סדר זמירות ישראל

# Siddur Zemirot Yisrael

## Songs for Shabbat and Festivals

Compiled by Rabbi Dr. Moses Loeb Bamberger (1922)

of Schoenlanke

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# Introduction

The custom of singing songs to God at the festive table is a very old one. In Midrash *Song of Songs Rabba* 8:10 the following statement appears: “When Israel eat and drink and praise the Holy One, they are praiseworthy.”

כשישראל אוכלין ושותים ומברכין ומשבחין ומקלסיים להקב"ה

Physical pleasure is not an end in itself but should serve a higher purpose, enabling increased enjoyment of the festivals and sanctification of the Sabbath.

This festive atmosphere is expressed in songs. Those sung in honor of God should elevate the gathering at the table towards holiness, “a table erected by God.” The meal becomes a *seudat mitzvah*, expressing *simha shel mitzvah* or joy in fulfilling the commandment. And just as they rang out in the past, *zemirot* – the songs – still ring out today in Jewish circles, and are suited for this purpose. They come out of different times and belong to different contexts! Everybody agrees with this: that they were intended to relieve the everyday pains of exile (*golus*) and improve the moods of our dejected army of coreligionists on Sabbaths and festivals. And all of us, when we let these songs ring out in prayer, will feel the power that Jewish melodies exert on large and small.

Similarly, on Friday evening, or Seder night, on Hanukah or Purim, when the Jew hears his Jewish melodies, when the old *nigunim* hit his ears, then his mood changes, his bent-over chest expands, and the clouds which oppress his soul move on.

Our literature is rich with such songs, which were composed for this purpose. Only a small part of them have become known to the general public. Bound collections of *zemirot* have been in existence for a long time, for example, the collection זמירות לשבת ולמוצאי שבת of Rabbi Salomon Luria (Maharshal) (Lublin 1598), or the very prolific composer of יה רבון עלם. Rabbi Israel ben Moshe Nagara published collections of *zemirot* under the title זמירות ישראלBenedig 1599. Besides that, selections of *zemirot* of German and Polish communities appear in many prayer books.

This collection, which my publisher asked me to translate, includes both well-known and other, less-known ones.

The composers of the hymns:

כל מקדש, מנוחה, מה יפית, יום שבת, יום זה מכובד,

And צור משלו

are not known. The names indicated [in the acrostics] Menahem, Moshe or Yitzhak (מנחם, משה, יצחק) appear frequently in our literature. The song מה יפית bears the name of מרדכי בר יצחק, who is (according to Zunz, Synagogue Poetry S.580) probably also the composer of מעוז צור.

The composer of יה רבון עלם is Rabbi Israel ben Moses Nagara (Zunz ibid. S.419).