

LIVING JEWISHLY, SINGING GLOBALLY:

Lifecycles and Holidays of
Moroccan and Persian Jewish Communities

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סיפורי מוסיקה
STORIES OF MUSIC



INTRODUCTION

This lesson is an exploration and celebration of the very rich music and culture of the Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities. To do this, we present two fictional families — one Moroccan (the Ben-Shabbat family) and one Persian (the Abraimian family) — to represent and exemplify Moroccan and Persian Jewish experience. We hope that in doing so we are also revealing the larger scope and range of Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities, cultures, and experiences. We know that we cannot possibly cover all of this adequately in one lesson.

This lesson was written in conjunction with the Stories of Music Lesson entitled “*Living Jewishly, Singing Globally: The Origins and Movement of Moroccan and Persian Jewish Communities.*” While each of these lessons can stand on its own, we encourage you to consider teaching them both consecutively, beginning with that lesson, and then continuing with this one.

Avoiding “Exoticization”

We chose to cover more than one community and to do so by presenting two representative (if fictional) families, in order to decrease the risk of “exoticizing” the experience of Moroccan or Persian Jews. Particularly in the United States, most Jewish culture and education has had Ashkenazic culture as its starting point, with other Jewish cultures seemingly, even if benevolently, othered. Our goal in the Stories of Music program is to render all Jewish experience, culture, and music as part of one tapestry: It all belongs to one people and is part of the heritage of all of us.

Because of this, we have offered in some places in this lesson, Ashkenazi settings to some musical selections. We encourage instructors to incorporate at least one of these. This will enable participants to hear the differences in music as well as to tie all Jewish music under one umbrella and lessen the possibility of “exoticizing” the major musical cultures explored here.

Use (and Nonuse) of Language in This Lesson

I. Why We Avoid the Use of the Terms “Sephardic” and “Mizrahi”

This lesson avoids the use of the terms “Sephardic” and “Mizrahi.” The former term comes from the Hebrew word “S’farad,” meaning “Spain,” and indicates Jews whose roots hail from Iberia. Nonetheless, the term has sometimes included Jewish communities whose origins lie elsewhere, especially North African Jews, whose practices have been influenced by Jews with Iberian roots, and to whom many Jews from Iberia fled following the Inquisition from Spain (1492) and Portugal (1497). In the United States, where Jewish education has often focused on Ashkenazic communities, the term Sephardic has even been evoked, incorrectly, as a term for any Jewish community that is not Ashkenazic. In Israel historically, “Sephardic” has connoted anyone who is or was part of the Islamic or Arab World, and “Ashkenazi” connoted anyone from Christendom.

The term, for some, thus includes Jews not hailing from Iberia. This has created an overlap of meaning with the term “Mizrahi,” a Hebrew word meaning “Eastern.” This term has often been used to connote Jews whose roots lay in the Middle East, including North Africa. Yet the overlap with the term “Sephardic” is not the only problem. While “Mizrahi” has been used as a designation of an *Edah* (community), the language about the “Edot HaMizrah,” “the communities of the East,” seems to have arisen from a colonial mindset that presumes some “backwardness” of the “Orient.” Further, today the term “Mizrahi” is often used to connote Arab-speaking Jews of Yemen, Tamazight-speaking Jews of Morocco, and

Farsi-speaking Jews of Iran. In Israel today the term is used to signify an identity and is interconnected with identity politics in Israel.

Finally, both terms have also been used interchangeably with each other in some circles, even as they continue to exhibit different meanings in other circles. To sum up, the terms “Sephardic” and “Mizrahi” currently signify quite distinct things, depending upon the speaker and the listener. We at Stories of Music have chosen to avoid any confusion in this lesson by not using the terms “Sephardic” or “Mizrahi.” Instead, we speak of Moroccan Jews and Persian Jews. This lesson will demonstrate how even these terms do not connote one group of people with a unified language and culture but, rather, are catchall terms based on geography. Nonetheless, this seems the clearest way to proceed. [For more on the [distinction of these terms, see here.](#)]

II. The Use of the Term “Berber” in This Lesson

We similarly avoid the use of the term “Berber” in this lesson. That term means “gibberish” in Arabic and “barbarian” in Latin. The term apparently originated in an attempt to belittle and vilify the indigenous peoples of North Africa, who number some 25 million. They call themselves Amazigh (singular) or Imazighen (plural). The language of the Imazighen is called Tamazight. The term “Amazigh” in Tamazight means “a free person.” Because the use of “Berber” was meant to demean, we suggest that if class participants use or ask about the term that you politely explain our use. [**NOTE:** For more on the use of “Amazigh” vs “Berber,” [see here.](#)]

Timing This Lesson

As always, this Stories of Music lesson is best done over two sessions.

- ◆ **For those completing the lesson over two sessions**, we have marked where the instructor might break, giving bullet points that can help review the first half of the lesson before the break and/or when resuming after the break.
- ◆ **If completing this material in one session**, the instructor will have to decide what material to omit and yet still transmit the essence of the lesson. This can be comfortably done with some preplanning.
- ◆ Alternatively, **if electing to teach this in more than two sessions**, the instructor will need to decide where the breaks will best occur.

How many sessions will be best for your cohort can depend upon many concerns, including but not limited to the length of your session, the number of learners, the number of videos and audios you might include, and if you will be playing all or just part of the videos/audios.

Preparation

I. Amount of Material

In addition to time, this lesson may need more preparation time than a typical lesson, particularly for instructors who lack familiarity with the Moroccan or Persian Jewish cultures. To help assist with this, we provide more links than usual, in order to provide more biographical, historical, cultural, and linguistic context. The majority of this will serve as helpful background material for the instructor; some of it may be worthy of incorporation into the presentation as well. Because this lesson deals with so many

factors that help account for the music of Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities and brings them together coherently, you will want to consider how much of this material to bring to the attention of your cohort, and how to do so. Due to this, we have provided more music than usual, so the instructor will want to consider time management, and may need to make decisions about breadth (presenting excerpts of all or some of the musical selections) versus depth (presenting all of the musical selections in their entirety). For this, each instructor will want to gain clarity for themselves regarding goals for their particular cohort.

II. Your Cohort

We Jews have had a wide breadth of lived experience and have lived in many places. Therefore, it is usually a good practice to assume heterogeneity among your cohort. It is quite possible that you have someone in your class who is a Moroccan or Persian Jew, or who is related to Moroccan or Persian Jews through marriage, or has had extensive experience with a Moroccan or Persian Jewish community. If so, think of those people as good resources, and possibly check-in with them on material about which you feel less certain or want more background. Do not make assumptions. For example: Just because most Persian Jews prefer that term over “Iranian Jews,” it is far from universal. Some may use one term in certain situations and the other in others. Depending upon the person, you may want them to speak about their family background, if a particular melody used in the lesson was part of the musical tradition they carry with them, etc.

III. A Tale of Two Families

Finally, we want to be clear that we are framing and introducing Moroccan and Persian Jewish heritages through two fictional families: the Ben-Shabbat family from Morocco and the Abraimian family from Persia. All the specific details about their family are fictional, although representative of typical Moroccan and Persian families. **All other information, such as the artists referred to, specific cultural and religious traditions, et al, is entirely real.**

LESSON ESSENTIALS

Enduring Understandings

- ◆ All Jewish communities, including the Moroccan and Persian communities, reflect and refract their sociocultural locations, and react to local historical, economic, and political realities. The music of the Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities exemplifies this. This remains true for the Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities in the United States today.
- ◆ At the same time, all Jewish communities, including the Moroccan and Persian communities, broadly share Jewish religious culture and history, and maintain Jewish values and aspirations.
- ◆ Nonetheless, discrete Jewish communities, including the Moroccan and Persian communities, may express their Judaism through different musical genres, styles, and modes, sometimes adopting local cultural forms, sometimes expressing themselves in local languages in addition to Hebrew, and sometimes developing practices that are not shared by other Jewish communities.
- ◆ Shabbat, holy days, and life cycle events have been and remain pivotal institutions that bring families and communities together to connect members to each other, to their cultural and religious heritage, and to God.

