**MINYANIM: BULGARIA**

**Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews**

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1. **Introduction:**
Jewish culture developed throughout history and around the world. While Jewish people from all over the world share commonalities that unify them, each world Jewish community also incubated its own art, music, liturgy, and customs that is unique to them. And though each distinct community or locale boasts their own traditions, the broadest divide in customs is between the “Sephardic” and “Ashkenazic” communities.

The term “Sephardim” refers to the Jewish communities that descended from Jews who lived in Spain and Portugal before the Spanish Inquisition. More commonly, however, the term “Sephardim” is used in a wider sense to include most Jews of Asian and African origin, who use a Sephardic style of liturgy. Sephardim traditionally pray using Minhag Sefarad, which is quite similar to Nusach Edot haMizrach (liturgy of the Eastern Congregations).

The term “Ashkenazim” refers to Jews descended from the medieval Jewish communities along the Rhine in Germany from Alsace in the south to the Rhineland in the north. Though Ashkenazim are literally “German Jews,” the term now refers to all Jews from who identify with these traditions, though they span Western, Central, and Eastern European descent. Most Jews from Europe identify as Ashkenazi, with the noted exception of communities near the Mediterranean.

The Jewish community of Bulgaria dates back to antiquity, and is made up of both Sephardic Jews (who traditionally spoke Ladino), as well as Ashkenazic Jews. As such, it is fitting that as a local Bulgarian group of Jewish leaders, you would choose to take a deeper look into the ways in which both communities differ, and where they might connect.

**Further reading:**
2. **Music**

Ashkenazi Jews developed a distinct culture and spread out eastwards through Central Europe into Slavic lands. Ashkenazi cantorial song reached a very high level of sophistication and ornamentation. The vernacular language was Yiddish, based on medieval German with Slavic and Hebrew words and written in Hebrew script. Yiddish language influenced their popular music. Yiddish language and music travelled with Ashkenazi Jews as they moved to the new world. A musician was called a klezmer.

Sephardic music combines lilting melodies in minor keys played on stringed instruments, usually guitar or oud, along with hand drums and flute. Its more Arabic stylings exude a feeling of floating. The older Spanish style feels more rooted. Traditional topics are liturgical or romantic\(^1\). The lingua franca of Sephardi Jews was Ladino (or Judeo-Spanish) which was based on medieval Castilian and written in Hebrew script. The Ladino ballad repertoire was a very important song tradition transmitted through the female line.

**Israeli Music:**

While many Israeli performers are internationally recognized, the vast repertoire of music for concert and stage by Israeli composers is still unfamiliar in the UK and beyond. Unique to Israeli music is the particular symbiosis of East and West and the assimilation of elements from diverse traditions, the strands of Jewish traditions, Arab and Middle Eastern music, with Western approaches\(^2\).

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3. Shalom Aleichem

On Shabbat, upon returning from the synagogue of Friday night, the following Kabbalistic *piyut* (liturgical poem) is said, each verse is customarily sung three times:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>Transliteration</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>שלום עלייכם מלךיכי משכחת מלאכי מעליון מלאכי השרים הקדושים</td>
<td>Sha-lom a-lei-chem, mal-a-chei ha-sha-reit, mal-a-chei el-yon, mi-me-lech ma-l'chei ha-m'la-chim, ha-ka-dosh ba-ruch hu.</td>
<td>Peace unto you, ministering angels, messengers of the Most High, of the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>והשם מלאכי מעליון מלאכי השרים הקדושים</td>
<td>Bo-a-chem l'sha-lom, mal-a-chei ha-sha-lom, mal-a-chei el-yon, mi-me-lech ma-l'chei ha-m'la-chim, ha-ka-dosh ba-ruch hu.</td>
<td>May your coming be in peace angels of peace, messengers of the Most High, of the supreme King of kings, the Holy one, blessed be He.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>והשם מלאכי מעליון מלאכי השרים הקדושים</td>
<td>Bar-chu-ni l'sha-lom, mal-a-chei ha-sha-lom, mal-a-chei el-yon, mi-me-lech ma-l'chei ha-m'la-chim, ha-ka-dosh ba-ruch hu.</td>
<td>Bless me with peace, angels of peace, messengers of the Most High, of the supreme King of kings, the Holy one, blessed be He.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>והשם מלאכי מעליון</td>
<td>Tsei-t'chem l'sha-lom, mal-a-chei ha-sha-lom, mal-a-chei el-yon, mi-me-lech ma-l'chei ha-m'la-chim, ha-ka-dosh ba-ruch hu.</td>
<td>May your departure be in peace, angels of peace, messengers of the Most High, of the supreme King of kings, the Holy one, blessed be He.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Some Sephardic communities add a penultimate verse:*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>והשם מלאכי מעליון והשם מלאכי מעליון מלאכי השרים הקדושים</td>
<td>Be-shiv-te'chem l'sha-lom, mal-a-chei ha-sha-lom, mal-a-chei el-yon, [mi]-me-lech ma-l'chei ha-m'la-chim, ha-ka-dosh ba-ruch hu.</td>
<td>May your rest here be in peace, angels of peace, messengers of the Most High, [of] the supreme King of kings, the Holy one, blessed be He.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The poem was written by the kabbalists of Safed in the late 16th or early 17th century and was incorporated quickly into virtually every Jewish community around the world. The term “Shalom Aleichem!”, “May peace be upon you” is also a traditional greeting used when two Jews meet. Shalom, translated as “peace”, comes from the Hebrew word “shalem”, which means complete. On the most basic level, the songs asks that our homes be blessed with peace. Yet on another level, the songs asks for completeness: that our lives, and even the world, is complete on Shabbat.
If you’d like to take a further look at the meaning of Shalom Aleichem, take a look at the Jewish tradition that the poem is based on:

Tractate Shabbat 119b of the Talmud relates the following Aggadah:

Rabbi Jose the son of Judah said, two ministering angels -- one good angel, and one "evil" (prosecuting) angel -- accompany a person home on Friday night from the synagogue.

When they arrive home, if they find a candle lit, the table set, and beds arranged nicely, the good angel says, "May it be G-d's will that next Shabbat be the same," and the evil angel is compelled to respond, "Amen!"

Otherwise, [if the home is not prepared in honor of Shabbat,] the evil angel says, "May it be G-d's will that next Shabbat be the same," and the good angel is compelled to respond, "Amen!"
4. Shalom Aleichem set to Music

Play the 2 classical versions of Shalom Aleichem below (one Sephardi, and one Ashkenazi) for the participants. Make sure they can detect the stylistic differences between the two. Point out that while the Ashkenazi music has a European sound, the Sephardi music is more Eastern/Oriental in sound, as well as in choice of musical instruments.

**Classical Versions:**

- **Classical Ashkenazi:** (Cantorial) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gs9Lfh-8Y60](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gs9Lfh-8Y60)
  
  This tune was composed by the American Rabbi **Israel Goldfarb** on May 10, 1918 while sitting near the Alma Mater statue in front of Low Memorial Library at Columbia University. Goldfarb's work is often presumed to be a traditional Hasidic melody. He wrote in 1963, "The popularity of the melody traveled not only throughout this country but throughout the world, so that many people came to believe that the song was handed down from Mt. Sinai by Moses."


Introduce participants to the following diagram. As you listen to each of the classical versions, mark them along this range, with the Ashkenazic song all the way to the left, and the Sephardic one all the way to the right.

![Diagram of Shalom Aleichem versions]

Over the centuries of Diaspora Jewish life, the various world Jewish communities had little, if any, opportunity to mix and share cultures. In this way, The State of Israel has become the ultimate case study for the blending of world Jewish cultures. After about a century since the **aliyot** (mass-immigrations to Israel) began bringing Jews from all over the world to one country, a distinctly Israeli culture has developed, with influences from the variety of cultures that make up its population.

Play the following **Israeli** versions of Shalom Aleichem for the participants. Ask them to map out on the diagram above where they think each composition belongs along the Ashkenazi ↔ Sephardi continuum. Their answers will likely show just how “in the middle” Israeli art has become, how much it draws from each cultural influence to create something unlike the classics, and yet, blatantly inspired by them.

I have included some notes with each of the songs for your background knowledge.
1. **Shai Gabso**: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tCQ3UbiQP8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tCQ3UbiQP8)
   - Classic Ashkenazi style, with an Israeli rock twist. Gabso does not typically play liturgically-inspired music, he is a well known Israeli rock musician.
   - Notice how the crowd reacts to the a-typical, unexpected performance.

2. **Avishai Cohen**: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFNZMxcWdm0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFNZMxcWdm0)
   - Avishai Cohen is a world famous (Israeli) jazz player who "made it" on the NY scene and has received much acclaim for his music. After arriving back in Israel, he decided to start singing as well, and he has since released music containing lyrics in Hebrew, English, Spanish and Ladino.
   - This song was inspired by the traditional “shalom Aleichem” that Cohen grew up hearing his grandfather singing. In the song, Cohen sings together with recordings of his grandfather singing in a his distinct Sephardic style.
     
     *While he was growing up, Cohen’s mother would sing Ladino songs, the Spanish-based language of the Sephardic Jewish tradition, as she went about her day. The sound of her — along with the influence of his father and grandfather singing in the Sabbath and the classical training he received on piano — stuck with him. [http://www.sunjournal.com/encore/story/920997](http://www.sunjournal.com/encore/story/920997)*

3. **Idan Yaniv**: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rf9RvyH3S6w&feature=fvwrel](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rf9RvyH3S6w&feature=fvwrel)
   - This song is extremely unique, in that it begins with a very distinct Sephardic sound, and then, almost shockingly, introduces the classical Ashkenazi melody. The words are sung in a Yemenite accent (one of the strongest Sephardic accents that can be heard in Israel today), and yet the melody is Ashkenazi. What’s more, the music video depicts Sephardi children wearing Ashkenazi/Hasidic garb.
   - What do you think the artist is trying to say by mixing these traditions?

4. **Ehud Banai**: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Utx--eJw73c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Utx--eJw73c)
   - Notice the instrumental at the beginning plays with the traditional Ashkenazic melody, and yet when the vocals come in, they are of a different sound altogether...What does it sound like to you?