

SUPPLEMENT

פיוט AS A FORM OF הושענות

It is interesting that after reciting complex פיוטים in the form of סליחות and other פיוטים during ראש השנה and יום כיפור, we end the holiday season with simple פיוטים in the form of הושענות. Because the linguistic style of the הושענות is so simple, Professor Joseph Heinemann of Hebrew University, concludes in his book, *Prayer in the Talmud*, that the הושענות are one of the oldest forms of פיוט.

These poems are extremely primitive; it is difficult to conceive of them as artistic compositions per se. They are not the products of poetic inspiration which came to an individual poet while seated at his writing desk. They are rather the result of a simple technique; the mechanical conjunction of similar lines in which the equivalent adjectives, et al, alternate with one another. Their style bears witness to the fact that they were composed at the time of their recitation by way of improvisation.

He further distinguishes between the writing style of the הושענות and other פיוטים:

A. All piyyutim of this genre display a fixed, stereotype pattern; the opening plea, Hosana ("O save!") is followed by not more than two or three divine appellatives or „reasons”, etc., after which the word Hosana recurs. The various lines differ only in the alternation, in each, of the equivalent appellatives or reasons (again, not exceeding three words).

B. All make use of one or more of the following stylistic devices (and of no others):

1. A simple alphabetical acrostic (no other forms of acrostic, such as one using the letters of the author's name), is employed in these Piyyutim
2. A „meter” which is constructed on the basis of an equal number of words in each line;
3. A primitive form of rhyme, achieved through the use of the same grammatical suffix (possessive suffix, plural suffix, and so forth) at the end of each line, to be found in most of these piyyutim (this is the weakest form of rhyme possible in the Hebrew language, as it lacks all variation; it is used systematically in those piyyutim in which it occurs);

To the above, we add the following negative characteristics:

4. These poems lack the typical linguistic characteristics of most piyyutim such as obscure phraseology, allusions to Rabbinic literature, and frequent use of epithets in place of proper nouns; nor do they employ artificial grammatical forms.

5. The structure of these poems is extremely simple: it consists merely of the constant repetition of a single sentence. Moreover, only a single idea is expressed in the sentence itself, and that idea is summed up in the responsorial word, Hosana (O save!), which contains both the subject and the predicate. (The subject is only expressed by implication.) The alternating words in each line are merely a form address or a „justification” for the acceptance of the petition; they are not, hence, integral to the basic idea of the sentence.

The various sentences are connected only through a purely mechanical device —the alphabetical acrostic. They lack any intrinsic connection, for each one merely repeats its predecessors without adding anything to them. Were it not for the alphabetical structure, it would be possible to add or to delete lines without in any way altering the „poem” itself. The entire „contents” of the composition has already been put forth in its first line; the lines which follow neither contribute nor detract from this sense.

Professor Heinemann explains why the authors of הושענות including קליר followed in that same simple style even though the פיוטים that they composed for other purposes were written in a much more sophisticated style:

All of these facts when taken together testify that neither Qalir nor any of his contemporaries created the above patterns, but that they were most certainly making use of a much more ancient and traditional style which they no longer were able to change. Only because they considered themselves bound by a traditional form did they give up both their freedom to develop a theme and the variety of artistic devices by which this was usually accomplished. Such primitive piyyutim when composed by artists famous for their highly sophisticated styles, certainly bear witness to the antiquity of that pattern which tradition imposed for certain liturgical occasions.

It should be noted that Professor Heinemann ignores what may be a much simpler explanation as to why the הושענות were written in such a style. It is based on the following משנה in מסכת סוכה that describes the הושענות ceremony in the בית המקדש:

משנה סוכה ד' – ה' – מצות ערבה כיצד? מקום היה למטה מירושלים, ונקרא מוצא. יורדין לשם ומלקטין משם מורביות של ערבה, ובאין וזוקפין אותן בצדי המזבח, וראשיהן כפופין על גבי המזבח. תקעו והריעו ותקעו. בכל יום מקיפין את המזבח פעם אחת, ואומרים, אנא ה' הושיעה נא, אנא ה' הצליחה נא. רבי יהודה אומר, אני והו הושיעה נא. ואותו היום מקיפין