- ◆ The Moroccan and Persian Jewish cultures make extensive use of piyyutim, and maintain proud musical traditions surrounding them.
- ◆ The culture of the Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities, including music, practices, food, language, and more, continue to provide personal enrichment for members of those communities.
- ◆ Moroccan and Persian Jewish music today reflects the sociocultural locations in which it is found (often the United States and Israel) and reflects as well an ongoing negotiation, even tension, between honoring the past and thriving in the present.

Essential Questions

- ◆ How do Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities reflect their own separate historical experiences in their music?
- ◆ In what ways do Moroccan and Persian communities exemplify the lives and concerns of all Jewish communities?
- ◆ How have Moroccan and Persian communities adopted and adapted local culture in expressing their Judaism?
- ◆ How do Moroccan and Persian families and communities celebrate Shabbat, holy days, and life cycle moments in ways that are both cross-culturally Jewish and yet reflective of their own experience?

Lesson Outline

PART 1: Prelude/Introduction

PART 2: Life Cycle Occasions

A. Pre-Wedding Rituals

1. Amir and Miriam's Pre-Wedding Henna Ritual in Morocco ("*Abyadi Ana*")
2. Musa and Esther's Pre-Wedding Persian Ceremony at the Public Bath ("*Shah Dumad*")

B. Brit Milah (ritual circumcision)

1. Moroccan Brit Milah ("*Shalom L'ven Dodi*")
2. Persian Brit Milah (video clip from the film *Persian Lullaby*)

PART 3: Holidays

A. Shabbat

1. Kabbalat Shabbat in Amir and Miriam's Synagogue (*Shir HaShirim* chanted)
2. Shabbat Dinner at Amir and Miriam's Home ("*Yom Ze L'Yisrael*")
3. Shabbat Dinner at Musa and Esther's Home ("*Tzur Mishelo*")
4. Shabbat Morning at Amir and Miriam's Synagogue ("*El Adon*," "*En Kelohenou*")
5. Shabbat in Musa and Esther's Synagogue ("*Ashrei*," "*Amar Adonai L'Ya'akov*")

B. Holidays with Special Communal Meaning

1. Musa and Esther Celebrate Purim ("*Purim, Purim, Purim Lanu*")
2. Amir and Miriam Celebrate Maimouna ("*Mose Salio de Misrayim*," "*Yom L'Yabasha*")

PART 4: Coda/Conclusion (Weaving our learning threads together) ("*Ya Alah Ya Alah*")

THE LESSON

PART 1 — PRELUDE/INTRODUCTION

TITLE SLIDE

Opening Discussion

SLIDE 1

(As learners enter and settle in, play "[Shah Dumad](#)." )

The song you heard as you settled in was "*Shah Dumad*," a Persian wedding song sung by Iranian-born Israeli, [Rita Jehan-Farouz](#) (b. 1962). Her family moved to Israel when she was eight-years old. Her career began with the Israeli army troupe, "IDF 80." She had a quick rise, becoming Israel's "queen of pop." Her 2010 album, "*My Joys*" (*HaS'machot Sheli*) was a collection of songs in her native Farsi language. It went gold in Israel in about three weeks, and gained a huge following in Iran.

Weddings are among the most joyful and meaningful occasions in anyone’s life. This lesson will explore several such significant life-cycle events and holiday celebrations in the life of Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities.

Most significant life events we encounter have some aural element or sonic marker that reminds the attendee/participant that they are part of something important and transformational: a *simcha*.

Think about the (hopefully) many *s’machot* (“joyous occasions;” plural of *simcha*) which you have been a part of: consider for a moment what they *sounded* like.

? Were there any key songs or musical moments tied to that event?

? Do those musical works *still* have an effect on you when you encounter them?

In this lesson we will be looking at music from key moments in the lives of two Jewish families, the Ben-Shabbats and Abraimians. The Ben-Shabbat family came to Los Angeles, CA from Casablanca, Morocco via Israel. The Abraimian family came to Kings Point, New York from Tehran, Iran, also via Israel. *[NOTE: The story of these families’ beginnings in Morocco and Persia, respectively, and their subsequent journeys, is told in the Stories of Music Lesson “Living Jewishly, Singing Globally: The Origins and Movement of the Moroccan and Persian Jewish Communities.”]*

PART 2 — LIFE CYCLE OCCASIONS

SLIDE 2

A. Pre-Wedding Rituals

SLIDE 3

1. Amir and Miriam’s Pre-Wedding Henna Ritual in Morocco

The Ben-Shabbat family is a middle-class family living on the westside of Los Angeles. Amir and Miriam left Casablanca in 1963 to join family members who had already gone to Israel. As did many Moroccan families, Amir and Miriam left Israel for the United States in 1973 following the Yom Kippur War. They have five children, all now adults: Abraham, Andre, Shoshana, Leon, and Sarah.

Amir and Miriam were introduced through a matchmaker in Casablanca in 1946. The use of a matchmaker was still a common practice. They hit it off immediately and, after seven months, became engaged. Leading up to the wedding, a henna party was held for Miriam. Moroccan Jewish culture traditionally had three separate henna (a plant-based dye) pre-wedding rituals, conducted by the women of the bride’s family. Music is an important part of them!

SLIDE 4

[NOTE: Moroccan Jewish henna rituals share patterns with the henna rituals of their Amazigh and Arab neighbors. Other Jewish cultures, such as Yemenite and Iraqi Jews, also have henna rituals and parties, which vary from Moroccan ones.]

- ◆ Miriam’s grandmother Shoshana, the designated family matriarch, smeared the henna into the palms of both Miriam and Amir. The henna dyes skin a shade of orange that lasts for up to two weeks. Although the wedding follows within a couple of days, the bride is exempted of any household duties until the henna completely fades.

- ◆ This act of smearing henna symbolizes the hope for good health, security, wisdom, and, of course, fertility. Moreover, the henna itself is an apotropaic, to help protect the young couple from demonic forces.
- ◆ Party guests also spread henna on their own palms, in order to bring good luck.
- ◆ Kaftans are worn by women at the henna party, except for the bride, who wears a *kshwa kbeerah*, “the big dress.” The groom also often wears a kaftan, while the other men dress in suits.
- ◆ Henna parties feature a sweet table full of traditional cookies (here’s a [recipe for Moroccan marzipan cookies](#) and here’s a [recipe for chebakia, Moroccan sesame cookies with honey](#)). The sweet cookies symbolize a sweet life for the bride and groom.

