופף על ארץ מזכה

נופף- *nofef*

The first word after "*tal*" that opens the third stanza "*nofef*" may be an allusion to the Biblical wave offering *temufa* (תנופה) that *BDB* explains is a technical term of a "rite in which originally the priest lifted his share of offering and *waved* it, i.e. moved it toward altar and back, in token of its presentation to God and its return by him to priest.[2]" Hence, dew is a way in which God in sense makes an offering to the people. The BDB also cites A. Dillman who compares the root *nun-vuv-feh* to an Ethiopic[3] word that means to distil or to drop like dew.[4] Additionally, this word may allude to Psalm 68:10: תָּנִיף אֱלֹהִים גֶּשֶׁם נְדָבוֹת "God **released** bountiful rain."

Line 2: ממגד שמים שבענו ברכה

Line two, ממגד שמים שבענו ברכה, "From the gift of the heavens, sate us in blessing" is a direct allusion to the blessing that Moses confers on the tribe of Joseph in Deuteronomy 33:13: מְבֹרֶכֶת יְהוָה אַרְצוֹ מִמֶּגֶד שָׁמַיִם מִטָּל וּמִתְּהוֹם רֹבֶצֶת תָּחַת

"his land is the blessed of God/ with the gift of dew from the heavens."

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[2] *BDB*, p.632.
[3] Ethiopic is the script derived from the classical Ethiopian language Ge'ez which has been in use since the 4th Century CE. The word meaning "to drop like dew" in Ethiopic is N-fə/ó-N-F which is similar to the Hebrew word Kallir uses N-ó-F-F.
[4] *BDB*, p. 631.

Line 4: כנה אחרדיך משוכה
כנה- kanah

The word that begins the fourth line of the third stanza, "*kanah*," is the word used in Psalm 80:16 to refer to Israel as the stock of a plant. The psalm reads: וְכַנָּה אֲשֶׁר־נָטְעָה יְמִינֶךָ וְעַל־בֵּן אִמַּצְתָּה לָּךְ "the stock planted by Your right hand, the stem you have taken as Your own." While the ArtScroll translates *kanah* as "the fundamental nation," I translated *kanah* (כנה) as "Israel" like the Birnbaum translation because it clearly refers to the nation/people of Israel.

Stanza 4

יַעֲסִיס צוּף הָרִים,	**טַל**	1
טְעֵם בִּמְאוֹדֶיךָ מֻבְחָרִים,		2
חֲנוּנֶיךָ חֻלִּין מִמַּסְגֵּרִים,		3
זְמָרָה נַנְעִים וְקוֹל נָרִים,		4
בְּטַל.		

Let dew sweeten the nectar of the mountains
Let the chosen people taste Your greatness.
Save your favored ones from bondage
So we may sing pleasant songs and raise our voices with dew.

Line 1: טל יעסיס צוף הרים

יעסיס-*ya'asis*

The opening word of this stanza (after *tal*) is a noun that Kallir creatively transforms into a verb. In the Bible, *asis* (עסיס) is sweet wine (Amos 9:13; Job 1:5, 4:18; Isaiah 49:26). In Modern Hebrew it means juice. In this line, Kallir uses the word as a verb—*ya'asis*—"to sweeten" (like wine).

צוף- *tzuf*

The second word, *tzuf* (צוף) , in Modern Hebrew means nectar, though in Biblical Hebrew it means honey comb. Kalir uses the word *tzuf* (צוף) here in a similar way as it was used in Proverbs 16:24: "*tzuf d'vash imrei no'am*" צוּף־דְּבַשׁ אִמְרֵי־נֹעַם (pleasant sayings are like a honey comb). Both the passage in Proverbs and this stanza in the piyut emphasize language and utilizing the human voice for a good purpose.

Line 2: טעם במאודיך מבחורים

במאודיך- *b'm'odecha*

Interestingly, the Biblical usage of the word *m'odecha* (מאודיך) in the middle of the second line alludes to Deuteronomy 6:5 (the beginning of the Shema):

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֵת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל־מְאֹדֶךָ

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." It alludes to God's commandment to the Israelites to love Adonai with all their might. In the piyyut, God is called upon to show His abundance, His might to the

Israelites and to let them taste of it. There is a play between these texts and the Jews' covenantal relationship with God: we have given you our abundance, our might to you as you commanded; now we are asking you to give us yours as well. This line also expresses that God's abundance be evidenced in their harvest so that they may literally "taste" God's greatness.

Line 4: זמרה נעים וקול נרים
זמרה נעים-*zimrah nanim*

Line four references the phrase in Psalm 147:1:

הַלְלוּ יָהּ֥ כִּי־טֽוֹב זַמְּרָ֗ה אֱלֹהֵ֫ינוּ֥ כִּי־נָעִ֥ים נָאוָ֥ה תְהִלָּֽה

"Hallelujah./ It is good to chant hymns to our God;/ it is pleasant to sing glorious praise." The psalm looks to a time when Jerusalem will be rebuilt. At the end of the psalm, the author explains that God controls the weather system: "He sends forth His word to the earth;/ His command runs swiftly./ He lays down snow like fleece,/ scatters frost like ashes/...He breathes and the waters flow."[5] Therefore, we must obey God's commandments because He has chosen us and is all powerful. Similarly, Kallir appeals to God by assuring Him that we will lift our voices in pleasant song if God controls the weather so that we may enjoy an abundant harvest.

[5] Psalm 147:15-18.

Stanza 5

1	טַל	וְשׂוֹבַע מַלֵּא אֲסָמֵינוּ,
2		הֲכָעֵת תְּחַדֵּשׁ יָמֵינוּ,
3		דּוֹד כְּעֶרְכֶּךָ הַעֲמֵד שְׁמֵנוּ,
4		גַּן רָוֶה שֹׁימֵנוּ,
	בְּטַל.	

May dew and plenty fill our barns.
Now will You renew our days?
Beloved One, let our names endure like Your own.
Make us like a well-watered garden.

Line 1: טל ושובע מלא אסמינו

The first line is a reference to Proverbs 3. In 3:10, the proverb reads: וְיִמָּלְאוּ אֲסָמֶיךָ שָׂבָע וְתִירוֹשׁ יְקָבֶיךָ יִפְרֹצוּ "Your barns will be filled with plenty." In verse 21, it reads: "By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew." Hence, through God's will, dew falls and that moisture allows for a good harvest from which barns will be filled with plenty.

Line 2: הכעת תחדש ימינו

הכעת- *haca'et*

The "*heh*" in *haca'et,* the word that begins the second line of the fifth stanza is a "*heh hasha'alah,*" a *heh* (ה) that designates a question. Hence, the line reads as a question, "Now, will you renew our days?"

תחדש ימינו- *t'chadesh yameinu*

This phrase in line 2, *t'chadesh yameinu* reminds the worshipper of the closing of the Torah service in which we say in the liturgy: "Turn us to You, Oh God and let us return; *renew our days* as of old." Again, Kallir stresses the relationship between our calling upon God and His response—filling the land with dew. He also stresses the theological motif of dew as a sign of redemption.

Line 3: דוד כצרכך העמד שמנו
דוד- *dod*

The name used for God, *dod* (Beloved One) in line 3 is a name for God that was popular in the liturgical poems of the time, such as "*L'cha Dodi*." The term is taken from *Shir haShirim* in which the poems written for the author's beloved are interpreted as Israel's love poems to God. Though now it is not our custom to conceive of God as a worshipper's lover, the term here has a romantic connotation. Hence, it is not just the God of our Fathers who is called upon in this *piyut*, but a more intimate God—our ultimate Lover.

Line 4: גן רוה שימנו
גן רוה-*gan raveh*

Line four is an allusion to Isaiah 58:11:

וְנָחֲךָ יְהוָה תָּמִיד וְהִשְׂבִּיעַ בְּצַחְצָחוֹת נַפְשֶׁךָ וְעַצְמוֹתֶיךָ יַחֲלִיץ וְהָיִיתָ כְּגַן רָוֶה וּכְמוֹצָא

מַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יְכַזְּבוּ מֵימָיו׃

"And the Lord shall guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and make your bones fat, and you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail." Again, Kallir calls on God to satisfy Israel's need for water. But interestingly, here, there is a shift in the context from the literal need of nourishing the land to the metaphysical need of nurturing the soul.

Stanza 6

טַל 1 בּוֹ תְּבָרֵךְ מָזוֹן,
2 בְּמִשְׁמַנֵּינוּ אַל יְהִי רָזוֹן,
3 אֵימָה אֲשֶׁר הִסַּעְתָּ כַּצֹּאן,
4 אָנָּה תָּפֵק לָהּ רָצוֹן
בְּטַל.

Bless our sustenance with dew,
Do not make our fertile land lean
This nation that you led like sheep,
Please, fulfill her desire through dew.

Line 2: במשמניו אל יהי רזון

The second line refers to Isaiah 10:16: לָכֵן יִשַׁלַּח הָאָדוֹן יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת בְּמִשְׁמַנָּיו רָזוֹן

" Assuredly, the Sovereign Lord of Hosts will send a wasting away in its fatness."

This verse in Isaiah refers to the destruction of much of Israel because of her sins, thus leaving only a remnant from which the Messiah will be born. However, in the poem, Kallir asks for the redemption without having to go through the process of destroying all of Israel except for the remnant.

Line 3: אימה אשר הסעת בצאן

Line three alludes to Jeremiah 31:12: וּבָאוּ֙ וְרִנְּנ֣וּ בִמְר֣וֹם־צִיּ֔וֹן וְנָהֲר֥וּ אֶל־ט֖וּב יְהוָ֑ה עַל־דָּגָ֣ן
וְעַל־תִּירֹ֗שׁ וְעַל־יִצְהָר֙ וְעַל־בְּנֵי־צֹ֣אן וּבָקָ֔ר וְהָיְתָ֤ה נַפְשָׁם֙ כְּגַ֣ן רָוֶ֔ה וְלֹא־יוֹסִ֥יפוּ לְדַאֲבָ֖ה עֽוֹד׃

"They shall come and shout on the heights of Zion, radiant over the bounty of the Lord—over new grain and wine and oil, and over sheep and cattle. They shall fare like a well-watered garden, they shall never languish again." This verse in brings other phrases used in this piyyut: "new grain and wine," and "make Israel like a well-watered garden." And now we understand the point of the poem—renew us and redeem us here and now. Do not make us go through the pain, just redeem us.

