



# Prayer of the Secular

Words and music by Kobi Oz



הסוכנות היהודית לארץ ישראל  
Jewish Agency for Israel

makōm מקום

Israel. In Real Life

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Father, oh merciful Father  
Be to me a trusted soul-mate  
Cushion my heart in your faith  
Lend to me awe at the sound of your name

I never found myself a teacher  
and my laws are improvised  
When I am in distress I take a pill  
I made great progress  
(descendant of monkeys)  
And for all my weaknesses  
my parents are to blame  
And there's no well-ploughed furrow,  
it's a multi-lane highway  
That leads to the general mall  
And if a miracle happens  
it's really no big deal  
Doesn't happen because of me

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That's how I prayed at a Jewish minyan  
Next to me a Haredi trembled  
a volcano of fears  
For the sake of G-d he is a systematic robot  
Hugely sweaty,  
blessed with (many) children  
Next to us a National Orthodox  
who worships dust  
And for all his invasion of the past  
He praises battle-dress as if the battle's won  
And we all live by his sword  
An immigrant and caretaker  
decorated in a hunched back  
A reform Jew with a brand new cover,  
or a different book.  
A traditional and his lad  
Bar Mitzvah boy  
Kuzaris without candies

אָבא הוּי אָב הַרְחָמֵן  
הִיָּה לִי יָדִיד נֶפֶשׁ נְאֻמָּן  
רַפֵּד לְבִי בְּאַמוּנָתְךָ  
תֵּן בִּי יִרְאָה לְמִשְׁמַע שְׁמִיךָ

לֹא עָשִׂיתִי לִי רַב וְחוֹקוֹתַי הֵן  
אֶלְתוֹר  
כְּשֶׁאֲנִי בְּמִצּוּקָה אֲנִי לוֹקֵחַ כְּדוֹר  
מֵאֲד הַתְּקַדְמָתִי (מוֹצְאֵי מְקוֹפִים)  
וּבְכָל חוֹלְשׁוֹתַי אֲשֵׁמִים הַהוֹרִים  
וְאִין אֵיזָה תָּלַם יֵשׁ כְּבִישׁ מְהִיר רַב  
מִסְּלוּלֵי  
הַמּוֹבִיל אֶל הַקְּנִיּוֹן הַכְּלָלִי  
וְאִם מִתְרַחֵשׁ נִס זֶה לְגַמְרֵי לְגַמְרֵי  
סִתְמִי  
לֹא קוֹרָה בְּגִלְלִי

אָבא הוּי אָב הַרְחָמֵן  
הִיָּה לִי יָדִיד נֶפֶשׁ נְאֻמָּן  
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1 כֶּךָ הַתְּפַלְלָתִי בְּמִנְיַן יְהוּדִים  
לְצַדִּי חֲרָדִי רָעַד גָּעַשׁ פְּחָדִים  
כִּי לְמַעַן הַשֵּׁם הוּא רוֹבּוֹט שִׁיטָּתִי  
2 מִיִּזְעַ כְּמוֹתִי, מְכוֹנֵת יְלָדִים  
לִידְנוּ דָתִי לְאִמִּי שְׁסוּגֵד לְעַפְרָה  
3 וַיִּמְרַב הַתְּפַלְשׁוֹת בְּעֶבֶר  
מִתְהַלֵּל הַחוּגֵר כְּמִשִּׁיל חֲגוּרוֹ  
וְכִלְנוּ חַיִּים עַל חֲרָבוֹ  
עוֹלָה וְשִׁמְשׁ מְעַטֵּר חֲטוּטָרֵת  
רְפוּרְמֵי בְּשֵׁנוֹי גְבֵרֵת אוֹ בְּשֵׁנוֹי  
4 הָאֲדָרֵת  
מְסֻרָתִי וְנִעְרוֹ  
חֲתָן גִּיל הַמְצָאוֹת  
5 כּוֹזְרִים חֲשׂוּכֵי מִמְתָּקִים

And from behind there is  
 a wild rustling and whispering  
 Headscarves and wigs and hair-do's  
 For on the other side of the divide  
 lifts the sensuous sound  
 The feminine voice  
 Of the non-counted

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai wept from on  
 high out of sadness, or maybe happiness  
 And the rain fell or he shed a tear  
 A sigh escaped my heart  
 All are thy students, Powerful Hammer,  
 Candle of Israel, Right-hand Pillar.  
 Bless thy children of all kinds,  
 both religious and also secular

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מֵאַחֲרָיִךְ יֵשׁ רִחַשׁ וְלַחֲשׁ חֲפָשִׁי  
 מִטְפָּחוֹת וּפִאוֹת וְעֲצוּב מִסְפָּרוֹת  
 כִּי מֵעֵבֶר פְּרָגוֹד רָם הַקּוֹל הַחוֹשֵׁי  
 קֶם הַקּוֹל הַנְּשִׁי  
 שֶׁל הֵלֵא נִסְפָּרוֹת.