Traditional Henna Ceremony/Party Song: “*Abyadi Ana*” (“I Am Happy”)

- ◆ The song was probably written at the beginning of the twentieth century, in one of the main Jewish communities of western Algeria, Tlemcen or Oran (Waharan), and spread quickly among the Jewish communities in Morocco.
- ◆ The song was apparently meant to be performed by women (often, the family matriarch) on the wedding night or in the morning after, together with the display of the proof of virginity, as part of the *Tsabach* ritual. As this ritual declined, the song was performed in all of the ceremonies comprising the wedding’s cycle.
- ◆ The song itself speaks of the various pre-wedding and wedding rituals, including the henna ceremony we have discussed, praises the bride, and, finally, exhorts the groom to attend dutifully now to his family of origin, even as he dotes on his new wife.
- ◆ Due to its wide distribution via commercial recordings by popular artists, *Abyadi Ana* became the most recognized wedding song in urban Jewish communities in Morocco, and later among Moroccan Jewish immigrants in Israel.
- ◆ There are two known versions of this song, one from Meknes in Northern Morocco and the other from the Jewish community of Rabat, Morocco’s capital city.
- ◆ The text of the song does not have a systematic meter or rhyme.

PLAY: “*Abyadi Ana*”

SLIDE 5

Choose *one* of the three versions below:

1) [Audio of Zohra El Fassia](#) 

[Zohra El Fassia](#) emerged as a central figure in the burgeoning recording industry of colonial Maghreb in the early twentieth century. She became the “queen” of *malhoun* music, as well as the *gharnati* style. She attained widespread mainstream success and sang frequently at the royal palace of [King Mohammed V of Morocco](#), whom she adored. [NOTE: For more on Zohra, please see *Stories of Music* lesson entitled “Living Jewishly, Singing Globally: The Origins and Movement of Moroccan and Persian Jewish Communities.”]




2) [Video of Laura Elkeslassy](#) 

Born in France (1985) with Moroccan and Israeli roots, [Laura Elkeslassy](#) is an artist who tries to reclaim her Moroccan Jewish liturgical tradition and North African musical heritage from a feminist standpoint.

3) [Video from film *Tipat Mazal*](#)  (“A Bit of Luck”) [from 8:00–10:26]

The film addresses the difficulties of North African immigrants to Israel. In the movie, *Abyadi Ana* is performed by Jojo ([Zeev Revach](#), an Israeli actor born in Rabat, Morocco) during a *Henna* ceremony.

Discussion [**NOTE:** *Instructors should consider how much time to allow for each discussion in the lesson to help in curating which question(s) to use*]:

-  **Please describe the music you heard in three words. [If by Zoom, have participants place in the chat. If in person, take several responses.]**
-  **How is this music similar to and/or different from wedding music you most often hear?**
-  **How does the sound of this music bring out the present joy of or future hopes for the couple, soon to be wed?**

You may have noticed that one vocal feature in this audio/video is [tahrir](#), or voice crackling. It is often described as an “ornament” of the melodic line which consists in producing one or more short frequency jumps — called *tekye* — towards higher pitches. [**NOTE:** *One can find an [electroglottographic analysis of tahrir here](#).*]

Another feature of this music that an instructor may wish to introduce is the use of [microtones](#).

Part 2. A. 2. Musa and Esther’s Pre-Wedding Persian Ceremony at the Public Bath SLIDE 6

We will now continue our learning journey with another family, the Abraimians, originally from Persia. The Abraimians lived in Tehran, but were eventually pushed by social, political, and economic forces to seek a new, safer, and a more prosperous life in the United States. The Abraimians are a well-to-do family living in Kings Point, a village on the Great Neck peninsula of Long Island, New York. Musa and Esther have three grown children: Itzach, Abbas, Danyal.

Musa and Esther met and got married in Tehran, as both families belonged to the small, old Molla Hanina synagogue in Oudlajan, the Jewish neighborhood. Persian weddings, like Moroccan ones, are less events and more elaborate processes involving a number of rituals, celebrations, and parties. These can include:

- ♦ The formal request of the groom to the bride’s family for permission to marry.
- ♦ An exchange of sweets to symbolize happiness.
- ♦ A bathing ritual for bride and groom (see below).
- ♦ A wedding shower for the bride.
- ♦ A get-to-know-you session for extended family members.

[**NOTE:** *For more information about [Persian weddings](#), see [here](#).*]

Musa and Esther recall that *motrebs*, popular musicians (sometimes used pejoratively), are a fixed feature of all festive life-cycle events in Persia, especially weddings and circumcisions, whether Jewish or Muslim. [**NOTE:** *The word “motreb” derives from the Arabic verb “taraba,” meaning “to make happy.”*] The most public performances of *motrebs*, the majority of whom were Jews, consist of their leading the ritual procession from the bride and bridegroom’s respective homes to the public bath in a ceremony called *hamum-barun* on the eve of their wedding. The *motrebs* followed the procession as far as the vestibule of the [bathhouse](#) (called *bina*) and entertained the family during the often day-long festivities.

Motrebs sometimes even presided over the ritual grooming of the bride and the requisite first shaping of her eyebrows on the eve of her wedding.

Food at Persian celebrations often includes [morasa polo](#), “jeweled rice,” made of rice, chicken or meat, saffron, barberries, almonds, and pistachios. A variation without raisins is called Shirin Polo, “sweet rice.” Another standard dish that partners well with the morasa polo is [shirazi salad](#), the classic Persian salad that hails from the city of Shiraz (and hence the name!).

One song often played at Persian pre-wedding events and wedding celebrations is “*Shah Dumad*.” It portrays the groom going to meet the bride, but because it does not mention the wedding specifically, it is appropriate for all pre-wedding rituals, in addition to the wedding/wedding reception.

PLAY: “[Shah Dumad](#)” 




SLIDE 7

[Maureen Nehedar](#)’s family left Isfahan for Israel in 1980, shortly following the fall of the shah in 1979, when she was two-years old. She received training in European classical music, but joined the [Ensemble Esfahan](#) at the age of 17, performing both classical Persian music and Persian folk songs. Her album, *Asleep in the Bosom of My Childhood* is a collection of Persian Jewish piyyutim. Her follow-up album, recorded in Farsi, was *Gole Gandum*, a collection of Persian folk songs as well as pre-revolution era popular songs, an era remembered with affection by Persian Jews.

[NOTE: “Shah Dumad” was the Persian wedding song you heard as you entered, but that was a version from the Israeli artist Rita. Instructor may or may not wish to compare the two versions.]

Discussion:

We have just learned how traditionally, Moroccan Jews would have three pre-wedding henna celebrations and that Persian Jews would have up to five pre-wedding ceremonies.

-  **Have you ever been part of a wedding experience that had multiple pre-wedding ceremonies? If so, how many? What were they? (Take 2–3 responses.)**
-  **What might be the purpose or value of having multiple pre-wedding ceremonies?**
-  *[NOTE: The following prompt may require more thought. The instructor might recommend sitting with the question for some time (30–60 seconds) or journaling thoughts before asking people to share.]* **These ceremonies of Persian and Moroccan Jews have Jewish-specific elements, but seem to have arisen out of a cultural environment shared by their non-Jewish neighbors. What might be the cultural value of having ceremonies that are both Jewish-specific, yet connected to a broader environment?**

In learning about these Moroccan Jewish and Persian Jewish pre-wedding customs and listening to “Shah Dumad,” we should note that all of this points to how these communities have dealt with the rupture of immigration by both honoring tradition and embracing change. Moroccan Jews in the United States, for example, continue to have pre-wedding henna ceremonies, but usually only one, not three. Persian Jews, too, continue to have pre-wedding ceremonies, but not five. In addition, Persian Jews, especially the Jews of Mashhad, traditionally sought spouses who were from the same city. In the United States, that is often no longer the case.

