

Pizmonim of the Patriarchs

Melech Rachman (page 168) in the Red Book

Ezra Ashkenazi

This pizmon is a classic in our community. It is the ultimate wedding song. It was written in Aleppo, Syria, circa 1897 by the master poet Rephael Taboush (1830-1918). He wrote it in honor of his student and protégé Moshe Ashear's (1877-1940) wedding to Salha Shamah.

The beautiful melody is in the maqam of Ajam, which is your basic western music scale, and was taken from a popular Arabic song, *Doom Ya Zaman*. The song features family names: Moshe (the groom), Bat Yaacob (daughter of Jacob, the bride), Shaol (Shehade, brother of the groom) and an allusion to Moshe's mother Simcha.

The song is sung at weddings and in synagogue on Shabbat when a groom goes up to the Torah, and for various musical pieces in the services.

Moshe Ashear came to New York in 1912 and immediately was appointed official *hazzan* (cantor) and *koreh* (Torah reader) by the Syrian Sephardic community on the lower east side of Manhattan. He was quite a personality. When he arrived in New York with his family, he was blessed with his fifth child, a boy. Because this was his first child born in America, he affectionately called him *Amerique*. Moshe had a talent for calligraphy which he handed down to his son Sayah, who in turn used this gift to hand write the Torah blessings on parchment and

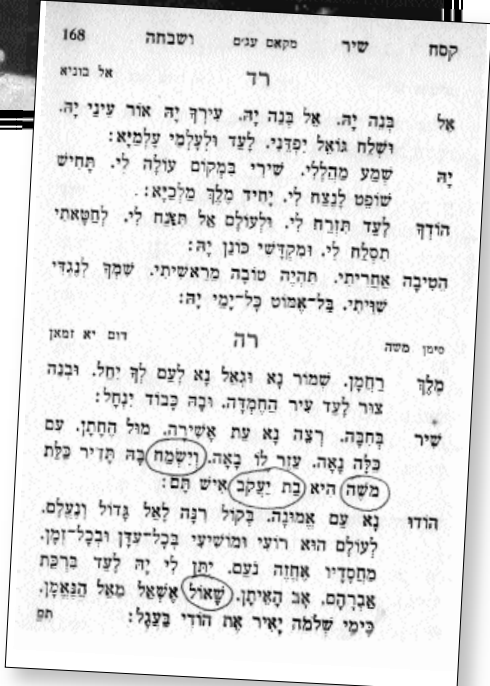


*Standing: Dave, Joseph and Allegra Franco;
Seated: Moshe, Sayah, Mrs. Shamah (Moshe's mother-in-law) and Shehade (Moshe's brother, an accomplished musician);
Standing in front Albert (Amerique);
Photo provided by Morris S. Ashear (grandson of Moshe)*

frame them as gifts to all the various synagogues in the community. Many of these precious items are still used today.

Moshe Ashear composed many pizmonim for community members on their happy occasions, he also wrote songs for various shuls and institutions. His pizmonim are sung every day in our synagogues, schools and homes.

He was so revered and loved by the community, that on the first Sabbath after his passing in 1940, the *tebah* (podium) that he used to serve the community for many years



was left vacant, and Rabbi Jacob Kassin conducted the services from his place at the *hachal* (ark).

Thanks to Joey Mosseri and David M. Betesh (keep singing). □

Ezra Ashkenazie is a community member.