Chapter 3
Comparison of *Tefilat Tal* and *Tefilat Geshem*

תפילת טל — Prayer for Dew

בְּדַעְתּוֹ אַבִּיעָה חִידוֹת,	With His knowledge, I will express riddles
בָּעָם זֶה בְּזוּ בְּטַל לְהַחֲדוֹת.	Among these people through this prayer.
טַל גִּיא וּדְשָׁאֶיהָ לְחַדּוֹת,	Dew brings joy to the valley and its greenery,
דָּחִים בְּצִלּוֹ לְהַחֲדוֹת.	Filling those in His shelter with joy.
אוֹת יַלְדוּת טַל לְהָגֵן לְתוֹלָדוֹת.	A sign of youth, may dew protect the generations.

תְּהוֹמוֹת הֲדוֹם לִרְסִיסוֹ כְּסוּפִים,	The depths of the Earth yearn for His droplet,
וְכָל נְאוֹת דֶּשֶׁא לוֹ נִכְסָפִים.	And every green meadow longs for it.
טַל זִכְרוֹ גְּבוּרוֹת מוֹסִיפִים,	The Prayer for Dew adds to God's power,
חָקוּק בְּגִישַׁת מוּסָפִים,	Thus it is inscribed in the Musaf Service.
טַל לְחַיּוֹת בּוֹ נְקוּדֵי סְעִיפִים.	Dew will revive those who are buried in the cleft of rocks.

טַל תֵּן לִרְצוֹת אַרְצָךְ,	Give dew to favor Your land,
שִׂיחָתֵנוּ בְּרָכָה בְּדִיצָךְ,	Make us blessed through Your rejoicing.
רַב דָּגָן וְתִירוֹשׁ בְּהַפְרִיצָךְ,	You cause grain and wine to increase and make it abundant,
קוֹמֵם עִיר בָּהּ הֶפְצָךְ,	Restore the city in which You delight through dew.
בְּטַל.	

טַל צַוֵּה שָׁנָה טוֹבָה וּמְעֻטָּרֶת
פְּרִי הָאָרֶץ לִגְאוֹן וּלְתִפְאֶרֶת,
עִיר כַּסֻּכָּה נוֹתֶרֶת,
שִׂימָהּ בְיָדְךָ עֲטֶרֶת,
בְּטַל.

Grant dew for a year that will be good and crowned,
And the splendor of the land will give dignity and majesty.
The city that was like a deserted booth,
Let Your hand make her as a crown with dew.

טַל נוֹפֵף עַל אֶרֶץ בְּרוּכָה,
מִמֶּגֶד שָׁמַיִם שַׂבְּעֵנוּ בְרָכָה,
לְהָאִיר מִתּוֹךְ חֲשֵׁכָה,
כִּי אַחֲרֶיךָ מְשׁוּכָה,
בְּטַל.

Wave dew upon the blessed land
From the gift of the heavens sate us in blessing.
Grant light from amid the darkness
For Israel that is drawn after You in dew.

Let dew sweeten the nectar of the mountains
Let the chosen people taste Your greatness.
Save your favored ones from bondage
So we may sing pleasant songs and raise our voices with dew.

טַל יַעֲסִים צוּף הָרִים,
טְעֵם בְּמְאוֹדֶיךָ מְבֹרָרִים,
חַנּוּנֶיךָ חַלֵּץ מִמַּסְגֵּרִים,
זְמָרָה נְעִימִים וְקוֹל נָרִים,
בְּטַל.

טַל וְשׂוֹבַע מַלֵּא אֲסָמֵינוּ,
הֲכָעֵת תְּחַדֵּשׁ יָמֵינוּ,
דּוֹד כְּעֵרְכְּךָ הַעֲמֵד שְׁמֵנוּ,
גַּן רָוֶה שִׁימֵנוּ,
בְּטַל.

May dew and plenty fill our barns.
Now will You renew our days?
Beloved One, let our names endure like Your own.
Make us like a well-watered garden.

טַל בּוֹ תְּבָרֵךְ מָזוֹן,
בְּמִשְׁמַנֵּינוּ אַל יְהִי רָזוֹן,
אֵימָה אֲשֶׁר הִסַּעְתָּ כַּצֹּאן,
אָנָּא תְּפַק לָהּ רָצוֹן
בְּטַל.

Bless our sustenance with dew,
Do not make our fertile land lean
This nation that you led like sheep,
Please, fulfill her desire through dew.

תפלת גשם Prayer for Rain*

אַף-בְּרִי אַתָּם שֵׁם שַׂר מָטָר,	*Af-Bri* is the title of the prince of rain,
לְהַעֲבִיב וּלְהַעֲנִין לְהָרִיק וּלְהַמְטִר,	Who gathers the clouds and makes them drop rain,
מַיִם אֲבִים בָּם גֵּיא לַעְטֵר,	Water to adorn the earth with verdure.
לְבַל יֵעָצְרוּ בִּנְשִׁיוֹן שְׁטָר,	Be it not held back because of unpaid debts;
אֲמוּנִים גְּנוֹן בָּם שׁוֹאֲלֵי מָטָר.	O shield faithful Israel who prays for rain.
יַשְׁרִיחַ לְפַלֵּג מִפֶּלֶג גֶּשֶׁם,	May he send rain from the heavenly source,
לְמוֹגֵג פְּנֵי נְשִׁי בְּצַחוֹת לֶשֶׁם,	To soften the earth with its crystal drops.
מַיִם לְאוֹתָךְ כָּנִית תָּרְשָׁם,	Thou hast named water the symbol of thy might;
לְהַרְגִּיעַ בְּרַעֲפָם לִנְפוּחֵי נְשָׁם,	Its drops refresh all that have the breath of life,
לְהַחֲיוֹת מְזַכְּרִים גְּבוּרוֹת הַגָּשֶׁם.	And revive those who praise thy powers of rain.
זְכוֹר אָב נִמְשַׁךְ אַחֲרֵיךְ כַּמַּיִם	Remember Abraham who followed thee like water,
בֵּרַכְתּוֹ עֵץ שָׁתוּל עַל פַּלְגֵי מָיִם,	Who thou didst bless like a tree planted near streams of water;
גְּנַנְתּוֹ, הִצַּלְתּוֹ מֵאֵשׁ וּמִמַּיִם,	Thou didst shield him, thou didst save him from fire and water;
דְּרַשְׁתּוֹ בְּזָרְעוֹ עַל כָּל מָיִם.	Thou didst care for him when he sowed by all streams of water.
בַּעֲבוּרוֹ אַל תִּמְנַע מָיִם.	For his sake, do not refuse water.

זְכוֹר הַנּוֹלָד בְּבִשׂוֹרַת יִצְחָק נָא מְעַט מַיִם,
וְשִׁוַּוְתָּ לְהוֹדוֹ לְשַׁחֲטוֹ, לִשְׁפּוֹךְ דָּמוֹ כַּמַּיִם,
וְהוּא גַּם הוּא לִשְׁפּוֹךְ לֵב כַּמַּיִם,
חָפַר וּמָצָא בְּאֵרוֹת מָיִם.

בִּצְדָקוֹ חֵן חַשְׂרַת מָיִם.

Remember Isaac whose birth was foretold over a little water,
Thou didst tell his father to offer his blood like water;
Isaac was heedful in pouring out his heart like water;
Digging wells he did discover water.

For his righteousness' sake, grant abundant water.

זְכוֹר טָעַן מַלְקוֹ וְעָבַר יַרְדֵּן מַיִם,
יִחַד לֵב וְגָל אֶבֶן מִפִּי בְּאֵר מַיִם,
כְּנָאֶבַק לוֹ שַׂר גָּלוֹל מֵאֵשׁ וּמַיִם,
לָכֵן הִבְטַחְתּוֹ חֲיוֹת עִמּוֹ בָּאֵשׁ וּבַמָּיִם.

בַּעֲבוּרוֹ אַל תִּמְנַע מָיִם.

Remember Jacob who, staff in hand, crossed the Jordan's water;
His heart trusted when he rolled off the stone of the well of water;
When he wrestled with the prince of fire and water,
Thou didst promise to be with him through fire and water.

For his sake, do not refuse water.

זְכוֹר מֹשֶׁה בְּתֵבַת גֹּמֶא מִן הַמַּיִם,
נָמוּ דָּלָה דָלָה וְהַשְׁקָה צֹאן מָיִם,
סְגוֹלֶיךָ עֵת צָמְאוּ לַמַּיִם,
עֲלֵי הַסֶּלַע הַךְ וְיֵצְאוּ מָיִם.

בִּצְדָקוֹ חֵן חַשְׂרַת מָיִם.

Remember Moses in an ark of papyrus reeds drawn out of the water;
They said: He drew water for us and provided the flock with water;
And when thy chosen people thirsted for water,
He struck the rock and there gushed out water.

For his righteousness' sake, grant abundant water.

זְכוֹר פִּקִיד שָׁתוֹת טוֹבֵל חָמֵשׁ טְבִילוֹת בַּמַּיִם,
צוֹעֶה וּמַרְחִיץ כַּפָּיו בְּקִדּוּשׁ מַיִם,
קוֹרֵא וּמַזֶּה טַהֲרַת מַיִם,
רָחֵק מֵעַם פָּחַז כַּמָּיִם.

Remember the Temple-priest who bathed five times in water;
He removed sins when he washed his hands with sanctified water;
He read from the Scriptures when he sprinkled purified water;
He was kept at a distance from a people as turbulent as water.

בַּעֲבוּרוֹ אַל תִּמְנַע מָיִם.

For his sake, do not refuse water.

זְכוֹר שְׁנֵים עָשָׂר שְׁבָטִים שֶׁהֶעֱבַרְתָּ בְּגוּרַת מַיִם,
שֶׁהֲמְתַקְתָּ לָמוֹ מְרִירוּת מַיִם,
תּוֹלְדוֹתָם נִשְׁפְּכוּ דָמָם עָלֶיהָ כַּמַּיִם,
תְּפֶן כִּי נַפְשֵׁנוּ אֲפָפוּ מָיִם.

Remember the twelve tribes thou didst bring across the water
Thou didst sweeten for them the bitterness of the water;
For thy sake was the blood of their descendents spilt like water;
Turn to us, for our life is encircled by foes like water.

בְּצִדְקָם חֹן חַשְׂרַת מָיִם.