PART 2 — LIFE CYCLE OCCASIONS

B. *Brit Milah* (ritual circumcision)

1. Moroccan *Brit Milah*

SLIDE 8

Amir and Miriam were blessed with five children: Abraham, André, Shoshana, Léon, and Sarah. When each son was born, the family and the community would come together to welcome the newborn into the community and into the covenant of the Jewish people with God through *brit milah* (circumcision). Music always played a role.

- ◆ In Moroccan families, on the night prior to the circumcision, the Chair of Elijah is brought from the synagogue to the home of the infant, where it is decorated with many colorful fabrics. (For background on the [Chair of Elijah](#), see [here](#).)
- ◆ In [Sefrou](#), the Chair of Elijah was placed near a doorpost. This is considered auspicious for the long life of the child, as alluded to in Deuteronomy 11:20–21, “And you shall inscribe them upon the doorposts... in order to prolong your days.”
- ◆ Moroccan Jews place a dish of sand near the [mohel](#) (ritual circumciser) to signify that the child should be as fruitful as the grains of sand, in accordance with the biblical verse, “The number of the Israelites will be like the sands of the sea, which cannot be measured or counted” (Hosea 2:1). This sand is also used to cover the excised foreskin.

SONG: “*Shalom L’ven Dodi*”

SLIDE 9

NOTE: *This would be a great place to work with your congregants/learners to sing all or a part of the song. Depending on how many classes this lesson is taught over, you can introduce it at the first class and continue improving over the full run of classes. It may even become part of your institution’s musical landscape!*

- ◆ Also known as “*Shalom L’cha Dodi*,” the song is a [piyyut](#) (liturgical poem) written by the renowned paytan (liturgical poet) of the Golden Age of Spain, Solomon ibn Gabirol.
- ◆ This piyyut is a song of love, and its lyrics are very reminiscent of the biblical book the *Song of Songs*.
- ◆ This piyyut/poem-song is traditionally sung on joyous occasions, including circumcisions, as well as on Shabbat and Yom Tov (festivals).
- ◆ “*Shalom L’ven Dodi*” serves as one example of how beloved and widespread are the use of piyyutim and the music of piyyutim, for the Moroccan Jewish community. [**NOTE:** *Piyyutim tend to continue to have great resonance in many non-Ashkenazi cultures/communities.*]

PLAY: One of the two versions of “*Shalom L’ven Dodi*”

OPTION 1 — PLAY: [Audio of Cantor Jo Amar](#) 

[Cantor Jo \(Yosef\) Amar](#) (1930–2009) was a well-known Israeli-Moroccan hazzan and singer. Born in Settat, his singing career took off in the 1940’s. He made aliyah in 1956, moving to Yad Rambam, a moshav of Moroccan emigres (mostly from Fez). He is known for pioneering Moroccan Jewish liturgical music in Israel, and he became associated with non-Ashkenazi music. He recorded more than 20 albums,

including two with the Israeli Andalusian Orchestra. He also published a volume of Moroccan Jewish liturgical music.

OPTION 2 — PLAY: [Audio version by The Oud Sounds \(Tz'lilei HaOud\)](#) 

[The Oud Sounds](#) was an Israeli band founded by two cousins of Yemenite descent in 1974, and were known for incorporating Western instrumentation into their sound. They recorded and performed Moroccan, Turkish, Greek, and original music. They often imitate the sounds of traditional instruments such as oud and doumbek on more common rock instruments such as electric guitar and drums. This selection is from *Original Performance Record #1*, their 1975 debut album. The Oud Sounds were discovered and nurtured by the [Azoulai brothers](#). The Azoulai family emigrated from Morocco in 1948, and their record label, “*Koliphon*,” was significant in the preservation and development of non-Ashkenazic music in the nascent state of Israel.




Part 2. B. 2. Persian Brit Milah Ceremony

SLIDE 10

To get a sense of a Persian brit milah, play this [clip from the movie, *Persian Lullaby \(Limoo Amani\)*](#), starting at the 1:30 point. The short film’s premise concerns a single mother wanting her traditional Persian father to serve as the [sandeck](#) (loosely, “godfather”) at her child’s brit milah, but he is upset that his grandson will have no father. A ceremony that is not depicted here but which is unique to Persian and Kurdistan Jews, is a ceremony before the actual circumcision, known as “*Lel Ik d ill Yas*,” during which the Chair of Elijah was consecrated and adorned with silver crowns and various plants. [**NOTE:** *Image on Slide is from the film.*]

We have seen how Moroccan Jews informally adorn the Chair of Elijah with fabrics. Now we learn that Persian Jews formally adorn the Chair of Elijah with silver crowns and plants. This points to the Jewish concept of *hiddur mitzvah*, the enhancement of a ritual act through aesthetics. Sometimes it’s worthwhile to take the extra time and thoughtfulness to do something in an especially beautiful way.

Discussion:

-  Why might Moroccan and Persian Jews adorn the Chair of Elijah?
-  What is the value of enhancing a ritual object? What is the value of maintaining ritual objects plainly?
-  What is the value of having embellished orchestrations for a musical piece? What is the value of having pared back musical arrangements (“unplugged” or a capella)?

Pair Share:

Share something special you have done or have witnessed at a brit milah or Jewish wedding celebration that was not required but added cultural richness or meaning to the event.

PART 3 — HOLIDAYS

A. Shabbat

SLIDE 11

1. Kabbalat Shabbat in Amir and Miriam’s Synagogue

SLIDE 12

Amir and Miriam both love Shabbat. Amir loves to begin Shabbat with his children at synagogue. He feels that it’s good to begin a day of rest and renewal by making time to connect with God and the community. [**NOTE:** *Image is of a synagogue in Fez, Morocco.*]

On Friday, the prayers start with [minha](#) (the afternoon service). Minha is not formally part of Shabbat, but having Kabbalat Shabbat (“Welcoming Shabbat”) services closely follow minha helps make the transition from weekday to Shabbat more palpable.

Recitation of the Song of Songs

The custom at Amir’s synagogue is to chant the biblical book the [Song of Songs](#), known in Hebrew as *Shir HaShirim*, between minha and ma’ariv (known as *aravit*) services. As is common in other parts of the prayer service, Shir HaShirim is usually divided up among the congregants with each of the eight chapters recited by different congregants. Amir is regularly invited to recite a chapter. Shir HaShirim has its own unique [trop, or cantillation](#).

- ◆ In Moroccan practice, the recitation of the Shir HaShirim is prefaced by a [Leshem Yehud](#) prayer whose purpose is to unify the name of God and to instill the proper spiritual intent among the readers.
- ◆ Prior to reciting the first chapter of Shir HaShirim, verse 2:12 is sung. The last few verses (some communities start at 8:8, others at 8:11) are then sung in unison.
- ◆ A concluding prayer follows the recitation.
- ◆ Shir HaShirim is recited prior to Shabbat as a final preparation to receive the Bride, identified as Shabbat. We sing praises of the bride, identified with the female persona of Shir HaShirim. A kabbalistic interpretation suggests that when we recite it, we are forgiven for the wrongdoings we committed during the week. [**NOTE:** *Source for this is Nulman, Macy. The Encyclopedia of Jewish Prayer. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1993, p. 305.*]

Play: “[Shir HaShirim](#)” 

[**NOTE:** *We suggest playing until the one-minute mark, which will get you through Chapter 1:1–5.*] The chanting is by [Rabbi David Kadoch](#), who serves as rabbi of the Sephardic Kehila Centre and as hazzan of the Abir Yaakob Congregation (located within the Sephardic Kehila Centre) in Thornhill, Ontario, north of Toronto. His family hails from Tangiers.

