



Elohai

by Kobi Oz



הסוכנות היהודית לארץ ישראל
Jewish Agency for Israel

80

1

אתה אל אלוהי אתה אל אלוהי
אתה אל קבץ נדחי ישראל אלוהי
קבץ נדחינו מארבע כנפות הארץ
ושלח משיחנו מלכנו דוד בן פרץ

I have so much to tell you, yet you know
everything

I have so many requests to ask of you, but you
anyway want the best for me

I give you a little smile for every thing of beauty I
notice, impressive or delicate

And I'm a bit embarrassed – dunno what to call
you – Elohim or Elokim?

**I have so so so so many thankyou's standing
in line at your door, but my thankyou's always
come out corny**

**I have so so so so so many requests to ask of
you, though I'm basically fine.**

Lord if you hear my prayer maybe you can send
my love to my Grandfather

Tell him that the Sephardi moderation he
maintained has been replaced by zealotry
and extremism

But despite everything, tolerance is bubbling
beneath the surface

Look how people are bit by bit leaving behind
the tension and in the end just want to be united

In this great synagogue called the Land of
Israel Where everyone is welcome to look up at
the heavens, pray for rain, and watch out for
missiles

**I have so so so so many thankyou's standing
in line at your door, but my thankyou's always
come out corny**

**I have so so so so so many requests to ask of
you, though I'm basically fine.**

יש לי כל כך הרבה דברים לספר לך ואתה הרי הכל יודע
יש לי הרבה בקשות לבקש ממך אבל אתה הרי הפץ
בטובתי ממילא

אני נותן לך חיוך קטן על כל דבר יפה שבו אני מבחין,
מרשים או עדין.

ואני קצת נבוך אנילא יודע איך לקרוא לך, אלוהים או
אלוקים.

2

יש לי המון תודות תודות תודות עומדות בתור מול
דלתך אבל תודות יוצאות לי קיטש.
יש לי מלא בקשות בקשות בקשות לבקש
ממך למרות שאצלי בסה"כ הכל בסדר.

אלוהי אם אתה שומע תפילתי אולי אפשר
למסור ד"ש לסבא שלי.

תגיד לו שהמתינות הספרדית שבה הוא דגל
התחלפה בקנאות, קיצוניות.

אבל למרות הכל הסובלנות רוחשת מתחת לפני השטח,
תראה לאט לאט אנשים עוזבים את המתח ורוצים בסך
הכל להיות ביחד,

3

4

5

בבית הכנסת הגדול הזה שנקרא ארץ ישראל פה
כולם מוזמנים להביט אל השמיים להתפלל
לגשמים לפחד מטילים.

יש לי המון תודות תודות תודות עומדות בתור
מול דלתך אבל תודות יוצאות לי קיטש.
יש לי מלא בקשות בקשות בקשות לבקש
ממך למרות שאצלי בסה"כ הכל בסדר.

אתה אל אלוהי אתה אל אלוהי
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1

"You are the Lord my G-d

You are the Lord who gathers the scattered of Israel my G-d

Gather our scattered from four corners of the earth

And send the Messiah our King David son of Peretz"

2

In writing, we may also hesitate between G-d, or inserting the 'ו'... Do you share the singer's discomfort with naming G-d? Do you find yourself searching for other words or concepts that fit your understanding better?

האם אתם שותפים לאי נוחות של הזמר לגבי שמו של ה' האם אתם מוצאים את עצמכם מחפשים מילים אחרות, או מושגים אחרים לתאר את שם האל - כאלו שמתאימים יותר לתפיסת עולמכם?

3

What does 'basically fine' mean? In what way do you see yourself as 'basically fine'? If you were to look at Israel, would you say that Israel is 'basically fine'?

מה זאת אומרת 'בסך הכל בסדר'? באיזה אופן אתם רואים את עצמכם בסך הכל בסדר? אם ביחס שלכם לישראל הייתם אומרים ש"ישראל בסך הכל בסדר"?

4

Kobi Oz talks of the way in which his Grandfather – a Rabbi who made aliya from Tunisia – would not force his religiosity on his grandchildren, and always searched for the compromise rather than the conflict on religious issues. This is a familiar trope in mizrachi families – families whose roots are in Arab lands. To the ear of a secular Israeli listening to this song today, moderation and tolerance on religious matters would be a rare experience.