For their righteousness' sake, grant abundant water.

*According to the translation in the Birnbaum Siddur

Eleazar Kallir wrote not only *Tefilat Tal* but also *Tefilat Geshem*. They are extremely different thematically, yet they follow a similar structure and appear in the same place in the liturgy almost exactly 6 months apart. Like its spring counterpart, *Tefilat Tal*, *Tefilat Geshem* is a many-stanzaed poem.[1] It too has an introductory section containing 11 stanzas of rhyming couplets, organized as a double alphabetical acrostic. This section also introduces the poet and his intentions. The second section consists of twenty-two four line stanzas. The third section contains twenty-two couplets, composing a reverse alphabetical acrostic, with the second word of each line forming yet another acrostic: אלעזר בירבי קליר מקריית ספר (Eleazar b. R. Kallir from Kiryat Sefer). The piyyutim also share a similar rhyme scheme. Each line of *Tefilat Tal* ends in the word *tal;* the parallel ending word in *Tefilat Geshem* is *matar*. Finally, we find in each poem a fourth section that deals with the Zodiac, weaving it together with the twelve tribes and the twelve months of the year. The structure of this section for *Tefilat Tal* has already been explained in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

Tefilat Geshem deviates at this point. It is a complex section with verbatim quotes from Biblical texts in succeeding alternating lines. The second word in these lines forms an alphabetical acrostic. The alternating lines begin with the word *mayim* and each division ends with Biblical quotations.[2] Both piyyutim end with a short prayer that most scholars agree is not by Kallir.[3] This chapter compares this prayer section of both *Tefilat Tal* and *Tefilat Geshem*.

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[1] On Shemini Atzeret, the eighth day of Sukkot, it was traditional to mention a prayer for rain. In time, payyetanim created elaborate liturgical prayers to do this. The most popular of these piyyutim is Eleazar Kallir's *Tefilat Geshem*.
[2] Elbogen, "Kalir Studies," *HUCA 4* pp. 217-218.
[3] Ibid.; *Literature of the Synagogue*, p. 205.

Most traditional *siddurim* in which these prayers occur provide a brief introduction consisting of two short stanzas of five lines for the prayer. Liturgically, the first introduction occurs in the *Avot*, just before the *chatimah*. The next introduction occurs immediately after *rav l'hoshia* at which place a direct appeal is inserted: אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו, "Our God and the God of our ancestors..." What follows in each case is a six stanza prayer. After these six stanzas, there is the line: שאתה יי אלהינו, משיב הרוח ומוריד הטל/הגשם, "For You are the Lord our God who causes the wind to blow and the dew/rain to fall." Three lines conclude the prayer, appealing to God:

> For blessing and not for curse.
> For life and not for death.
> For plenty and not for scarcity.

To each of these lines, the congregation responds, "Amen."

Interestingly, in *Tefilat Tal*, there is no specified congregational component until the congregation's "Amen" at the end of the prayer. In *Tefilat Geshem*, however, a congregational response occurs after each stanza. It alternates between בעבורו אל תמנע מים, "For his sake do not hold the water back!" and בצדקו חן חשרת מים, "For his righteousness' sake, grant abundant water!"

Kallir is known for liturgical innovations. Kallir created choral pieces within his *piyyutim* for in order to accentuate the important role of the *payyetan* and his poems in the prayer service. In the pre-classical period, no choirs existed. While Kallir may not have created the phenomenon of the choir, he may have been the first to institute its use

in such large liturgical pieces.[4] From his day on, payyetanim incorporated the use of choirs in their liturgical creations.

In terms of rhyme, *Tefilat Geshem* simply concludes each line with the word *mayim*; but the rhyme scheme in *Tefilat Tal* is more complex. All four lines of each stanza rhyme. However, many of these rhymes are what we call in contemporary poetry, "slant rhymes," defined by Barbara Drake as "the intentional use of approximate rhyme" such as "dances" and "branches."[5] In the case of Kallir's *Tefilat Tal*, the author uses words, often with the same number of syllables, whose endings rhyme, but whose beginning syllables do not. For example, the words that end the lines in the first stanza are: *artzach*, *b'ditzach*, *b'haritzach* and *heftzach*.

Similarly, the poet does not match the meter in the lines. The approximate beats per line[6] are as follows:

Tefilat Tal- Stanza 1:

Line 1- 6 beats
Line 2- 8 beats
Line 3- 10 beats
Line 4- 6 beats

Tefilat Geshem- Stanza 1:

Line 1- 12 beats
Line 2- 12 beats
Line 3- 12 beats
Line 4- 10 beats

Tefilat Tal- Stanza 2:

Line 1- 11 beats
Line 2- 11 beats
Line 3- 7 beats
Line 4- 8 beats

Tefilat Geshem- Stanza 2:

Line 1- 14 beats
Line 2- 17 beats
Line 3- 10 beats
Line 4- 10 beats

Tefilat Tal- Stanza 3:

Line 1- 9 beats
Line 2- 11 beats

Tefilat Geshem- Stanza 3:

Line 1- 13 beats
Line 2- 13 beats

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[4] Ibid., p. 136.
[5] Drake, Barbara. *Writing Poetry, Second Edition.* Orlando, Florida: Hartcourt Brace College Publishers, 1994, p. 100.
[6] It is impossible to know exactly how these prayers were vocalized in the payyetan's time.

Line 3- 8 beats
Line 4- 9 beats

Tefilat Tal- Stanza 4:

Line 1- 7 beats
Line 2- 9 beats
Line 3- 9 beats
Line 4- 7 beats

Tefilat Tal- Stanza 5:

Line 1- 10 beats
Line 2- 9 beats
Line 3- 11 beats
Line 4- 6 beats

Tefilat Tal- Stanza 6:

Line 1- 7 beats
Line 2- 10 beats
Line 3- 10 beats
Line 4- 7 beats

Line 3- 14 beats
Line 4- 15 beats

Tefilat Geshem- Stanza 4:

Line 1- 13 beats
Line 2- 12 beats
Line 3- 10 beats
Line 4- 9 beats

Tefilat Geshem- Stanza 5:

Line 1- 16 beats
Line 2- 12 beats
Line 3- 10 beats
Line 4- 9 beats

Tefilat Geshem- Stanza 6:

Line 1- 17 beats
Line 2- 11 beats
Line 3- 13 beats
Line 4- 10 beats

At times, it seems that there is some kind of internal meter scheme within a stanza (*Tefilat Tal* stanzas 4 and 6, *Tefilat Geshem* stanzas 1 and 3), but because the scheme is inconsistent, the metrical pattern may in fact have just been happenstance.

Both poems use repetition of words to good effect. They begin each stanza with a key word: *tal* in *Tefilat Tal; z'chor* ("remember") in *Tefilat Geshem*. Each stanza in *Tefilat Tal* also ends with the word *tal*. Each line in *Tefilat Geshem* ends with the word *mayim* (water). The significance of the repetition of these two key words in *Tefilat Geshem* will be discussed later in this chapter. The word "land" is repeated three times in the first three stanzas of *Tefilat Tal*. Terms for "blessing" occur four times in the six stanzas of the prayer. References to blood and fire recur three times in *Tefilat Geshem*.

Repetition provides the sense of rhythm despite the lack of meter. Additionally, it ties the prayers together thematically.

While both prayers for precipitation draw heavily upon biblical passages, the author selects them with each poem's theme in mind. *Tefilat Geshem* focuses each stanza on different biblical character: stanza one, Abraham; two, Isaac; three, Jacob; four, Moses; five, Aaron; and six, the twelve tribes of Israel. The *payyetan* uses biblical stories and rabbinic material for these biblical figures. *Tefilat Tal* is much more naturalistic, though it too draws on biblical passages to enhance the poetic imagery. As Heinemann and Petuchowski point out, "Each stanza consists of four lines. The first two lines deal with hoped-for agricultural bounties, and take 'dew' in a literal sense. The last two lines construe the word in a metaphorical sense, as a symbol of national restoration and resurrection."[7] While I found this to be true most of the time, there were instances in which the redemptive theme was brought out in the first two lines of a stanza by alluding to biblical verses calling for redemption of the Land and People Israel. For example, in the second stanza the author alludes to Isaiah 4:2 in which the prophet looks to a Messianic age which, "In that day the radiance of the Lord will lend beauty and glory, bestow fruit of the land with majesty and splendor to the survivors of Israel." Also in the fifth stanza, the second line calls on God to "renew our days". Thus, the Biblical verses drawn upon give a deeper nuance to the entire stanza as a call for both earthly bounty and spiritual resurrection.

While a major feature of the Kalliri style is to utilize rabbinic sources, this is evidenced much more in *Tefilat Geshem* than in *Tefilat Tal*. In the first three stanzas of *Tefilat Geshem*, the author draws upon numerous rabbinic aggadic and halachic

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[7] *Literature of the Synagogue*, p. 238.

midrashim. The first stanza alone alludes to two famous midrashim with the words "Remember Abraham... You saved him from fire and water." The fire refers to the midrash in which Nimrod threw Abraham into a furnace for not bowing down to idols.[8] The water refers to the story in *Midrash Tanhuma* in which Satan created a river to drown Isaac and Abraham on their way to Mount Moriah. When Abraham calls out to God to spare their lives so that they might proclaim the Unity of God's name to all the peoples of the world, God dries up the river. The Prayer for Rain further alludes to aggadot in BT Hagigah 12a and Mishnah Yoma 1:1.

However, the Prayer for Dew draws almost exclusively upon Biblical sources. Only two rabbinic sources inform this prayer as a whole. Most significantly the author alludes regularly to Mishnah Ma'aser Sheni 5:13:

> *Look down from heaven*—we have done what You have decreed concerning us: now do what You have promised to us; *Look down from Your holy habitation from heaven and bless Your people Israel*—with sons and daughters; *and the ground which You have given us*—with dew and wine and with young cattle; as *You swore unto our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey*—that You may give flavor to the fruits.

Additionally, the payyetan alludes to the aggadah of Mishnah Sotah 9:12 in which the sages lament the fact that since the destruction of the Temple, "there has been no day without its curse; and the dew has not fallen in blessing and the fruits have lost their savor." R. Jose adds that the fruits have also lost their fatness. Pervading the poems is the theme of restoring the days before the destruction of the Temple and enjoying the fruits of the Land again. Yet, even to elaborate on this rabbinic theme, the poet uses biblical verses much more than rabbinic passages.