Part 3. A. 2. Shabbat Dinner at Amir and Miriam's Home

Amir and his children love coming home to join with Miriam in celebrating Shabbat. Shabbat gives them important family time together. Miriam explains the importance of the Shabbat meal. “Shabbat is different from the other six days. Everything has to be dressed up — the table, the food — everything — because this shows our love for God, for our traditions, and for our guests. And having a nice table makes it a warm place to pass down our family stories.” Miriam also promotes the Shabbat meal, because she basically believes that food solves all problems!

To reflect this difference, following cooking and table preparations Miriam usually takes a shower and changes into a traditional Moroccan kaftan known as a *jalabiya* once dinner preparations are complete. As sunset nears, Miriam lights a candle for each of her children to welcome in the Shabbat.

Pair Share:

Every Friday night Miriam lights and blesses a candle for each of her children.

- ❓ Do you have a Shabbat candle lighting tradition?
- ❓ How many candles do you light?
- ❓ Do you cover your eyes?
- ❓ Do you wear a head covering?
- ❓ Are you by yourself or with family?
- ❓ Do you recite the blessing aloud or to yourself?

Please take 1–2 minutes to discuss your tradition (or your parents’ or grandparents’ tradition) with the person next to you.


Among Moroccan Jews, parents and grandparents are respected above all else, and to signify this, each family shares their wine from the same cup for Kiddush. This suggests that the family continues to look to the family elders for guidance and wisdom. They symbolically commit to continue to drink from their (metaphoric) cup.

Cooked carrots glisten in [harissa](#), while [fried eggplant](#) sits alongside the much-loved [matboucha](#), a traditional tomato and chili dish. [Moroccan fish](#) is a traditional dish on a Friday night. “After the fish, we often think we don’t have room in our stomachs for anything else,” Miriam states, and yet out comes more: [lamb tagine with dried fruit](#), veal and vegetables on couscous ([here’s a vegetarian version](#)), and prunes and artichokes stuffed with meat ([here is a recipe](#)).


The traditional [Moroccan mint tea ceremony](#) using the handed-down family teapot, marks the end of the meal. “Shabbat is always the most magnificent day,” Miriam says. “In my family we always believed that when you have a good Shabbat, you’re going to have a very good week.”

SONG: “Yom Ze L’Yisrael”

It is common to sing [z’mirot](#), table songs, at Shabbat meals. “Yom Ze L’Yisrael” is well-known in most communities globally from the fifteenth century. The chorus takes the expression “light and joy,” taken from the book of Esther (8:16), which states, “The Jews enjoyed light and joy, happiness and honor.” The poem extols Shabbat as the day on which a suffering people may find rest, relief, and is given an “extra soul” — an extra measure of life because of the freedom from worry that Shabbat affords. At the end of the piyyut, the poet asks God to make the conditions ripe for a world of “light and joy,” a world that is completely Shabbat. [NOTE: Explanation relies on Reuven Hammer, Or Hadash. 2003: New York, Rabbinical Assembly, p. 327.]

PLAY: “Yom Ze L’Yisrael”  (at bottom of screen, press to the forward arrow to the fourth selection) The melody here is one of the most popular melodies in the Moroccan Jewish repertoire (per Cantor Eli Mellul’s *Songs of the Jews of Morocco*; Tara Publications, 1996, p.11). The use of [z’mirot](#) in Moroccan (and other non-Ashkenazic traditions) might best be seen as part of the love of piyyutim and the music that they have engendered. It is part of a melody type known as *makam kurd*.

This version is sung by [Cantor David Abikzer](#) (b. 1939). Born in Casablanca, his family made aliyah when he was 17-years old. He served as Hazzan of the Sephardic Temple of Cedarhurst (New York) for over 40 years. He later returned to Israel. [NOTE: Image on slide is of Cantor Abikzer.]

EXTENSION IDEA: For contrast, play this version of “Yom Ze L’Yisrael”  by Israeli performer [Asaph Neve Shalom](#). It is an Ashkenazic setting of the piyyut. [NOTE: If time is a consideration, we suggest playing from the beginning to 1:13. Alternatively, if your community has its own version, you might have everyone sing it, with a view to comparing the music.]

Part 3. A. 3. Shabbat Dinner at Musa and Esther’s Home

SLIDE 15

Musa and Esther also love to celebrate Shabbat with their family. They host their children and grandchildren just as their parents and grandparents did. “The door is always open,” says Esther. Their son Abbas adds: “The plan is always, if we want to come, we can come—there’s no real invitation from my folks, and there’s no actual phone call I need to make. But Shabbat is a time to gather and be with family.”


On coming home from synagogue on Friday evening, Musa sometimes takes a drink of [arak](#). The meals often start in the living room with everyone snacking on [gondi](#), chickpea-flour dumplings, pickles, and plates of [sabzi khordan](#), a fresh herb platter, along with a type of bread, such as [sangak](#) or [taftoon](#). [For more, including recipes, [on seven kinds of Persian bread, see here.](#)] At the table, Esther always serves [abgoosht](#), or “meat broth” that often serves as the staple of the meal.

The Abraimian family also loves to sing [z’mirot](#). One of their favorites is “Tzur Mishelo.” This widely known piyyut of unknown origin is an introduction to [Birkat HaMazon](#), the “grace after meals.” Indeed, it has been debated whether one needs or should recite Birkat HaMazon after singing “Tzur Mishelo.” Although the piyyut does not specifically refer to Shabbat, it is typically sung at the Shabbat table.

PLAY: [“Tzur Mishelo”](#)  sung by Ehud Banai

SLIDE 16

[Ehud Banai](#) is a popular Israeli musician of Persian origin, writing and performing in the rock and folk genres. His 1986 rock opera *Mami* was made into a successful Israeli movie musical in 2019. His band’s self-titled debut album, *Banai and the Refugees*, is still in the discussion as one of the most influential and best Israeli rock albums ever. Also important, he is part of the [Banai family](#) from Shiraz that has forever changed Israeli culture since the 1950’s, and whose legacy was featured in [an extensive exhibit at the Tower of David Museum](#) in 2020. According to Dr. Galeet Dardashti, here Banai draws upon both Persian and Arab-Jewish traditions.

EXTENSION IDEA: For contrast, [play this version of “Tzur Mishelo”](#)  performed by an all-star cast of Orthodox Jewish performers, recorded in 2010. There are two settings presented. The first is a well-known Ashkenazic one. *[NOTE: We suggest playing to 1:24; if wanting to do both melodies, play until 3:01 (a different song altogether is appended after that). Alternatively, if your community has its own melody for “Tzur Mishelo,” have everyone sing it together, with a view toward discussing how the versions differ musically.]*

Summary

So after having two Shabbat dinners (!!!), one Moroccan and one Persian, it’s time for a Shabbat rest. But, before we do, let’s take a moment to reflect. What have we learned today? The instructor should catalog responses in a place where all can see, and then add to from the following list, particularly whatever was the focus of the instructor.