Have you experienced extremism or intolerance on your Jewish journey? What are your opinions? Have you heard of any examples of religious extremism or intolerance in Israel? Do you appreciate the degree to which this issue is pivotal in shaping Israeli society?

קובי אוז מרבה לדבר על הדרך שבה סבו - רב שעלה ארצה מטוניס - לא כפה את 'דתיותו' על נכדיו, ותמיד חיפש פשרה במקום עימות בענייני דת. זהו סיפור מוכר במשפחות מזרחיות. לאזונו של ישראלי חילוני שמקשיב לשיר הזה היום, מתינות וסובלנות דתית בזירה הציבורית אינן חוויות שכיחות... האם חוויתם קיצוניות או חוסר סובלנות במסגרת החיים היהודיים שלכם? כיצד זה השפיע על הזהות היהודית שלכם?

האם שמעתם על דוגמאות של קיצוניות דתית בישראל? האם אתם מבינים כיצד סוגיה זו משפיעה באופן מכריע על החברה הישראלית?

5

Kobi conjured up the idea of the Land of Israel as a 'great, or large, synagogue'. What does this image do for the way you relate to Israel? Would you choose an alternative image to sum up what Israel means for you? Is it significant that the phrase is 'Land' of Israel, and not 'State' of Israel?

קובי יצר כאן דימוי של ארץ ישראל כ"בית הכנסת הגדול". כיצד דימוי זה מסתדר עם הדימויים האחרים שלכם ביחס לישראל? האם הייתם בוחרים דימוי אחר כדי לסכם את משמעותה של ישראל עבורכם? האם זה משמעותי שקובי משתמש במושג 'ארץ' ישראל ולא 'מדינת' ישראל? מדוע?

60 seconds on..... Kobi Oz was born in Sderot, in the South of Israel, in the late 60's. He began his career as a 15 year old, playing traditional Moroccan music for the band *Sfatayim*. He then formed Teapacks, a band famous for blending Mizrachi music into mainstream Israeli pop, while making witty social comment. With Teapacks he wrote and was lead singer on their 10 albums, even representing Israel in the Eurovision Song Contest with Push the Button. After the break-up of Teapacks, Kobi formed *Mizmorei Nevuchim* – Psalms of the Perplexed – to present the music he has written since 'soaking himself in the rich marinade of Judaism'.

60 seconds on..... Kobi talks of how he was in Tel Aviv one Yom Kippur. He came across a group of people who had started praying in the middle of the cross-road between Dizengoff and King George Street. Ordinarily this is a busy commercial crossing but on Yom Kippur was empty of cars. He joined the prayers as more and more people gathered. As he looked around, at religious and secular praying together next to a (temporarily) closed shopping mall in the centre of Tel Aviv – he was struck with this image of the Land of Israel as one large synagogue.

60 שניות על.... קובי מספר שהיה בתל אביב ביום כיפור. באמצע הכביש בין קינג ג'ורג' ודיזנגוף, מצא קבוצה של מתפללים. הוא הצטרף יחד עם אחרים. כאשר הסתכל מסביבו, עלה הדימוי.

60 seconds on... Kobi's grandfather was a paytan – a writer and singer of piyutim (hymns). On arriving in Israel, and realizing that piyutim were not in the mainstream of Israel culture, he recorded all of his piyutim onto cassettes that were found after his death. For more about the renaissance of piyutim, go to piyut.org.il

60 שניות על.... סבו של קובי היה פייטן. בהגעו לישראל, הבין שפיוטים אינם חלק מההגמוניה של התרבות הישראלית. מחשש שהפיוטים יעלמו, הקליט הסב את כל פיוטיו בקלטות שנמצאו לאחר מותו. כדי להתעמק בכל הקשור לפיוטים - : piyut.org.il

Israeli Rock Finds Religion

The New Wave Sweeping the Holy Land

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By Robbie Gringras

'I feel like a fish that spent its entire life in an aquarium and has suddenly discovered the sea,' Kobi Oz enthused, prior to going onstage with his new set, "Psalms for the Perplexed," all of it written after several years of his "soaking in the rich marinade of Judaism."

The excitement of Oz, former singer-songwriter of the Israeli super-band Teapacks, is now shared by artists throughout the country. The riches of Jewish culture are being plundered and exalted, thrown into rap, rock, and reggae, to the delight of a hungry audience. "Israelis are realizing that Zionism is only one chapter of the Jewish story. Now we want to enjoy the whole book," Oz concluded gleefully.