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[8] This story occurs in BT Pesachim 118a and *Bereishit Rabba* 38.

Each stanza in *Tefilat Geshem* is a variation on the theme of remembering our ancestors so that for their sake, God will bring moisture to the Land. This concept comes from BT Ta'anit 3:2: "Sometimes the rain falls on account of the merits of a single person or a single blade of grass." Thematically, this refrain fits naturally in with the *Avot* where worshippers appeal to God, אל עליון ... וזכר חסדי אבות, "Blessed are You... You are a sublime God who remembers the good deeds of our ancestors." Yet, the theme fits well in the *gevurot* as well because *Tefilat Geshem* seeks to remind God of the ancestors' deeds in relation to water specifically, adducing God's protection of them as a model for similarly saving the present generation. The first stanza details Abraham's good deeds: following God, doing good deeds and studying Torah[9]. In the next stanza, Isaac is lauded for pouring his heart out in prayer (like water) and digging wells (of water). Stanza four details Jacob's deeds: Jacob crossed the Jordan, rolled away the stone from the well and wrestled with an angel (composed of fire and water). Interestingly, in stanza four Moses is not only commended for letting the sheep drink, but for striking the rock to enable to Israelites to drink—a deed that is condemned in the Bible and is interpreted by the Rabbis as one of the reasons why Moses could not enter the Land of Israel. Stanza five is dedicated to expounding upon Aaron's accomplishment of his priestly duties—specifically his ritual purification through water. Finally, the author calls on God to remember all twelve tribes of Israel whose ancestors' blood spilt like water. The poem closes with a stanza in which God's protection is highlighted in opposition to the paucity of good deeds the twelve tribes of Israel performed. God caused the Sea to split and sweetened the waters of Marah. Not one deed by the twelve tribes is noted. The

[9] In *Literature of the Synagogue*, Heinemann and Petuchowski explain that the line, "Thou didst care for him when he sowed by all streams of water" taken from Isaiah 32:20 has been interpreted in BT Baba Kamma 17a. "Sowing" means "Doing charitable deeds" and "water" is "Torah." p. 232.

poem closes with a direct appeal to God to reward the people Israel, despite not having been as devoted to doing good deeds as their ancestors. This is the only stanza in which there is a direct appeal to God to save the present people Israel within the stanza. In the previous stanzas, the appeal does not occur until the congregational response after the stanza itself. However, the fourth line of stanza six concludes: "Turn to us, for our life is encircled by foes like water."

The stanzas in *Tefilat Geshem* vary, yet are connected by key words and the general theme of remembering our Biblical ancestors. The stanzas follow in a logical order: they begin with the three patriarchs followed by Moses and Aaron and conclude with the twelve tribes. The stanzas in *Tefilat Tal* are more interrelated. As Heinemann and Petuchowski point out, the stanzas themselves follow the general structure in which the first two lines deal with the natural phenomenon of dew while the last two deal with the spiritual connotation of dew: redemption.[10] I do not believe that the tone or logic would be disturbed by rearranging the stanzas in the same way that changing the order of the stanzas would disturb *Tefilat Geshem.* However, it would destroy the acrostic so carefully crafted by the author of *Tefilat Tal.*

The Prayer for Dew is acutely focused on the land—more so than the Prayer for Rain. While *Tefilat Tal* highlights the natural phenomena itself, the six stanzas of *Tefilat Geshem* does not mention rain once. Instead, it plays on the symbol of water in general. This has the effect of taking the listener into the metaphorical realm without grounding him or her in the imagery of the land. While *Tefilat Tal*'s metaphors and similes always arise from the landscapes that the poet describes, the water imagery in *Tefilat Geshem* at times is completely divorced from its occurrence in nature. For example, while every

[10] Ibid., p. 238.

stanza in *Tefilat Tal* is filled with references to landscapes, neither stanza two nor five in *Tefilat Geshem* mention anything from nature. *Tefilat Geshem* is more of a metaphorical meditation on the significance of water in the lives of our Biblical ancestors.

This prayer is as much about our forefathers as symbols as it is about the symbolism of water. Water merely plays the role of tying the verses together and serving God from the Land of his father to the Land that God showed him. Isaac is the first willing martyr of our people whose model of heart-felt worship is glorified by the rabbis and the payyetan. Jacob is the quintessential wanderer and wrestler. Moses is an anomaly in this poem. As the first line in stanza four points out, his whole identity is bound up in the natural phenomena of waters of the Nile. Yet, in the rest of the stanzas, water is just a prop that shows him as the ultimate symbol by which he is known: leader of the Israelites. Aaron is our Biblical symbol of the priesthood. The twelve tribes symbolize God's chosen people—the Jews.

However, water in the form of dew is no mere prop in *Tefilat Tal*—it is the main focus of the poem. While the word "dew" merely opens and closes each stanza, it is the pervasive image in each stanza. Each stanza reinforces the point that dew is the natural force that will yield crops and the spiritual force that will restore Jerusalem.

Tefilat Geshem plays on the concept of *zechut*. After each stanza in which the Biblical ancestors' good deeds are detailed, the congregation calls on God to reward the present generation on account of the ancestors' merit. This is not the case in *Tefilat Tal*. In this piyyut, the payyetan asks God to restore Jerusalem and to reward the people Israel without mentioning anything about merit—neither their ancestors nor their own.

While *Tefilat Tal* draws on like-images, *Tefilat Geshem* contains contrasting images within its lines. Three times the opposing elements of fire and water are paired in the Prayer for Rain. In the first stanza, the payyetan refers to two midrashim, one in which Abraham is saved from Nimrod's fiery furnace, the other in which he is saved from Satan's river. In the third stanza, these opposing images are used in consecutive lines. The angel that Jacob wrestles with is said to consist of fire and water. Heinemann and Petuchowski note that according to BT Hagigah 12a, heaven consists of fire and water and therefore an angel from that realm would consist of the same elements.[11] The poet closes the stanza by saying that God promised to be with Jacob through fire and water—i.e. through everything. Why would the author use these contrasting images? Is it to show that God's omniscience of God? God 's might is ubiquitous and as such, the payyetan calls on God to show His might in all aspects of the Jews' lives. Yet, it is strange that in this prayer for water, fire is mentioned at all. Most of the images would be just as strong without the mention of fire. Maybe the author wants to equate the force of water with fire. Often people think of water as refreshing and life giving. Yet, as the payyetan declares in the introduction to the piyyut: "Thou hast named water as a symbol of thy might." Hence, the payyetan demonstrates the power and potential potency of water by matching it with fire.

Whereas the significance of dew in *Tefilat Tal* is a symbol of life and blessing throughout the poem, the water in *Tefilat Geshem* is multi-symbolic. Not only is water associated with Torah, an earthly element in contrast to fire, and a purifying agent an unstable element, but sometimes it even has negative connotations. In the second and last stanzas of the latter poem, the author uses the image of blood spilling like water. In this

[11] *Literature of the Synagogue*, p. 234

way, water is associated with danger and martyrdom. In the fifth stanza, water (and the people Israel) is associated with turbulence. In the last line of the poem, enemies of the Jews encircle them like water. Because of these negative connotations, it is clear that the word "water" is used as a poetic device and not as the object for which the congregation prays.

All of this contributes to two very different moods in these two poems. *Tefilat Tal* is light and inspiring. The images used are celestial. The congregation imagines a successful future filled with a bountiful harvest and the ultimate redemption of Jerusalem. However, *Tefilat* Geshem is much heavier, more brooding. It is more dramatic with its constant repetitions and narrative power. The congregation remembers its past rather than looks to its future. It remembers not only happy experiences, but martyrdom. The poet calls attention to their dangerous present as well.

It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for the payyetan to create such different moods in these two poems. Obviously, in his time, the entire piyyutim were recited during these two times of year and not just the six stanzas that are liturgized today. However, these two units occur in parallel locations in the longer piyyutim and therefore may be compared. One reason for this contrast may be due to the different in moods of these different times of year, particularly in Israel. The end of Sukkot ushered in the rainy season replete with cloudy and wet days. While this is good for the land, it creates a much darker mood for the people themselves. It may be unpleasant to focus on the present uncomfortable weather and it is harder to dream of a bright tomorrow in those dark, wet days. In contrast to this, Pesach marks the beginning of spring. The days are

filled with sun and new greenery. The landscapes seem to be a symbol of rebirth and redemption. Hence, this type of symbolism is illustrated in *Tefilat Tal.*

It is not just the agricultural calendar that has influenced the moods of the piyyutim, but the Jewish calendar as well. *Tefilat Tal* is recited on the first day of Pesach during the Musaf Service. Therefore, it reflects the newness of the holiday. The poem draws upon the general symbolism of the holiday: redemption and rebirth. At the seder the night before, they would have heard the words from the Haggadah:

> In every generation, each person should feel as though she or he were redeemed from Egypt as it is said, "You shall tell your children on that day saying, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free out of Egypt.' For the Holy One redeemed not only our ancestors; He redeemed us with him.[12]

They would have experienced the tastes of redemption: the *karpas*, the salt water that reminds them both of the pain they escaped and the Sea they crossed in to freedom and the sweet *charoset.*

Tefilat Geshem, on the other hand, is recited at the end of Sukkot, on Shemini Atzeret. Not only had the congregation spent a week dwelling vulnerably in their sukkas, but they had just participated in the rites of *Hoshana Rabba* the day before. This is a day, as the name implies, devoted to prayers for salvation. As Eliyahu Kitov notes in *The Book of Our Heritage*:

> Hoshana Rabbah marks the day when the judgment, which begins on Rosh Hashanah, is sealed...During the Festival of Sukko[t], the entire world is judged concerning water... The seventh day of the Festival, *Hoshana Rabbah*, is the day that this judgment is sealed. Because human life depends on water and all depends on the final decision, *Hoshana Rabbah* is invested with a certain

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[12] Strassfeld, Michael. *The Jewish Holidays: A Guide and Commentary*, p. 7.

similarity to Yom Kippur and is therefore maked by profuse prayer and repentance.[13]

Hence, Shemini Atzeret immediately follows this grave tradition. The payyetan is aware of the general mood of the congregation and creates a section of the piyyut to reflect this gravity.