We learned how:

- ◆ Moroccan Jews traditionally have three pre-wedding henna rituals and celebrations, although today that is not necessarily the case.
- ◆ The pre-wedding henna ritual is often led by women, and is something that has shared moments with pre-wedding henna rituals by Moroccan Muslims.
- ◆ Persian Jews traditionally have up to five pre-wedding rituals, including one at the public bathhouse. Jewish musicians (“*motrebs*”) were always a part of the celebration.
- ◆ Moroccan and Persian Jews both adorn the “Chair of Elijah” before a circumcision.
- ◆ Shabbat at a Moroccan synagogue is typically preceded by the chanting of Shir HaShirim.
- ◆ Shabbat in a Moroccan home is rich in cultural traditions (e.g. food) and ritual traditions (e.g. all sharing from the same Kiddush cup).
- ◆ Shabbat in a Persian home is also rich in cultural traditions (e.g. food) and religious celebrations (e.g. beginning Shabbat meal in the living room with appetizers, so that the spirit of Shabbat calm can enter the space).
- ◆ Persian and Moroccan Jews have a rich tradition of singing *z’mirot* at their Shabbat tables.
- ◆ Moroccan and Persian Jews regularly employ piyyutim in their lives, and revel in the music of the piyyutim.

OUTRO:**SLIDE 17**

As we end this session, we leave you with a Persian-Jewish setting for “L’cha Dodi,” the piyyut that formally welcomes Shabbat at synagogues worldwide on Friday nights. The melody here hails from Tehran. It is sung by [Cantor Jacqueline Rafii](#), as heard by Issac Boudaie. While the melody and instrumentation are Persian, Cantor Rafii has chosen in this performance setting to present vocals that are more Westernized. To cite two examples: There is less use of microtones here, and virtually no use of *tahrir*, voice crackling.

L’cha Dodi was written by Rabbi Solomon Halevi Alkabetz (1500–1576), a Jew from Salonica who became part of the mystic community of Ts’fat in Eretz Yisrael (the land of Israel). The initial letter of the first eight stanzas spell out his name.

Most interesting, while the piyyut is sung to welcome Shabbat, five stanzas specifically invite God to usher in the messianic era, pictured in our tradition as a time when “all is Shabbat” (BT *Rosh HaShanah* 31a). The observance and celebration of Shabbat is a foretaste of that time. The hymn is also suffused with a consciousness of the biblical Song of Songs, particularly as Rabbi Akiva (c. 100 C.E.) interpreted it as portraying the love between the lover (“*dod*”), God, and us. Indeed, the phrase “*l’cha dodi*” is taken from Song of Songs 7:12.

As you listen, please take a moment to appreciate Cantor Rafii’s reclaiming and celebrating of her Jewish cultural heritage, the heartfelt balancing of tradition and modernization in this performance, and how this melody helps Persian Jews to begin Shabbat in joy. May we feel similar joy as we live out our Jewish heritage in our day, and in our own ways.

PLAY: [“L’cha Dodi”](#) 

SEE YOU NEXT SESSION!

BREAK

As learners settle in, play [“El Adon.”](#) 

Part 3. A. 4. Shabbat Morning in Amir and Miriam’s Synagogue**SLIDE 18**

As you settled in, you listened to “El Adon,” a piyyut sung on Shabbat mornings to praise the daily rising and setting of the sun, moon, and the stars. The words reflect the language and ideas of [Merkavah Mysticism](#), which developed much earlier than kabbalah. The version you heard was by [Yossi Azoulay](#) (b. 1977), an Israel singer of Moroccan descent. This will help us transition into today’s session.

Last session we learned about two special life cycle events: Pre-wedding rituals and brit milah (circumcision). We saw how in both Moroccan and Persian traditions, for example, they adorn the Chair of Elijah. We also spent time in Amir and Miriam’s synagogue, where just before Kabbalat Shabbat (“The Welcoming of Shabbat”) services, they chant “Shir HaShirim” (the Song of Songs). We also spent time in both Amir and Miriam’s home, and in Musa and Esther’s home, for Shabbat dinner. Today we begin by turning to Shabbat morning for both the Ben-Shabbat and Abrahamic families.

In Amir and Miriam’s synagogue, the prayer leader chants aloud, word by word, virtually the entire service. Unlike the music of the Eastern rites (Syrian, Iraqi, etc.), which were influenced by Middle Eastern sounds, Moroccan Jewish religious tunes have a uniquely [Andalusian](#) feel. Moreover, just as Eastern liturgical melodies are organized into a system of musical modes called Maqam, Moroccan liturgy can be classified by the musical genre known as [nouba](#). [NOTE: For more on [Moroccan synagogue services](#), see [here](#).]

Toward the end of the Shabbat morning service the community sings “En Kelohenou,” which celebrates the relationship between God and our people. Recited daily in many communities, this hymn has been known since at least the ninth century C.E. Originally, the question, “Mi Kelohenou,” “Who is like our God?” was followed by the answer, “En Kelohenou,” “There is none like our God.” The order was changed to give the pattern of **אין** (“Ein”), **מי** (“Mi”), and **נודה** (“No-de”), the first letters of which spell out **אמן**, “Amen!”

PLAY: [“En Kelohenou”](#) 

SLIDE 19

[Vanessa Paloma](#) sings this in Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic, and Judeo-Spanish at the Benarrosh Synagogue in Casablanca (from 2013). The melody is associated with Slat Al Fassiyine, the synagogue of Fez. The performance was arranged by [Samuel Kaplan](#), U.S. ambassador to Morocco, appointed by President Barack Obama. He is one of only a handful of Jews to ever represent the United States in a majority Muslim nation.

EXTENSION IDEA: Moroccan Havdallah

SLIDE 20

A unique feature in the Moroccan Minhag is the recitation of the introductory song “*Avarech et Shem*” (lit. “I shall bless [the Almighty’s name]). During Havdalah all sorts of fragrant herbs and spices are used in the Moroccan community, including fresh spearmint leaves, rose water, cloves and myrtle branches. Some include the recitation of the Priestly Blessing as well as the Torah portion dealing with Pinhas ben Elazar (Numbers 25:10–12), as both have the theme of peace. [NOTE: The instructor may wish to note the interplay between the portions which the leader chants and those which the community joins in to sing together. Experientially, the dynamic interplay between the two is a characteristic feature of Moroccan and, indeed, most Middle Eastern and North African traditions.]

PLAY: [Moroccan Havdallah](#) 

[NOTE: Instructor should decide how much and which part of this video to show.]

Part 3. A. 5. Shabbat in Musa and Esther’s Synagogue

SLIDE 21

Musa attends Shabbat morning services at his synagogue frequently, often with children and grandchildren.

The following selections are several Persian synagogue melodies. They reflect a Saturday morning, and Saturday evening piece (as we just did for the Moroccan community. [NOTE: If time is limited, the instructor should decide whether to abridge the selections and/or to eliminate one.]

PLAY: “[Ashrei](#)”  (excerpt; from 2:20–2:56)

SLIDE 22

Here is a traditional Persian chant of the Ashrei prayer, one that hails from Shiraz. The prayer is built around the alphabetical Psalm 145. Its opening ascription identifies the psalm as a “*t’hila l’David*,” “a praise of David,” while the final verse speaks of “*t’hilat Adonai*,” the praise of God. In addition, Psalm 115:18 was appended to Ashrei so that it could end with the word “*Halleluyah*,” meaning “praise God.” “*T’hila(t)*” and “*Halleluyah*” derive from the same Hebrew root, which appears a total of six times in this prayer, suggesting a Divine-human connection, even interdependence, that elevates each of our lives into praise.

PLAY: “[Amar Adonai L’Ya’akov](#)”  (If time is a concern, can play from 0:34–1:57)

This hymn of unknown authorship is an alphabetic acrostic sung at the departure of Shabbat. The first half of each short stanza alludes to a biblical verse with the name Jacob that offers blessing, comfort, and consolation. The second half of each stanza is the refrain “*Al tira avdi Yaakov*,” “Do not fear, my servant Jacob,” a reference to Isaiah 44:2, a prophecy of hope. After a Shabbat during which we renewed our vision and energies, this hymn gives us the hope and strength to face the rigors of the new week.

