

The Outpouring for 'Geshem' by Cantor Moshe Haschel

The Mishna (Rosh Hashanah, chapter 1 mishna 2) tells us that on Sukkot the world is judged for rain. The Talmud (Ta'anit 7a) says in the name of Rav Yosef that the world's dependence on rain for its sustenance is so total that rainfall is compared to the revival of the dead. This is the reason says Rav Yosef, why the Rabbis put the phrase – '*Mashiv Haruach uMorid Hageshem*' – 'He makes the wind to blow and the rain to fall' in the second blessing of the Amida which speaks about Divine Might and concludes with 'Blessed are You, Lord, who revives the dead'.

The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 16a) brings Rabbi Yehuda's view that the world is judged on all aspects already on Rosh Hashanah but the final judgment is sealed for each feature only in its specific time; for grain on Pesach, for fruits of trees on Shavuot and for rain on Sukkot. Rabbi Yehoshua Ibn Shuaib (13th century Spain) in his work 'Derashot al haTorah' (derasha for Shemini Atzeret) explains this notion in connection with rain that the amount of rain that will fall during the coming year is in fact determined already on *Rosh Hashanah*. However, on Sukkot it is decided where i.e. on which parts of the world it would fall, and how i.e. whether it would be beneficial to the world or otherwise. This idea is reflected in the Liturgical poem '*Af Beri*' by Rabbi Eleazar haKalir recited at the Shemini Atzeret Mussaf repetition. According to tradition *Af Beri* is the name of the angel appointed over rainclouds. The word '*af*' means anger and the word '*beri*' means health alluding in his very name the two ways in which rain can fall.

Our Rabbis say that raining on Sukkot would appear as if G-d doesn't favour our mitzvah of dwelling in the Sukkah, and it is considered a '*siman kelala*' – a sign of curse. It would be therefore inappropriate for us to pray for rain during the first seven days of the Festival.

Only on Shemini Atzeret, when the mitzvah of Sukkah does not apply any longer, we hold the 'Tefilat Geshem', the prayer for rain, at the Mussaf Service.

Shemini Atzeret therefore has a dimension of a Yom Din – a day of judgment. Accordingly, the chazzan wears his white garments for Tefilat Geshem as on Yamin Noraim. This aspect is reflected also on the music for the liturgy of Geshem.



The Nusach (i.e. specific melody for a particular prayer) for the Kaddish before Geshem and the beginning of the Amida repetition and the liturgical poem '*Af Beri*' is very ancient. This tune belongs to a group of melodies categorized as '*Niggunim Missinai*' – 'tunes from Sinai'. These melodies, because of their majestic beauty and ancientness have attained a status of sanctity. They have become an inseparable part of our 'Minhag' and are regarded as if they were given on Mount Sinai.

Other melodies in this group include the Kadishim before Mussaf of Yamim Noraim and Neilah, '*Vehakohanim*' of the *Avodah* Service on Yom Kippur and more. Their dissemination among Ashkenazi Jewry is attributed to Rabbi Yaacov Molin (known as The Maharil) of 14th century Mainz, a major halachic authority and himself a chazzan.

The tune for the Kaddish before Geshem is similar in its melodic material and structure to the tune of the Kaddish before Mussaf on Rosh Hashanah (even some hints to Neilah are present). The musicologist A. Z.

Idelsohn suggests that originally there was one tune used for both occasions and later it branched out as two separate melodies.



Few cantorial compositions convey so beautifully the Piyut (liturgical poem) 'Zechor Av' – 'Remember the Patriarch' as the setting by the famous Yossele Rosenblatt (1882-1933) for the first three stanzas.

The first stanza, appeals to Hashem to remember the merit of our patriarch Abraham 'who was drawn behind you like water'. Rosenblatt utilizes the suppliant Ahava Rabah mode. (a mode is a musical scale that bears a distinctive colour or flavour due to the specific intervals between its notes). The elegant way in which the musical theme is developed is a classic example of the traditional chazzanic utterance ('zogechts' in Yiddish).

The next stanza invokes G-d to remember 'the one born with the tidings of 'Let some water be brought'. This is a reference to Isaac, whose birth was prophesied to Abraham when he offered his hospitality (some water) to the three angels. Here Rosenblatt moves to the brighter major scale to depict the happiness of receiving the good tidings.

The third paragraph pleads, 'Remember the one who carried his staff' referring to Jacob who crossed the Jordan with his staff on his way to Laban. Here the heartfelt melody aptly expresses the phrase 'he dedicated his heart and rolled a stone off a well of water'. This refers to Jacob's dedication and determination in his faith which enabled him to remove single handedly a very heavy stone from the top of a well in order to water Rachel's sheep.

You can hear Rosenblatt's own rendition at the Florida Atlantic University website, in their Judaic Sound Archives where you can listen to about 150 of Rosenblatt's recordings and here is the link: http://faujsa.fau.edu/jsa/search_LP.php?artisttext=rosenblatt&artist=contains&titletext=&title=contains&selectgenre=&selectlanguage=&musiconly=&id=&select=titlea&fetch=25&pagenum=2

(a rare recording on this website is a Rosenblatt rendition of 'E-I Mole Rachamim' (memorial prayer) for the victims of the 'Titanic' (anshei Titanic shenitbeu bayom)

Here in SJWS we sing this beautiful composition in the very exquisite Raymond Goldstein arrangement for chazzan and choir. In fact, the structure of this setting is so much in the classic style of the Shacharit Kedusha 'nusach' that Marc Temerlies and myself adapted it to the Shacharit kedusha for Shemini Atzeret thus giving a flavour of Geshem and anticipating it already at the beginning of the service.



A further Yamim Noraim 'touch' is the use of the High Holydays tune for the Mussaf Kedusha, something I've learned from my teacher Cantor Naftali Herstik. Then we finish with the last Kadish Titkabel again with the same beautiful lilting Yamim Noraim melody thus bringing the 'Yemei Din' - Days of Judgment to an exhilarating conclusion.

May Hashem accept our prayers with love and favour, Amen.