Pesach and Sukkot (the holiday that Shemini Atzeret immediately follows) both have a Bibilical literary tradition that accompanies the holiday. *Shir Hashirim* accompanies Pesach while *Kohelet* accompanies Sukkot. The author of the piyyutim seems to draw on these traditions as well. *Shir Hashirim* is an intimate love poem that has been interpreted as a love poem about God and the people Israel. *Kohelet* on the other hand is about humanity's struggle to make sense in the world over which God reigns, but in which God is not necessarily felt immanently.

The references to *Shir Hashirim* in our section of *Tefilat Tal* are pervasive. Most apparent is the way in which God is referred to intimately. In the fifth stanza, God is called on directly by the affectionate term דוד, Beloved One. This is a term taken directly from *Shir Hashirim*. The idea that God can be referred to so intimately is a concept that is taken from *Shir Hashirim* as well. Additionally, other terms and concepts allude to *Shir Hashirm*. Both the piyyut and *Shir Hashirim* are filled with land imagery. In fact, the land is portrayed in such idyllic terms it almost functions as another Garden of Eden. The author of *Shir Hashirim* constantly places the lovers in their gardens. Similarly, the payyetan calls upon God to make the people Israel like a well-watered garden. Other

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[13] Kitov, Eliyahu. *The Book of Our Heritage: The Jewish Year and Its Days of Significance- Volume 1*, p. 191.

terms such as grain and wine and the nectar of the mountains are reminiscent of *Shir Hashirim*.

The references to *Kohelet* in *Tefilat Geshem* are more subtle. The poet seems to draw on the general mood of *Kohelet* rather than the language. As C. Leong Seow explains:

> [K]ohelet and his audience live in a world of rapid political, social, and economic change... They try everything to gain some control... Nothing works, however, and still there looms the large shadow of death, from which no one can escape. [14]

This mood pervades the stanzas of *Tefilat Geshem*. They do not have control of their lives, so they ask for God's help. In fact, the poem concludes with the direct appeal: "Turn to us, for our life is encircled by foes like water." Whereas in *Tefilat Tal*, God is referred to intimately, in *Tefilat Geshem* it seems that the God called upon in *Tefilat Geshem* is more distant. The congregation cannot call upon God for themselves, but only for the sake of their Biblical ancestors. This too is a concept taken from *Kohelet*. In this book, God "does not relate personally to anyone [and] does not enter into a covenant with anyone.[15]" Hence, the congregation must remind God of the covenants with their ancestors and ask God to help them in their own lives for the sake of those intimate relationships.

By comparing *Tefilat Tal* and *Tefilat Geshem*, I better understand these prayers. They are both grounded in tradition and Jewish lore, yet utilize different sources in order to capture the different moods of these parallel times of year. For me, the process of uncovering the nuances in these poems enables me to feel more deeply connected to them

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[14] Seow, C. Leong. "Ecclesiastes," *HarperCollins Bible Commentary*, p. 467
[15] Ibid., p. 468.

and at the same time, freer to be creative with the liturgy. This leads me to my final chapter.

Chapter 4
Tefilat Tal:
Inspiration for Creative Liturgy

After this research, a question still remains: What do we, as Reform Jews, do with this *piyyut* today? One might respond that we should keep this ancient, barely intelligible poem out of our contemporary worship. Many rabbis in the emerging Reform Jewish Movement responded this way. Early reformers complained that these poems in archaic Hebrew detracted from the decorum of the service. They preferred the high church of German Protestantism to the davening style of the *shtetl shul*. Hence, the long, archaic Hebrew poem was shunned. Rabbi Joseph Von Maier typified the response of his colleagues in his vehement rejection of the use of any *piyyutim* in the service. Like Talmudic passages in the service, he claimed that these poems:

> have become antiquated on their own accord... [T]he same applies to... all of the *piyyutim*, to the extent to which the synagogue service for the three festivals... had still retained them. Science has given its verdict on those additions. They have, in part, artistic and, in part, scientific or historical value; but none as far as devotion and edification are concerned. At a time when the living Word of God had disappeared from the synagogue, they were, to a certain extent, a substitute for a sermon. But, since, to the joy and refreshment of every truly pious spirit, the sermon has returned to the House of God, the *piyyutim* have completely lost any value. Lest they continue to interfere with dignified recitation of prayers, and disturb devotion, their total removal has become a holy duty.[1]

Here, Von Maier draws on the theory (explained in Chapter 1) that the only reason that *piyyutim* were incorporated into the liturgy was because of the Justinian decree against *deuterosis*, a term often interpreted as exegesis of midrashic and biblical passages. Thus, *piyyutim* functioned in a pedagogic role. However, Von Maier argued, no reason remained to retain these poems in the service once the sermon reemerged as a vital part of

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[1] See Jakob J. Petuchowski, *Prayerbook Reform in Europe: The Liturgy of European Liberal and Reform Judaism*, p. 161. On pages 160-162, he translates excerpts from the preface to Joseph Von Maier's Stuttgart prayerbook, *Israelitische Gebetordnung* published in 1861. This prayerbook formed the basis of the Munich prayerbook published in 1876.

the service. Instead, he thought that the *piyyutim* should be relegated to history books about ancient Jewish liturgy.

Von Maier was not alone in his disdain of these ancient liturgical poems. However, while he advocated for the elimination of all *piyyutim* from the service—including *Tefilat Tal*— other rabbis sought to retain concepts from the *piyyut* if not the *piyyut* itself. Therefore, some Reform rabbis recited prayers for dew in the vernacular on the first day of Passover, replacing the traditional *Tefilat Tal.* For example, the rabbi of Mayence led prayers for dew and rain in German reciting the rest of the service in Hebrew.[2] Other Reform rabbis wrote new versions of the *piyyut*. West London Synagogue for British Jews' founding minister, David Woolf Marks, "subjoined thereto a virtuoso amphibious *berakhah* to take the place of the prayer for *tal* (Dew) and *geshem* (Rain)."[3]

However, around this time, a lone voice emerged among the reformers, arguing for the retention of the *piyyutim* in their original form. In 1869, Gustav Gottheil appealed to his colleagues at the Israelite Synod in Leipzig:

> I fully recognize the rights of the present to change the prayer, but I believe that the religious consciousness of other times also has the right to find expression in our prayers. I do not believe that our time, with its cold, rational direction, is especially suitable to create warm, heart-stirring prayers. And for these I would rather go back to the warmer religious sentiment of antiquity, and let it supply us with such prayers. Therefore, I must speak out against the generally condemnatory judgment against *piyutim.*

I concur that we should find ways to continue to incorporate *piyyutim* in our liturgy today, but for an entirely different reason. While Gottheil lived in a particularly

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[2] Ibid., p. 137.
[3] Friedland, Eric L. *Were Our Mouths Filled With Song: Studies in Liberal Jewish Liturgy*, p. 95.

"cold" and "rational" time, today we live in a world pervaded by spirituality. According to the internet search engine Google there are 5,810,000 websites devoted in some way to spirituality. Most major bookstores provide entire sections to books on spirituality—strategically placed near the Religion Section, yet far enough away not to offend the unaffiliated reader.[4] Spiritual retreat centers—ashrams, healing retreats, New Age health spas, accommodations at monasteries—populate nearly every state in the nation.[5]

The number of spiritual seekers seems to be growing exponentially, and among this population, Jews figure prominently. Sidney Schwarz, a rabbi and author seeking ways to spiritually revitalize synagogues, finds that thousands of Jews attend these retreat centers. He relates that rabbis often offer Shabbat services there—and they are well attended! Schwarz concludes that, "[t]he fact that these 'dropouts' come to such Jewish services and are often deeply moved by them suggests that there exists a deep, though latent, yearning for spiritual practice grounded in Jewish tradition."[6] The emergence of Jewish retreat centers such as *Eilat Chayim*, Kabbalah centers and Jewish yoga offers further evidence to his conclusion.

Inspired Jewish leaders now look to invigorate synagogues with this type of spiritual energy. Rabbi Schwarz founded a congregation for this goal. Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman created Synagogue 2000 in an attempt to help existing congregations envision a

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[4] In the Barnes and Noble on 7th Avenue in Park Slope, Brooklyn they promoted three distinct sections: "New Age and Spirituality," "Religion" (includes sub-sections for Islam, Christianity and Eastern Religions) and "Judaica." They were all in the same general vicinity, but were separated by other sections on various subjects. The bookstore featured the "New Age and Spirituality" section most prominently—against the back wall, directly behind the escalator in an area with all books of fiction, poetry, religion and science. Not only did they use the space in this section for bookshelves, but they placed couches and plush chairs there and they offer earphone hook-ups where patrons can listen to New Age music CDs. When I was there some months ago customers filled this area reading, listening and perusing while many other sections—even ones with chairs and couches as well—remained empty.

[5] According to Spiritsite.com's list of retreat centers.

[6] Schwarz, Sidney. *Finding a Spiritual Home: How a New Generation of Jews Can Transform the American Synagogue*, p. 23.

new paradigm for spiritually invigorated synagogues. Numerous and varied methods of inspiring congregants' souls exist. However, as a poet and rabbinical student one way that I would like to do this is to incorporating more poetry into our liturgy—both ancient and contemporary.

Therefore, inspired by the beauty in the ancient *piyyut* of *Tefilat Tal*, I am attempting to find meaningful ways to incorporate this beauty into Reform liturgy during the Passover season. Toward this effort, I have written a concise translation of the six liturgical stanzas of the *piyyut* with footnotes that a congregant can read in order to understand the context and allusions in the poem. I also wrote a poetic translation to enable a person to get a taste of the Hebrew poetic style of the *piyyut*. Finally, I have written my own kavanah on Kallir's *Tefilat Tal*. Before offering ways in which these pieces of writing may find their way into meaningful rituals, I will explain the process of this project.

As I wrote in the introduction, I studied for a semester with linguist Dr. Joel Hoffman. With him, I poured over Kallir's *piyyut* attempting to trace each allusion in the poem and answer questions about the acrostics and the grammar. Thus, by the end of the semester I had created an extensive annotated translation.

Additionally, I wrote a poetic translation of the liturgical six stanzas during the semester. I wanted to accurately represent the content of the poem as well as offer the non-Hebrew reader a flavor of the Hebrew *piyyut*. However, many of the poetic devices would not appeal to the aesthetic sensibilities of today's reader. For example, contemporary poets no longer use acrostics to impress their leaders. Instead, this ancient

poetic form has been relegated to the elementary school classroom.[7] Therefore, Dr. Hoffman and I studied the poetic devices Kallir used and tried to find relevant ways to represent the poem. Thus, my poetic translation includes biblical and rabbinic allusions, stanzas with rhyming couplets, meter, and repetition of the word "dew" in the opening line of every stanza. My poetic translation is included at the end of this chapter.