This version is performed by [Jeanette Rotstain Yehudayan](#), who was born in Tehran. Her father was a cantor, composer and musician. She left for Israel on her own when she was just 14-years old.

PART 3 — HOLIDAYS

B. Holidays with Special Communal Meaning

SLIDE 23

1. Musa and Esther Celebrate Purim (more [here](#))

SLIDE 24

For Musa and Esther, Purim is a very important holiday. They recall that back in Persia, they and the Jewish community took pride that the Purim story happened there. Indeed, for centuries, thousands of Jews would make a pilgrimage to the city of [Hamadan](#), to sit on the floor by the [tombs of Queen Esther and Mordecai](#) and listen to the reading of Megillat Esther. Musa recalls that when the family could not go to Hamadan, his parents listened to the Megillah in the synagogue, while he and his friends played in the courtyard with small fireworks.

In the Purim story the heroine Queen Esther hides her Jewishness from her husband (the king!), servants, court staff, and the public due to the dangerous climate, either created or deepened by Haman’s machinations. Thus, Esther lived as a secret Jew. This deeply resonates for the Persian Jewish community, especially the Jews of Mashhad. After an 1839 pogrom (occasioned by a [blood libel](#)) in which 36 Jews were killed and 7 girls abducted to become Muslim child-brides, the community publicly converted to Islam. They lived as secret Jews through the 1920’s, during which the Mashhadi Jews

produced at least two [sheikhs](#), 57 [Hajjis](#), and 21 [Karbelais](#). [**NOTE:** For more on the remarkable story of Mashhadi Jewry, [see here](#).]

Discussion:

- ❓ How many of you have heard of this piece of Jewish history?
- ❓ Who records our history?
- ❓ In doing so, how do we know which parts get saved and which parts don't — and on what basis?
- ❓ How are you affected personally by hearing of this history of Mashhadi Jews?

For Jews who still live in Iran, the story gives resolve and courage. The integrity demonstrated by Queen Esther in not turning her back against her Jewish identity is particularly moving for a minority community in one of the more volatile regions of the world.

MUSIC: “Purim, Purim, Purim Lanu”

SLIDE 25

This piyyut, written by [Rabbi Yosef Shalom Gallego](#) (Salonica, d. 1624), consists of quatrains (with rhyme scheme in what is known as the [zejel pattern](#)) with short biblical quotations all ending in and rhyming with “anu.” Each time this recalls the opening verse “Purim, Purim, Purim **lanu**/barukh asher bahar **banu**” (“Purim, Purim, Purim **for us**/blessed be God who chose **us**”) that functions as a refrain between the stanzas. The text recalls the Purim story and miracle, but for the Jews of Persia, especially those of Mashad, this piyyut also recalls their miraculous survival through other Purims. The repetition of “anu” meaning “us” revels in our collective survival. Persian Jews — and all of us — can rightly celebrate with the piyyut: We are still here!

In its form, content and general spirit, this piyyut strongly recalls the Judeo-Spanish song tradition known as “*Coplas de Purim*.” Scholars assume that Gallego had this Ladino genre in mind when composing this Hebrew poem. [**NOTE:** For more on “Purim, Purim, Lanu” [see here](#). Image on slide is of a family from Salonica in Purim costume shortly after making aliyah to Israel. Recall that Rabbi Gallego hailed from Salonica and promoted the music of its Jewish community.]

PLAY: [“Purim, Purim, Purim Lanu”](#)  audio of Jeanette Rotstain-Yehudayan

In Persia, adults and kids alike wear costumes. Musa recalls that men would dress up as the likes of Saddam Hussein, Muammar Qaddafi, and yes, Yasser Arafat, “because there was nothing funnier than a dark, hairy Iranian Jewish man named ‘Ebrahim’ or ‘Musa’ dressed as a Middle Eastern despot.” Little girls dressed as Esther (as they do all over the world).

Queen Esther is believed to have eaten vegetarian food in King Ahasuerus’s unkosher palace. Due to this the Abrahamic household, as is typical of Persian-Jewish households, prepares pareve food on Purim, especially the deeply comforting noodle dish, [Ash-e-Reshteh](#), which is made with lentils, kidney beans, half a dozen different herbs and thick noodles found only at Persian specialty shops and Israeli markets (or on Amazon!).

Yet Esther and Musa recall that *the* ubiquitous Purim treat for Jews all over Iran was [Persian halva](#), which does not use tahini as other Middle Eastern versions of halva do. In addition, she often made [goosh-e-fil](#), [koloocheh](#), and [nan panjereh](#) (crisp, cookie-like fritters, or rosettes, made with iron molds).

Musa remembers that in Iran, barely anyone got drunk on Purim. This was especially true after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which banned alcohol (except for Jews on Shabbat, Passover and during other rituals; recreational Purim drinking didn't count).

PLAY: Choose to share at least one of the following contemporary options to enhance the sense of the Purim experience.

SLIDE 26

OPTION 1 — PLAY: [“Vashti” by Galeet Dardashti](#)  **[NOTE:** *Can play from 0:32–2:01*]

Persian performer Galeet Dardashti wrote an original song celebrating Vashti as a woman who stands up to bullies. She begins this performance by chanting from Megillat Esther to Persian trop.

[Dr. Galeet Dardashti](#) is a renowned singer and lecturer of Persian music. She is the granddaughter of [Yona Dardashti](#), the most renowned singer of classical Persian music in the 1950's and 1960's.

[NOTE: *Yona Dardashti is highlighted in the Stories of Music Lesson “Living Jewishly, Singing Globally: The Origins and Movement of Moroccan and Persian Jewish Communities.”*]

OPTION 2 — PLAY: [“Tenu Shirah v'Zimra”](#) 

“Tenu Shirah v'Zimra” is a piyyut for Purim from Persian Kurdistan. It is only known from manuscripts, and no musical setting for it survives. This melody was written by Kobi Yaakov Alkobi, an Israeli artist.



Again, we can note the importance and popularity of piyyutim, especially in non-Ashkenazic communities.

EXTENSION IDEA: Purim Sebastiano

There has been a tradition for local communities to call for a [special Purim](#) after surviving a near disaster to their survival. The Jews of Morocco celebrate [Purim Sebastiano](#).

The King Dom Sebastiano of Portugal invaded Morocco in 1578. Two crypto-Jews informed the Jewish community that if the invasion succeeded, all the Jews of Morocco would be forcibly converted. At the battle of Alcazarquebir, the Portuguese were defeated and Dom Sebastiano was killed in battle. That day was set aside by the Jews of Morocco as a Purim.

Pair Share:



-  Have you ever ascribed meaning to a “miraculous” or fateful event and its timing?
-  Is there another event or incident in Jewish history that you might suggest for a special Purim? If so, what is it, and why is it a “Special Purim”?

Amir and Miriam love Passover. But Amir and Miriam, as do many North African Jews, extend the holiday spirit immediately following Passover with a holiday called [Maimouna](#).