It is not as if the language of the Bible or Talmud is foreign to secular Israelis. Notwithstanding the cruel characterization of the general populace as "Hebrew-speaking goyim," even the most secular students study Jewish history, Bible, and Jewish thought. Yet, few imagined that this rich culture might be shared by anyone other than the strictly Orthodox. In the past few years, all of this has changed. Throughout the Israeli pop world, from the Israeli version of "American Idol," to mainstream radio, to illegal downloads, the language, ideas and character of ancient Jewish texts are suddenly common currency. Funk rap band HaDag Nachash signed off its latest disc with an electronic adaptation of a psalm. Rock legend Meir Banai recently brought out "Hear My Voice," which is entirely made up of adaptations of ancient *piyutim* (hymns) and went platinum within a month. Even the annual Children's Song Festival features top star Shai Gabso singing, "Hey! You have a *kippah* on your head..." which is a bit like having Bono going to the Irish equivalent and singing about a crucifix on a T-shirt.

So what's happening? Has secular Israel gone *frum*?

The answer is far more complex, fascinating and hopeful. It would seem that unexpectedly, unpredictably and in often contradictory ways, Jewish learning and literacy has become a significant part of Israeli popular culture — regardless of belief or observance.

Oz sees this blending of the traditional and the modern, of the textual and the personal, as an inspiring liberation. "As the Zionist narrative plays a lesser role in our lives, it leaves room for us to create a new model: What it is to be a Jew in the Land of Israel." With typical mischievous Oz honesty, he sings to God, but admits "I'm not sure what to call you — *Elohim*, or *Elokim*?" His songs tell of his fears of being religiously transformed by immersing himself in a Jerusalem mikveh. "How much of this is megalomania?" he wonders, "How much is it anthropology? How much is it guilt? How much because my world is dirty?" In the end, he emerges, relieved to find himself unchanged, neither in his realism nor in his half-superstitious faith:

I get out and towel down

Where did I put my glasses?

Still feel like myself, thank God...

The story of Shuli Rand is far more dramatic. Rand left his Orthodox upbringing to become a leading stage and screen actor. After several years at the height of his career, he left acting and left the secular life for the ultra-Orthodox world. Eight years later, he returned to the screen in Haredi black garb, starring in *"Ushpizin"* alongside his wife (the only woman with whom he could allow himself to act).

Last year, we discovered that the man also could sing. Rand emerged with a brand new solo musical set, *"A Good Point."* A kind of Haredi Tom Waits, he strums soul-searching songs to the heavens, sings of theological debates with secular friends. His songs are not saved for the Haredi ghetto though: They are played on state radio, enjoyed by secular and religious alike. A common searching and a shared grappling with Israeliness, modernity and Judaism seems to be far more compelling and uniting than denominational definitions would have us believe.

Take a performance of Etti Ankri: Between her songs, she will tell a Hasidic story from Poland before launching into her famous midrash song about the Exodus from Egypt, full of the rhythms of her Mizrachic roots. As if this Ashkenazic-Mizrachic combination weren't enough, Ankri stands there, picking on her guitar, swaying in a long dress and the head-covering of a religious woman, singing to a mixed audience of men and women. Religious consistency is suspended here, all separations between "kinds" of Jews dance together in the music.

While Ankri once admitted she is happiest "just singing to God," Alma Zohar, voted Israel's best newcomer to the music scene last year, insists she is "far more free-style." Jewish texts are as much a part of her cultural heritage as folk and reggae. When she sings the story of her divorce in *"A Second Babylonian Exile,"* she refers as much to the Babylon of Marley as to the Babylon of the Talmud. Yet she is now creating in a society that hears both cultural references, both of which resonate in different directions. No one was thrown by the way the chorus of her latest single, *"Know,"* comes directly from Pirke Avot, Ethics of the Fathers: "My life itself makes the mix," she explained.

It may be this very "mix" that one of Zionism's early thinkers, Ahad Ha'am, had in mind for the nascent state. Not only did Jews need to adapt to the modern world of the Enlightenment, he suggested, but so, too, did Judaism. In mixing and smudging the secular and the religious, East and West, the Hebrew language and top artists, it could be that the Israeli music scene is finally beginning to play a new Jewish melody.

Robbie Gringras is the artist-in-residence at Makom in the Education Dept of the Jewish Agency for Israel. He blogs at www.makom.haaretz.com.