However, consistently metered and rhymed poetry strikes most contemporary readers as outdated. Many of today's finest poets use powerful imagery, alliteration, rhyme within lines rather than at the ends of lines, narrative voice and slant rhyme (if rhyme is used at all) to capture their reader's attention. Therefore, I decided that this *piyyut* and its poetic translation needed a *kavanah* as well. This meditative reading needed to be short, focused on themes in the *piyyut* itself, full of powerful imagery and prayerful in a way that could speak to today's worshipper. The task daunted me and I knew that this part of the project required as much or more research than the rest.

I began by looking in the *siddurim* of the liberal movements in the United States. Following in the tradition of innovators in the early Reform Movement, Eugene Kohn/ Joseph Marcus wrote their own version of *Tefilat Tal* for the 1958 Reconstructionist *Festival Prayer Book.*[8] Like Kallir's *piyyut*, they concluded each stanza with the word *tal*, dew. Interestingly, whereas each stanza in Kallir's version begins with a literal call on God to bring dew to the Earth followed by an appeal for the metaphorical blessing of

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[7] However, the compilers of *Kol Haneshamah*, the current Reconstructionist Prayerbook, use this device successfully in their translation of Sephardic poem of *Tefilat Tal*. Yet, instead of using the English alphabet, they use transliteration of the Hebrew the letters according to the aleph-bet. For example, the acrostic in Hebrew uses the words "דיצה, הוד, ועד טוב" (ditzah, hod, va'ad tov) represented by the acrostic in English: Dancing exultation, Heavenly splendor, and Wise assembly. Therefore, in order to understand the acrostic, the reader must have a familiarity with both Hebrew and English. While this may have worked well in the Reconstructionist Prayerbook, I wanted to write a poetic translation that an English reader could comprehend and use literary devices that that reader could readily understand.

[8] *Festival Prayerbook*, pp.458-466.

dew; the Kohn/Marcus first three stanzas deal with the literal phenomenon of dew followed by six stanzas that use dew as a metaphor. Their poem begins:

> Gone winter's rain,
> Sun shines again,
> Fields green with grain
> Wait for dew.

This opening draws on the imagery in Kallir's *Tefilat Tal* with its reference to greenery and grain. Even the fourth stanza that begins the metaphorical stage of the poem utilizes concepts from Kallir's original:

> So we take as a token
> Of God's love unspoken,
> Of His promise unbroken—
> The dew.

Yet, from this point on, the new prayer for dew deviates from the original *piyyut*. Instead of asking God for the redemption of His people Israel and the restoration of the Temple, Kohn and Marcus write about personal salvation. They do not look toward a Messianic Age, but instead toward a type of inner-renewal in this life time:

> Devoutly we pray
> That our hearts ever may
> Keep fresh, bright and gay
> As the dew
>
> When we've weathered the chill
> Of adversity, fill
> Our hearts with goodwill
> As with dew...
>
> So help us to face
> Life afresh with Thy grace,
> Bless the whole human race
> With love's dew.

Their poem ends with the traditional conclusion of the Prayer for Dew:

> For Thou, O Lord our God willest

That the wind blow and the dew descend
For a blessing not for a curse, Amen.
For life and not for death, Amen.
For abundance and not for dearth. Amen.

In 1994, The Reconstructionist Press published a new Reconctructionist Prayerbook, *Kol Haneshamah*. Instead of the Kohl/Marcus poem, the compilers of the *siddur* uncovered Sephardic versions of Tefilat Tal and Tefilat Geshem. Each line contains only four words—the first and last words are the same in each line. The two middle words are variations on the same word. For example, the first and second lines read:

בטללי ברכה תברך אדמה
בטללי אורה תאיר אדמה

The translation reads:

With dewdrops of Ancient light, illuminate the earth.
With dewdrops of Blessing divine, please bless the earth.

While the language is simple, it inspires. Like *The Festival Prayerbook*, the version included in *Kol Haneshamah* ends with the traditional conclusion of the Prayer for Dew. However, the compilers of *Kol Haneshamah* replace any reference to "the Lord" with creative descriptions of God. Therefore, while the first two lines in Kohl and Marcus' version read:

For Thou, O Lord our God willest
That the wind blow and the dew descend

the version in *Kol Haneshamah* reads:

For you are THE ABUNDANT ONE, our God, who makes the wind blow and brings down the dew.

This Sephardic prayer for dew appeared in *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook*, the standard American Reform siddur 19 years earlier. In fact, the compilers of this prayerbook incorporated several readings for the first day of Pesach that the prayer leader could incorporate as he or she chose. However, while *Kol Haneshamah*'s translation attempted to represent the poetic devices in the poem, the translation in *Gates of Prayer* disregarded them entirely. Thus, the English loses the poetic force of the Hebrew. Instead, we are left with a short communal reading:

Let sunlight and blessing
Come to earth
With the coming of spring.
Let there descend with the dew
Joy and gladness.
And with the dew
Let harvest and song descend,
Goodness and life,
Sustenance and help. Amen[9]

Interestingly, while *Tefilat Tal* is traditionally incorporated into the *musaf* service on the first day of *Pesach*, the Reform prayerbook offers readings for dew at the opening of the morning service on this day. The compilers of this *siddur* carefully excised the

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[9] *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook*, ed. by Chaim Stern, p. 495. While this version in the Reform Prayerbook does not attempt to represent the structure of the Hebrew original, Rabbi Marty Lawson of Temple Emanu-El in San Diego called my attention to a newer Reform translation of this prayer that appears in *The Five Scrolls : Hebrew Texts, English Translations, Introductions, and New Liturgies* published by the CCAR Press in 1984. This text on page 323 reads:

> Our God, and God of our ancestors:
> Bring the dew of light to shine on the earth,
> Bring the dew of benediction to bless the earth,
> Bring the dew of rejoicing to gladden the earth,
> Bring the dew of happiness to enrich the earth,
> Bring the dew of song to make the earth sprout with song,
> Bring the dew of life to vitalize the earth,
> Bring the dew of goodness that makes the earth beneficent,
> Bring the dew of deliverance that redeems the earth,
> Bring the dew of sustenance to sustain the earth!

It includes the repetition in the beginning and end of the lines, though it does not attempt to represent the acrostic. Rabbi Lawson uses this text during the *shacharit* service on the first day of Pesach.

shacharit service of the *musaf* service not only because it lengthened the service but because, in the opinion of these redactors, its emphasis on the reinstitution of the sacrificial system was antiquated. Therefore, they creatively inserted these readings as *kavanot* for the Passover morning service. They provided three readings on Passover themes from which the service leader could choose. The third reading interests me the most. Ingeniously, the compilers, aware of both the Ashkenazi tradition of reading Kallir's *piyyut* and the Sephardic tradition, combined variations on both poems into one reading. Thus, the third reading begins with a six stanza poem that draws on the imagery and some of the sources for Kallir's *Tefilat Tal.* For example it opens with a quotation from Song of Songs 2:11:

> "For now winter is past,
> the rains are over and gone.
> The flowers appear on the earth,
> The time of singing has come.
> The song of the dove
> Will be heard in our land."

It closes with a communal reading influenced by the pervasive theme in Kallir's *Tefilat Tal*—redemption:

> *Breathe new life into us,*
> *O Lord of life!*
> *Restore to its ancient glory*
> *The land of Your heritage.*
> *Let redemption appear at last,*
> *O Source of life and its renewal.*

Additionally, *Gates of Prayer* provides an inserted a prayer for precipitation in the Amidah on the first morning of *Pesach* and for what they call *Atzeret-Simchat Torah*. [10] Interestingly, they insert petition in the end of the *gevurot* instead of after its first line. The editors of the prayer book probably placed it here so as not to interrupt the flow of the *gevurot*. The insertion draws on themes from *Tefilat Tal* and *Tefilat Geshem*:

> O Source of life and blessing, at this season, from of old, our people in the land of Israel have prayed for rain and dew, for sustenance and health. We, too, now call upon You: Grant that all Your children may enjoy the fruits of the earth in abundance, and that none may ever suffer hunger. May rain and dew descend in season.
>
> O Fountain of light and truth, Your teaching is like rain that falls on the parched soil; Your word is like dew settling upon the flower; Your Torah bears fruits of righteousness.
>
> *So it has been said: "I will pour water upon the thirsty land and streams upon the dry ground; I will pour My spirit upon Your children and My blessing on Your descendants."* [11]

As with the Reconstructionist and traditional prayerbooks, this insertion ends with the three line conclusion. The Hebrew text of this conclusion remains the same in its totality; however, the compilers exchanged the final two lines. Whereas the original text concludes: "*l'chaim v'lo l'mavet* (for life and not for death)*/ l'shova v'lo l'razon* (for plenty and not for famine)," the Reform text ends: "*l'shova v'lo l'razon/ l'chaim v'lo l'mavet.*" The compilers may have reasoned that contemporary readers would not relate to the agricultural reference as much as the appeal for life. Therefore, they concluded the

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[10] This clumsy name for a holiday arose because traditionally there are eight days of Sukkot. The last day is a holiday called Shemini Atzeret, meaning the concluding eighth day. However, Reform Jews celebrate only seven days of Sukkot. Therefore, the last day is not Shemini Atzeret but its title would be more accurately Shevi'i Atzeret. Additionally, the day after the last day of Sukkot is a holiday called Simchat Torah. Thus, the Reform tradition encounters a challenge—how to include a reading for a holiday that is no longer celebrated that occurs on a day when a different holiday is celebrated. They solved this challenge by calling this day (at least in this service in the prayerbook) "Atzeret-Simchat Torah." This prayer can be found in *Gates of Prayer* on pages 516-517.

[11] Isaiah 44:3

poem with the more resonating line. Similarly, they creatively translated these lines. The literal translation reads:

> For blessing and not for curse
> For life and not for death
> For plenty and not for famine

The interpreters of this prayer transform these lines in *Gates of Prayer* into:

> Let blessings abound and hurts be healed.
> Let there be life and not destruction.
> Let us know plenty and escape famine.