- ◆ Murky in origin but celebrated widely by Jews of Mediterranean background, Maimouna is held on the evening and day after Passover.
- ◆ Here are a few common explanations, any or all of which may be part of the background of this day:
 - [Maimun \(Abu Nuh\)](#), king of the Djinn, was a spirit who was the ruler of Saturday and associated with the color black and with the metal gold. Djinn are supernatural figures in pre-Arabian religious systems that were incorporated into Islamic mythology and theology.
 - The Arabic word for wealth and good fortune is *ma'amoun*, literally “protected by God.” The word seems linguistically related to the Aramaic and Hebrew *ma-mon*, meaning “money.” Since Passover is the beginning of the new agricultural year, when the world is judged for produce, it is a time to pray for plentiful crops, symbolic of general prosperity.
 - The day may be the [azkarah](#) (anniversary of the death) of [Maimon ben Joseph](#), the father of the great Jewish philosopher [Rambam](#) (acronym of **R**abbi **M**oses **b**en **M**aimon, also known as Maimonides). Maimon was a scholar in his own right who lived in Fez (Morocco) and wrote on Jewish-Islamic relations.
- ◆ On Maimouna single adults receive blessings that they will be married in the year ahead. Women wear their fanciest clothes, girls don white, and children dress in costumes like the Amazighs (native North Africans). Their Arab friends and neighbors share in their celebration, providing flowers, milk, butter, honey, wheat, and other produce for the Jews.
- ◆ Wafers of dough resembling pancakes, called [mufleta](#), are popular.
- ◆ The festival has spread to America and Israel, if only elements of it.

MUSIC: Choose one or both of the following options to play

SLIDE 28

OPTION #1 — PLAY: “*Mose Salio de Misrayim*” either the version [by Vanessa Paloma](#)  or [by the Trio Sefardi](#) 

This song originated with the Jews of Morocco and is particularly known among the Jews of Larache and Ksar el Kebir, two towns of northwestern Morocco. Their Jewish populations are of unknown origin, but their numbers swelled in the wake of the 1492 Spanish Inquisition. The Jews of northwestern Morocco kept their language Haketia (western Judeo-Spanish) alive for centuries. **[NOTE: The language, while endangered, has been experiencing something akin to a renaissance over the last several decades, helped particularly by musicians. See more on [Haketia here](#)] [NOTE: On the [Trio Sefardi](#), see [here](#).]**

OPTION #2 — PLAY: “*Yom L’Yabasha*”  performed by [The Burning Bush](#) [1:25–2:35]

“*Yom L’Yabasha*” is a piyyut written by [Yehudah Halevi](#) (1075–1141) recited on the seventh day of Passover during the blessing for redemption that precedes the morning Amidah. The refrain states that the “redeemed ones sang a new song,” words that are part of the blessing for redemption (the *Mi Chamocho*). The seventh day of Passover is, in traditional reckoning, the anniversary of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, when the redemption from Egypt was finalized and recognized. Miriam, Moses and the Israelites, according to Exodus 15, did indeed “sing a new song” after crossing the sea to safety.

In Moroccan Jewish tradition, the piyyut is sung to the well-known Arabic tune “*Libarach Welyum*.” Singing this piyyut at Maimouna means that while the crossing was marked liturgically in the synagogue during Passover, now people can more freely begin their post-Passover lives by dancing and celebrating their new sense of redemption. This gives Passover’s beginning and end a touch of home celebration of freedom: eating, singing, and celebrating on Seder night in anticipation of redemption and now, having achieved it, celebrating it during Maimuna.

[NOTE: In this audio by the British-based group the Burning Bush, the song is surrounded by “Ya’atof Ani,” another Moroccan piyyut-song about redemption, a key theme of Passover. Again, this audio indicates the widespread pleasure communities have in piyyutim and their music, especially in non-Ashkenazic communities.]

IV. CODA/CONCLUSION (Weaving Our Learning Threads Together)

SLIDE 29

What an exciting journey we have taken so far! As we get to the end of our time together on this lesson, let’s consider how much Moroccan and Persian culture and heritage we have explored.

- ❓ **What do you remember?**
- ❓ **What have you learned about Moroccan or Persian Jewish culture?**
- ❓ **What musicians and music stand out?**

[NOTE: Instructor should catalog responses where everyone can see them.]

We have seen how:

- ♦ Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities have kept Shabbat (at home and at synagogue), holidays, and life cycle events (britot milah/circumcisions; weddings) in accordance with Jewish traditions.
- ♦ Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities have found ways to enrich their experience by expanding that tradition with new rituals and customs (e.g. pre-wedding rituals [henna; public baths]; specific brit milah customs [use of sand; formal decoration of Elijah’s Chair]; sharing the cup for Shabbat kiddush; pilgrimages to the tombs of Jewish figures Esther and Mordecai]).
- ♦ Moroccan Jews had henna ceremonies as part of their ritual customs and celebrations leading up to the wedding. Such rituals had their own dress and food, as well as music.
- ♦ Persian Jews had five ritual celebrations before the wedding, including one at the public baths. At such occasions, the *motrebs*, the popular musicians, most of whom were Jews, were important to the celebration.
- ♦ Piyyutim (and z’mirot) are much beloved by the Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities. In addition to well-known piyyutim, they each have a tradition of writing new ones. Finally, the music of the piyyutim is part of their cultural experience.

- ◆ The brit milah ritual and celebration, for both Moroccan and Persian Jews, helps connect the community members to their heritage, history, community, and God, and yet has elements that are distinctive to it and which derive from their sociocultural milieu. So, for example, Moroccan Jews place sand near the *mohe*l to emphasize the idea of fertility, while Persian Jews both formally consecrate and adorn the Chair of Elijah.
- ◆ Many of those specific traditions had analogues in the other cultures in which these Jewish communities lived (e.g. henna traditions among the Amazigh).
- ◆ The music of Moroccan and Persian Jewish communities arises out of, appropriates, and extends the music of the cultures in which these communities live.
- ◆ The melodies are sometimes distinct settings to familiar songs or prayers (e.g. “*En Kelohenou*”; “*Tzur Mishelo*”), but are sometimes particular to these communities (e.g. “*Mose Salo de Misrayim*”).

Pair Share:

- ❓ **What have you personally gotten out of this exploration of Moroccan and Persian Jewish lifecycle events and holidays through their music?**

OUTRO

SLIDE 30

As we leave, we watch a video and listen to “*Ya’alah Ya’alah*.” The piyyut, by [Israel Najara](#) (c.1555–c.1625), is a love song sung at many occasions but perhaps most commonly at the birth of a daughter or at a bat mitzvah. Moroccan Jews also sing it on Shabbat of *Parashat Bo* (Exodus 10:1–13:16). The piyyut is performed by the [New Jerusalem Orchestra](#) at the 2010 [Israel Festival](#) and features [Rabbi Haim Louk](#). The New Jerusalem Orchestra draws on African and Middle Eastern music (especially North African Andalusian music) and performs it with a jazz sensibility.

This piece seems to sum up and synthesize our journey. It shows:

- ◆ a devotion to tradition through the choice of a religious piyyut;
- ◆ a love of musical heritage by the use of (and highlighting) the ney, a simple, long, end-blown flute. This instrument has been in continual use for 4,500–5,000 years;
- ◆ the acculturation to modern musical esthetics with the move toward a jazz arrangement, and with the trumpet solo;
- ◆ the presence of kippah-wearing and non-kippah wearing musicians;
- ◆ the sheer joy of Jewish living, particularly reveling in the journey of tradition and change musically and culturally;
- ◆ the ending which fades but does not end, suggesting to us perhaps that the journey does not end, it continues with us, through us, and beyond us.

PLAY: “[Ya Alah Ya Alah](#)” 

Enjoy! // שלום! // L’hit-ra’ot! // See you soon!

SLIDE 31