## SEPHARDIC HISTORY

## **Pizmonim of the Patriarchs**

Melech Rachman (page 168) in the Red Book

Ezra Ashkenazi

his 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

שיר מקאם עגים ושבחה 168	קסח
רד אל בוניא	
בנה זה. אל בנה זה. עירף זה אור עיני זה. ושלח גואל יפדני. לעד ולעלמי עלמיא:	86
שמע מהללי. שירי במקום עוקה לי. תחיש שומת לואח לי. יחיד מלך מלכיא:	a;
לעד קורח לי. ולעולם אל תאח לי. לחשאתי תסלח לי. ומקדשי כוגן יה:	הוֹדְהָ
אחריתי. תהיה טובה מראשיתי. שקה לנגדי שויתי. בל-אמוט כל-ימי יה:	הטיבה
רה רוםיאזמאן	סימן מי
רַחָּקָן. שמור גָא וּגָאַל גָא לְעַם לְךָ יִחַל. וּבְגָה צור לעד עיר הַחַמְדֶה. וּגָה כָּבוֹד יְנָחָל:	מלך
בְּחָבָה. רְצָה נָא עַת אָשׁירָה. מוּל הָחָתָן. עם כּלָה נָאָה. עזר לו בָאָה.(וְיַשְׁמַח בָּה תָזִיר כּלָת משָה היא בַת יַעַקב אִיש הָם:	שיר
גָא עם אַמּינְה. כְּקוֹל רְנָה לָאַל גָדוֹי (נָאָרָס. לְעוֹלָם הוא רועי ומושיעי בְּכָל־עדָן וּבְּכָל־וֹקו. מַחַסְדָיו אַחָזָה נַעֵם. יַתָּן לִי יָה לְעַד בְרָפַת אַבְרָהָם, אַב הָאִיקו. (שָׁאוֹל) אָשָׁאַל מאל הַנָּאַלָן.	הודו
פימי שלמה יאיר את הודי בעגל: תפ פימי שלמה יאיר את הודי בעגל:	

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.