Among the prayerbooks of the liberal Jewish movements in the United States, the standard prayerbook for the conservative movement—*Siddur Sim Shalom*—most closely resembles the traditional Ashkenazi rite of reading Kallir's *Tefilat Tal*. The poetic translation of the Kallir's *piyyut* by Israel Zangwill fairly accurately portrays the Hebrew text. He structures the stanzas with the rhyme-scheme *abab*. In the second stanza, however, the rhyme-scheme falters by using "wait" and "desolate" as rhyming pairs. In general, I enjoyed the use of rhyme through alternating lines. I now notice that this rhyming pattern flows better than rhyming couplets.

Looking for further inspiration after collecting and assessing poems and readings for dew in liberal prayerbooks, I searched for other ancient Jewish prayers for dew. I found a small collection of them in a book called *Passover: Its History and Traditions*. In it, Theodor Herzl Gaster collected and loosely translated four such poems from Sephardic traditions.[12] Two of these poems particularly inspired me. The first is a fragment of a poem by Solomon Ibn Gabirol, a 9th century Spanish poet whose *piyyutim* pervade traditional Jewish liturgy.

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[12] Gaster , pp. 84-86.

Seared, O Lord, is Thy beloved's face;
On her dear face the sun of Egypt burns.
Let then Thy dewdrops fall upon her face,
On her dear face which unto Thee she turns.

Most gentle Lord, when men cry bitterly,
Only from Thee comes forth their answer true;
Shield of them who put their trust in Thee,
Now answer her with Thy refreshing dew!

For me, this poem's power lies in its direct appeal to God. In Kallir's *Tefilat Tal*, he only called on God directly in one line in the poem. However, ibn Gabirol's poem feels more urgent. It is also much more personal than *Tefilat Tal*. While Kalir's focus is on the symbolism of the land, ibn Gabirol focuses on a human being to represent the people's yearning for dew.

The second poem fragment left me uninspired with its complete preoccupation with the resurrection of the dead. However, the following Sephardic hymn moved me with its excited energy—especially its opening stanzas:

Welcome, O dewfall;
Rainfall, adieu!
Great in salvation,
God sends the dew!

My songs will I sing,
My rhymes will I rhyme;
To God my Salvation
Rise they sublime!

Now shall my verses
Distil as the dew.
Great in salvation,
God sends the dew.

I would like to capture this momentum in my own *kavanah*. I think that the short lines and the personal aspect of the poet's own exultation help achieve this energy.

After compiling a collection of prayers for dew from the Jewish tradition, I collected poems about dew and water in nature as well as prayers for dew from many religious traditions. I found many meaningful prayers whose simple structure and brevity showed me how impacting simplicity can be. The Hawaiin prayer for the earth illustrates this point:

> May the earth continue to live
> May the heavens above continue to live
> May the rains continue to dampen the land
> May the wet forests continue to grow
> Then the flowers shall bloom
> And we people shall live again.[13]

I also found meditations with prayer formulas similar to some of our traditional prayers. These resonated with me as well. A portion of one such meditation from the North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology particular stood out to me:

> We pour out our thanks to You, our God,
> for sun and moon and stars,
> for rain and dew and winds,
> for winter cold and summer heat.
>
> How many and wonderful are Your works, our God!
> In wisdom you have made them all![14]

After spending days collecting inspirational nature poems and prayers from a variety of sources, I decided that it was time to discover if these poems and the concepts would inspire anyone else. Therefore, I compiled this survey:

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[13] *Earth Prayers from Around the World: 365 Prayers, Poems and Invocations for Honoring the Earth*, ed. by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, p. 178.
[14] Ibid., p. 228.

Dew in Poetry Survey for *Tefilat Tal* Thesis

Great Neck, New York, January 9, 2004

1. List any nature images that you associate with rebirth or renewal

2. Would you like the concept of renewal to be incorporated into Jewish rituals?

2a. How?

3. When you think about personal redemption, what comes up?

4. Do you like the use of nature imagery in Jewish liturgy? Why or why not?

5. T/F I prefer simple readings to complex liturgical pieces

6. T/F I like simple readings to introduce complex liturgical pieces

7. I like footnotes in the prayer book that explain aspects of the prayer?

8. Do you prefer
   a. listening to elaborate choral pieces
   b. congregational singing
   c. a style of liturgical music that incorporates both performance pieces by the cantor and congregational singing

8a. Why?

9. List any associations you have with dew

10. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the highest, write down how much you resonate with the following readings:

    a. Spring rain/ Everything just grows/ more beautiful

    b. This dewdrop world—it may be a dew drop—and yet- and yet-

    c. Were it sweet, it would be my dew, God's dew.

    d. [A] leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars…
    And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,
    And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery…
    And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.
    (Walt Whitman)

Dew in Poetry Survey for *Tefilat Tal* Thesis
Page 2

e. [I]n a moment of peace
I give thanks
to the source of all peace

as I set forth
into the day
the birds sing
with new voices
and I listen
with new ears
and give thanks...

my feet touch the grass
still we with dew
and I give thanks...

the dewdrops
become jeweled
with the mornings' sun-fire
and I give thanks

you can see forever
when the vision is clear
in this moment
each moment
I give thanks
(Harriet Kofalk)

f. May the earth continue to live
May the heavens above continue to live
May the rains continue to dampen the land
May the wet forests continue to grow
Then the flowers shall bloom
And we people shall live again.
(Hawaiian Prayer)

g. Waters, you are the ones who bring us the life force.
Help us to find nourishment so that we may look upon great joy...

Waters, yield your cure as an armor for my body, so that I may
see the sun for a long time.
(Hindu Prayer)

Dew in Poetry Survey for *Tefilat Tal* Thesis
Page 3

h. i thank You God for most this amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any—lifted from the no
of all nothing—human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)
(E.E. Cummings)

i. We pour out our thanks to You, our God,
for sun and moon and stars,
for rain and dew and winds,
for winter cold and summer heat.

We pour forth our praise to You
for mountains and hills,
for springs and valleys,
for rivers and seas.

We praise You, O Lord,
for plants growing in earth and water,
for life inhabiting lakes and seas,
for life creeping in soils and land,
for life flying above earth and sea,
for beasts dwelling in woods and fields.

How many and wonderful are Your works, our God!
In wisdom you have made them all!
(North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology)

j. Look down from your holy habitation from heaven and bless your people
Israel… and the ground which You have given us—with dew and wine

Dew in Poetry Survey for *Tefilat Tal* Thesis
Page 4

and with young cattle; as you swore to our ancestors, a land flowing with milk and honey—that You may give flavor to the fruits.
(from Ma'aser Sheni 5:13)

k. Sweeten the honeyed hills with dew
That we may taste greatness through You.
Though once bound, come to our rescue
So we may raise our voices to praise You.
(from Kallir's *Tefilat Tal*, my poetic translation)

I shared this survey with an Adult Education Class from Temple Beth El in Great Neck, New York. Since October 2001, I have taught a group of 13 women who have been studying together for 12 years now. They began studying together when they were preparing to have a ceremony to commemorate their Bat Mitzvah in adulthood. They enjoyed studying so much that after the ceremony, they began hiring teachers from HUC to teach them in various Jewish topics.

This is my third year teaching them. The class balances somewhere between being a discussion group, a support group and a formal teaching setting. During my first year with them, we discussed contemporary issues in Judaism such as medical ethics, the dissipation of the separation of church and state in the U.S. and Israeli-Palestinian relations. Yet, I noticed that whenever God or prayer was mentioned, many of the women became uncomfortable. It became obvious that a lot of people in the class hold prayer-baggage and felt very conflicted about it. They are deeply spiritual women, yet they could not find a way into Jewish liturgy. Therefore, I thought it would be a good idea to take a few semesters to explore Jewish liturgy.

We started the following year with an article from *Tikkun* magazine called "Prayer Block." The article was written by a man that felt deeply Jewish, but had a hard time with prayer. We discussed the main themes in the article in relation to their own issues. After a few more sessions of getting their prayer baggage (really their God-baggage) out on the table and exploring creative ways of approaching prayer, we began the second unit of the course: Morning Rituals. In this unit, we spent some time with considering various versions of *Modah Ani*. We explored different versions of this prayer and other prayers, poems and meditations that provided them with ways to express their

gratefulness upon waking up. Next, we followed a similar format with *Elohai Neshama*. Finally, we finished the unit by experimenting with the ritual of putting on *tallitot*.

In the third unit we examined Shabbat home rituals. I compiled a packet of home rituals from four books: *The Zmirot Handbook*, published by Tara Publications provides a user-friendly traditional approach to Shabbat rituals; *The New Union Home Prayer Book*, published by the Central Conference of Reform Rabbis provides a Reform approach to Shabbat rituals; *The Book of Blessings*, by Marcia Falk provides a feminist approach to Shabbat rituals; *The Book of Jewish Sacred Practices: CLAL's Guide to Everyday and Holiday Rituals and Blessings*, published by Jewish Lights provides a pluralistic approach to Shabbat rituals. We had sessions on each part of the home ritual: Welcoming in Shabbat, *Shalom Alechem*, Lighting the Candles, Blessing Children and Spouses, etc. We concluded the year with a Shabbat dinner together with our families in one of the women's homes.

This year, we have focused on the liturgy of Kabbalat Shabbat. In a similar fashion to last year's Shabbat Home Ritual Packet, I have compiled a binder of Kabbat Shabbat services from various Jewish movements' prayerbooks. This compilation includes services from a draft of *Mishkan Tefilah*, the upcoming standard Reform prayerbook; *Gates of Prayer*, the standard Reform prayerbook published in 1975; *The Birnbaum Prayer Book for Sabbath and Festivals*, a standard traditional siddur; *Siddur Sim Shalom*, the official prayer book of the Conservative Movement; *Kol Haneshamah*, the Reconstructionist prayer book; and Marcia Falk's *Book of Blessings*, a book of feminist liturgy for daily and Shabbat prayers. We spent a few sessions comparing the differences between the services on a macro-level and now have begun delving into the

creation psalms at the beginning of the service. Soon, we will create *kavanot* as a class based on the themes in these psalms.

I consider them to be the perfect people to critique this project—they are committed yet critical, comfortable to be called "spiritual" but most shun the word "religious." Most of the women in the group hold Masters Degrees from private universities. Their professions range from homemaker to arts administrator, from social work to attorney and dancer. They are highly motivated, intellectually curious and spiritually driven. Additionally, they have filled me personally with inspiration weekly. Therefore, as I look for inspiration for this final part of my project, I look to them.

