

The Pizmonim Website's Annual Report

David M. Betesh

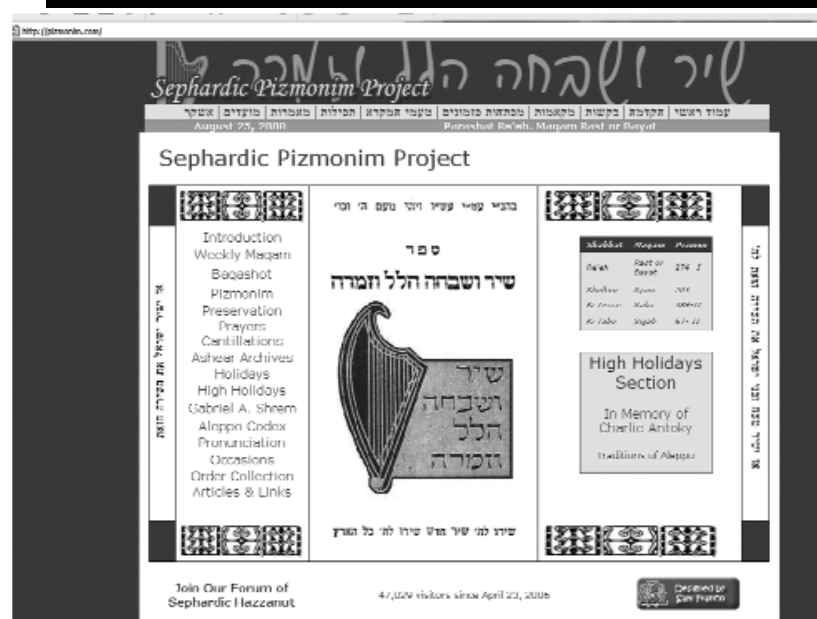
It has become an annual tradition for me to keep tabs, from year to year, on what has been accomplished by the Sephardic Pizmonim Project. I've been doing so with IMAGE Magazine since 2004, and it gives me a nice opportunity to update my visitors on some of the goals that have been accomplished over the last 12 months.

Pizmonim.com, the flagship website of the Sephardic Pizmonim Project, is the online location where people throughout the world can learn all about the liturgical traditions of the Middle Eastern Sephardic Jewish community. The website is dedicated to my great grandfather, Hazzan Gabriel A. Shrem A"H, and is meant to be an offshoot of everything that he taught to the community over the course of his five decade career. Each page of the *Shir Ushbaha Hallel VeZimrah Red Pizmonim Book* can be found on the website, and every attempt is being made to have at least one recording of each song from the book.

This year, a number of things have been accomplished:

- The website is technologically up-to-date with a new format introduced in March of 2008 designed to make website navigation a lot easier and more pleasant. The "ticker" on the bottom of the page allows the page to be more condensed when it is opened, so that you don't have to scroll down to find anything.

- In May 2008, the Sephardic Pizmonim Project collaborated with IMAGE Magazine providing the "Maqam of the Week" feature in the back of each monthly issue on IMAGE's calendar. We are also providing the magazine with informative articles (once every two months) about the "Maqam of the Week" for



each parashah and explanations of them.

- In June 2008, Abie Betesh of the Sephardic Synagogue Youth Minyan conducted the first annual Pizmonim.com contest. Many youth from the community were asked to learn one pizmon really well and were given a few weeks to practice. After the participation of many students, the judges have chosen Michael (Ezra) Tawil as the first place winner of the contest for singing his rendition of the pizmon "Rochev Abim" in Maqam Hijaz on page 485-I.

- In conjunction with the Hazzanut Forum of Mr. Joseph Mosseri, we have established a very comprehensive page called "Ashear's Archive." This page goes through each parashah throughout the year and discusses what the Hazzan Moses Ashear A"H (and occasionally Gabriel Shrem A"H) has done, according to the notes that he has written during the last four years of his life, 1937-1940. This new page serves as an official

rulebook on which tunes and traditions are appropriate for which Shabbats throughout the year. This page is the product of a lot of hard work by Mr. Joseph Mosseri and he deserves a tremendous *Hazaq Ubarukh* for this.

- This year, we have been very intent on providing you with the appropriate holiday pizmonim at least a month in advance of each holiday, on the main page of the website for constant review throughout the month. During times of the year that there are no holidays, we substituted this practice by providing you with pizmonim appropriate with each week's parashah according to Moshe Ashear or Gabriel Shrem.

- With permission of Hazzan Moe Tawil, we now have access to most of the recordings that he has made throughout his career. A few years ago, he released a digitally mastered set of 6 CDs for the members of the community. Many of the pizmonim that he recorded on the CDs were not on the pizmonim web-

Continued on page 2

The Pizmonim...

Continued from page 1

site, so when I asked him about this, he graciously allowed me to use all of his CDs and tapes for this endeavor. At this point, most of his recordings are located in the Pizmonim, Prayer and High Holiday sections.

- The High Holiday section has been updated to include the recordings of Mr. Moe Tawil and many other hazzanim who were previously not on the page. Every attempt has been made to include every song that is used on the High Holidays. This year, the High Holiday page has been dedicated in memory of Mr. Charlie Antoky A"H, a man who loved the *Tefilah* and a man who constantly pursued a life of Torah and mitzvot. Mr. Antoky passed away this past summer. In the past, this page has been dedicated in memory of other esteemed and outstanding members of the community, including Mr. Eddie Mishan A"H and Hacham Selim Dweck A"H.

- At this time last year, we mentioned in IMAGE Magazine how the Pizmonim Preservation Checklist is the official list of which pizmonim we need in order to complete our goal of having every pizmon in the red book. The list started in 2006 with well over 220 missing pizmonim. In 2007's article, we boasted that we had saved 30 songs from that list, leaving us with 190 missing pizmonim. Well this year, as we conclude 2008, we will boast again that we have recovered another 60 missing pizmonim, leaving us with only 130 pizmonim that we are missing. The missing may seem like a lot, but it is not, considering that there are almost 1,000 pizmonim in the book.

- As a website attempting to preserve the melodies of some of the older pizmonim, I have conceded to members of the Sephardic Pizmonim Project committee, to allow original Arabic music recordings on the website, mostly on songs that we don't have the Hebrew recordings to. A special thanks specifically goes to Mr. Morris Arking for providing me with the original Arabic music tapes.

A very special thanks goes out to the following people who have helped me tremendously in finding and recording the missing pizmonim: Isaac Cabasso, Joey Mosseri, Mordechai Nadaf, Moe Tawil, Menahem Mustachi and Irwin Dayan. These individuals were generous enough to spend their time with me, recording the pizmonim that probably only they themselves knew. I hope that they understand how much they are appreciated for sharing their priceless knowledge with us.

I'd also like to thank my associates Rabbi Dr. Ricky Hidary, Sam Franco and Charlie Shrem for their continuous help with the technological aspects of this project. □