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רַבֵּן יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכַּי בָּכָה מִלְמַעְלָה  
 מִצַּעַר, אוֹלֵי מִשְׂמָחָה  
 וְהִגִּישׁ יָרֵד אוֹ דְמָעָה הוּא מָחָה.

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מִלְבִּי נִפְלְטָה אֲנָחָה,  
 כָּלֵם תִּלְמִידֶיךָ פְּטִישׁ הַחֲזֵק, גֵּר  
 יִשְׂרָאֵל, עֲמוּד הַיְמִינִי  
 בְּרַךְ אֶת בְּנֶיךָ מִכָּל הַגּוֹוֹנִים גַּם דְּתִי  
 גַּם חִלּוּנִי.

אָבָא הוּי אָב הַרְחֵמֶן  
 הִיָּה לִי יָדִיד נֶפֶשׁ נֶאֱמָן  
 רִפֵּד לְבִי בְּאֲמוּנָתְךָ  
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1. Haredi – Ultra-Orthodox. The literal translation of ‘haredi’ would be ‘quaker’, or ‘trembler’.
2. The phrase “blessed with children” is now, among other things, a political phrase. It recalls the fact that large families are eligible for significant government subsidies, far more per child than small families.
3. Here the reference is to the religious settlers who value the land of the Bible. The continued settlement of Biblical lands on the West Bank is, in this song, blamed for Israel’s continuing wars with her neighbours.
4. Here Kobi Oz raises a question as to whether Reform Judaism has reformed Judaism, or created an entirely different religion.
5. The Kuzari nation, that legend has it converted to Judaism after the persuasions of Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, was a blond nation. Sephardi legends have it that the Ashkenazim are descended from the Kuzaris. The tradition of throwing candies at a Bar Mitzvah is a Sephardi tradition. Hence if you are a descendent of the Kuzaris, you will be without candies...
6. A Jewish prayer quorum requires 10 people to pray together. In orthodox and ultra-orthodox Judaism, this number refers only to men: women are not counted.
7. The story of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai that Kobi Oz draws on is from Kobi Oz draws on is from the Babylonian Talmud Gittin 55b-57a.

When the Romans were besieging Jerusalem, extremists were in control of the population of the Holy City. In order to hasten the coming of the messiah, these zealots even burned all the food stores of Jerusalem.

It was at this point that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai decided to sneak out of the city. The Roman commander Vespasian came upon him, and Yochanan ben Zakkai cried out: "Greetings, Emperor of Rome!" Before Vespasian could explain to ben Zakkai that he was not the Emperor, a messenger from Rome arrived with the decree naming Vespasian Emperor. Vespasian was so impressed with ben Zakkai's prophetic powers, he offered to grant the Rabbi's any request. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai did not ask for Jerusalem to be saved, or for the Holy Temple to be spared destruction. Instead, he asked for "Yavneh and her sages" – the permission to establish a Jewish scholars' academy in the city of Yavneh.

In Yavneh, following the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, these scholars built the Jewish religion anew. This religion would have no centralizing Temple, nor would it be ruled by the hereditary Priestly caste: it would be, in Kobi Oz' words, a privatized religion, interpreted differently in different places. The multi-denominational, multi-customed Judaism that we know today was set in motion – so Kobi would maintain – by the fateful decision of Yochanan ben Zakkai.

8. Kobi Oz sees Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai as something of a 'Patron Saint' of Pluralism. He is so pluralist, suggests Kobi, that he even has three names!

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- In what way is this a personal prayer, in your opinion?
  - In what way is this a collective prayer, in your opinion?
  - Do you see the first verse as being critical of this non-religious approach to life?

**Kobi Oz sees Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai as something of a 'Patron Saint' of Pluralism. He is so pluralist, suggests Kobi, that he even has three names! As such, this song offers a vision of pluralism in action. In the song/prayer's minyan, the protagonist prays alongside those with whom he strongly disagrees and even dislikes.**

- Do you accept this as an ideal vision of pluralism and tolerance?
- Do current political issues find their way into your prayers?
- Is Jewish communal prayer the place for thinking about 'tough stuff'?  
**Maybe this is another unexpected consequence of the lack of separation between Religion and State in Israel – not only does religion insert itself into politics, but politics also inserts itself into religion!**