Their answers to the questions on the survey greatly helped this project. While I will not detail the answers on each individual survey, I will summarize some important points as well as feature some particularly poignant statements. Many women listed water and its various forms (the sea, river, springs, and tides), flowers and trees as images they associated with rebirth and renewal. They wrote that they want to seem more prayers devoted to the concept of renewal. One woman responded, "[I want] prayers for hope—descriptions of how one might change for the better." Another person thought not only of personal renewal, but requested more prayers devoted to *tikkun olam*, acts that would renew our world. She answered, "[I want more prayers that] bring... in ways to make the present world better."

I was surprised by their responses to the third question on the survey: "When you think about personal redemption, what comes up?" I hesitated asking this question in the first place because I know that the word "redemption" holds a lot of baggage for them. From our conversations about the Friday night liturgy, I know that this word along with

"salvation" reminds them of Christianity and connotes concepts that they cannot accept into their personal prayer practice. I assumed then that they would respond negatively to this question, either skipping #3 entirely or expressing their dislike of this concept. Instead, this question yielded poignant responses. One woman wrote that to her, personal redemption meant "not having to suffer health problems." For others, this question evoked feelings of needing to work on personal relationships. One woman's answer typified this response. For her, personal redemption signified "delving into self and knowing and accepting wrong done to others and (to self); trying to make amends—by finding others and apologizing." Yet for many of these women, personal redemption remains bound up in working to redeem the world. Many wrote "doing good in the world" and "repairing the world."

For all the women who participated in this survey, nature imagery played an important role in their prayers. These images allowed for transcendence in the service on many levels: transcendence of space, time and gender. Yet, one explained that it was not only the transcendence of the images, but their ability to evoke in her a sense of being grounded that inspired her most. One person explained, "There is an awe in nature and its images that lend to the awe of religion." Another woman responded, "[I]t is easier for me to accept the concept of God in nature than as an omnipotent being."

Poems A, E, and I resonated most with these women. Poem A's "happy association with God," its focus on "growth" and "optimism" appealed most to the members of the class. They found Poem E's "wonder" and "appreciation" most inspiring. Similarly, they liked Poem I's "appreciation of life and nature." Another person wrote that the words in Poem I felt like "real words" to her. They also ranked

Poems F, G and H high. However many women in the class did not like Poem D, finding it, "too complicated." While many women scored G poorly, one wrote that she did not like the term "holy habitation" in particular. For her, this connoted a hierarchical God whose dwelling place was far from this earth.

After reading these responses, I knew that I would need to write a *kavanah* that somehow touched on the themes of healing, *tikkun olam*, peace that was deeply grounded in uplifting images from nature. Additionally, I knew that its structure needed to be simple and its images would need to portray God's presence as immanent and eternal. Finally, I felt ready to write my own *kavanah*. In order to ensure my proper poetic state of mind, I compiled a document with inspiring Biblical passages about dew, results from the Great Neck survey and poems about dew. I took this document with me through the freezing streets of New York to my favorite tea house where I ordered a pot of *Gyokuro Asahi*, Pearl Dew Tea. Drawing on my favorite phrases from the Bible, attempting to be attuned to the needs of congregants, I wrote this *kavanah*:

Drops of inspiration
Collect on hilltops
Tickling the earth
With wisdom distilled

Nourish my roots
As a I stretch in the sunshine
Blossoming like the lily
I awaken in spring.

Source of Life,
Source of Spring,
Satisfy our souls in drought.
Make us like well-watered gardens,
Springs of abundance
Whose waters never fail.

Source of Spring,

Source of Strength,
Gird our steps
With waterfall force,
So we may empower
Forgotten rivulets.

Source of Peace,
Source of Spring,
Show us the stream
Where mercy and truth kiss,
There we will quench
The thirst of our souls.

God of our fathers,
God of our mothers,
May it come soon—
Let it be gentle—
Dew.

The following week I informally interviewed some innovative prayer leaders and congregants to find out their practices regarding *Tefilat Tal.* Their responses will then help me brainstorm ways in which these meditations on dew—both Kallir's original and other creative reflections on dew—might be utilized. I spoke with Elaine Zecher from Temple Israel, a dynamic Reform synagogue in Boston.[15] She explained that while they do not currently mention the prayer for dew in services, she is interested to see how the new Reform prayerbook, *Mishkan Tefilah* will treat this prayer. Members of Shaare Emeth in St. Louis explain that only a few dozen committed congregants attend morning services on the first day of Pesach in which rabbis often preach about renewal and personal redemption. However, they only sporadically incorporate the readings in *Gates of Prayer* about dew in the beginning of that prayer service. Rabbi Marty Lawson from Temple Emanu-El in San Diego explained that his congregation reads the version of the

[15] See Jeff Summit's book, *The Lords Song in a Strange Land* pp. 51-63 for a description of Temple Israel's congregation, mission and regular worship practices.

Sephardic *Tefilat Tal* that appears in the CCAR's *Five Scrolls* as noted earlier in this chapter.

In a conversation with Rabbi Larry Kushner (former rabbi of the famously creative Congregation Beth El of Sudbury, Massachusetts[16]), I discovered that while asking Reform congregations about whether they incorporated prayers for dew was a fine question, the better question was: "Why?" "Listen," he told me, "we never incorporated *Tefilat Tal* into our service because frankly it was not on our radar screen. We were so busy trying to recover a prayer service that resembled traditional liturgy in broad brush strokes that we didn't get to the fine points. However, I do I believe that it would have been well-received if I brought it up to the [ritual] committee."

I believe that Reform congregations would benefit spiritually from exposure to Kallir's *Tefilat Tal.* While its Hebrew is archaic and its calls for Israel's redemption may sound antiquated; its natural images, repetition of "tal," and soothing rhyme schemes still have the power to inspire. The inclusion of an English meditation on the symbolism of dew beforehand will help the worshipper to relate themes of the *piyyut* to their own lives. Additionally, a great melody in which worshippers can participate in its chorus will enable congregants to personally incorporate these concepts of renewal and personal redemption. For example, Cantor Ari Priven from B'nei Jeshurun[17] told me about melody that Rabbi J. Rolando Matalon wrote. While he based the melody of the liturgical stanzas on a traditional Ashkenazi tune for *Tefilat Tal,* he wrote a refrain that simply repeated the word "tal" in a tune that encouraged participation. "Even if they

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[16] See Sidney Schwarz's book *Finding a Spiritual Home*, pp. 60-82 to learn more about this innovative congregation.

[17] See Drs. Ayala Fader and Mark Kligman's article "BJ:A Model for Revitalized Synagogue Life" posted on Synagogue 2000's website: www.bj.org/S2K and Sidney Schwarz's book *Finding a Spiritual Home*, pp. 188-209 to discover more about their creative worship experiences.

have never heard it before, by the second time, they all sing along," he explained. I would like to see a similar setting for Reform Jewish congregations. We have many talented composers in our movement including Cantors Benji Schiller and Mark Opatow, and musician Craig Taubman who could write beautiful music for this prayer. I personally fantasize about Israeli singer Achinoam Nini composing the music for *Tefilat Tal*. Her melodious songs often sound like Shabbat niggunim.

Because services on the morning of the first day of Pesach are poorly attended[18], I think that *Tefilat Tal* should be incorporated into services on the Shabbat evening before Passover. This offers congregants a kavanah before the holiday and helps them to open their eyes to the season. I envision an insert in the program of the Friday night service beginning with the English meditation on dew, Kallir's *Tefilat Tal* and its transliteration, the poetic translation of the poem with brief footnotes explaining a little bit about Kallir and the biblical and rabbinic allusions in the *piyyut* and finally the musical notation of the refrain. This would enable congregants' participation, understanding and in turn spiritual inspiration.

[18] Congregations Shaare Emeth in St. Louis and Beth El in Sudbury, Massachusetts as well as Temple Emanu-El in San Diego average about 45 congregants in attendance at the *shacharit* service on the first day of Pesach.

Poetic Translation of *Tefilat Tal*
By Shoshanah Wolf

Give dew to favor the Earth,
And bless our spirit through your mirth.
Multiply our grain and wine,
And restore the city in which you shine.

Grant dew for this year and may it be crowned
With fruit of the land whose splendor abounds.
The city that was burned to the ground
Restore her grandeur with a crown.

Let dew drop upon the blessed land,
Moisten the earth with the wave of Your hand.
Shine your light through the gray,
And Israel will follow in Your way.

Sweeten the honeyed hills with dew
That we may taste greatness through You.
Though once bound, come to our rescue
So we may raise our voices to praise You.

Your dew will make our barns overflow.
Renew our days like days long ago.
Oh, Beloved God, let our names endure, too.
And like a well-watered garden we will grow after You.

Through Your dew please bless our fare
And never threaten to strip our land bare.
We, Your flock long to follow You,
So fulfill our desire to ever be renewed.

Conclusion

After spending nearly a year studying Kallir's *Tefilat Tal*, I still find it a refreshing source of inspiration—though not an easy one. It has taken me a long time to achieve the relatively slight understanding of the poem I have today. However, I have enjoyed this process. For me, it has been much like my experience of entering the Museo Nacional Reina Sofia in Madrid and viewing Picasso's Guernica. I first entered a room in which explanations about the context of Picasso's inspiration as well as Picasso's notes and early sketches hung on the walls. I lingered in that room for a long time, studying each display. It was only after this that I felt ready to encounter the enormous painting. explanations and that he transformed into the enormous work of art. Similarly, Kallir's *Tefilat Tal* requires some type of displays for the reader. This is what I have tried to offer the reader in my first three essays.

However, most people do not want enter a place of worship that feels like a museum. They want to be inspired more readily. Complex art takes time to digest and appreciate—and inspiration is not guaranteed. Therefore, while I enjoyed the process of writing my first three chapters, my final chapter was most important to me as a poet and rabbinical student.

My goal has been to find a way to connect the modern Reform worshipper to Kallir's *Tefilat Tal* that feels not only like education, but inspiration. To this goal, I have begun to make small strides. Surveying the women in Great Neck helped me most in this endeavor because they eloquently articulated how they need prayers to speak to their lives today. I would like to continue to workshop the various prayers for dew with other focus groups as well. Therefore, as I conclude this thesis, I realize that seeking innovative ways to connect Jews to our ancient prayers will forever be my quest.

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