להבין את התפלה

את המזבח שבע פעמים. בשעת פטירתו, מה הן אומרים, יופי לך מזבח, יופי לך מזבח. רבי אליעזר אומר, ליה ולך, מזבח. ליה ולך, מזבח:

The פיוטים which we call הושענות are פיוטים that have as their roots words that were recited as part of the service in the בית המקדש. This משנה lists the words that were recited during the הקפות in the בית המקדש: either the words: 'אנא ה' הושיעה נא, אנא ה' הצליחה נא or the words: 'אני והו הושיעה נא. If those simple words constituted a sufficient outcry during the time of the בית המקדש, who are we to compose anything more elaborate. Obviously, the פייטנים were very conscience of the simple style of the words that were recited in the בית המקדש and continued that style in their own compositions.

The words: 'אני והו הושיעה נא which are the words that רבי יהודה believed were recited during the הקפות in the בית המקדש have raised some interesting comments:

רש"י מסכת סוכה דף מה' עמוד א' – אני והו – בגימטריא: אנא ה', ועוד: משבעים ושתים שמות הן, הנקובים בשלש מקראות הסמוכין בפרשת ויהי בשלח: ויסע וגו' ויבא בין מחנה ויט משה את ידו, ושלתן בני שבעים ושתים אותיות, ומהן שם המפורש: אות ראשונה של פסוק ראשון, ואחרונה של אמצעי, וראשונה של אחרון, וכן בזה הסדר כולן, השם הראשון והו: וי"ו של ויסע, ה"א דכל הלילה, וי"ו דויט, ושם השלשים ושבע הוא אני: אל"ף דמאתריהם, ונו"ן ראשון דהענין בחשבון של מפרע, וי"ד דרוח קדים.

חידושי הריטב"א מסכת סוכה דף מה' עמוד א' – אני והוא הושיעה נא. פי' רש"י ז"ל שם בן ע"ב אותיות היוצאים משלשה פסוקים שבפרשת ויהי בשלח, ואינו נכון שאם כן היה לו לומר אני והו בלא אל"ף ובכל המשניות ישנות גם חדשות ובכל הספרים כתוב באל"ף, ובירושלמי פירשו שהענין כענין עמו אנכי בצרה שאף השכינה עמנו בגלות ותהיה עמנו בישועה וכמו שאמרו בירושלמי ממה שכתוב ולכה לישועתה לנו ואף כאן אנו אומרים לנו ולך הושיעה נא, ואני אומר והוא כדי לומר בלשון נסתר דרך כבוד כלפי מעלה, וכן עיקר.

Based on his research, Professor Heinemann opines that it was רב סעדיה גאון who added the word "למענך" to the opening lines of the הושענות. Notice how much barer the opening lines sound without the word "למענך":

הושע נא גואלינו הושע נא;

הושע נא דורשינו הושע נא.

הושע נא אלקינו הושע נא;

הושע נא בוראנו הושע נא;

He further believes that the paragraph with which we conclude הושענות, כהושעת, was authored by קליר.

The style of the הושענות should remind one of the פיוטים with which we conclude מי שענה לאברהם בהר המוריה and קל רחום שמך, ענינו ה' ענינו: סליחות.

Ismar Elbogen in his book, *Jewish Liturgy* provides some background to the הושענות: The oldest reports about the processions and the prayers go back to geonic times. After the conclusion of the Additional Service, the precentor began הושע נא, "O save," which the congregation would repeat; then the precentor would repeat his prayer for salvation in a fuller version. On the seventh day they would vary the short cries of "O save" and repeat them seven times. Apparently these cries of "O save" soon developed into short litanies. In the geonic period it was everywhere customary to recite poems with "O save" as a refrain; Saadia says that in his time the number of such poems was extremely great. Poems were composed in alphabetical acrostic, so that one spoke of inserting "an alphabet or two"; but they are also called by the neutral expression פרקים, "sections," or פזמונים, a general term for poems. These poems must have been rather varied in content; often they were hymns, which were called שבה or דברי שבה ופיוטים or שבה; there were also petitions, called דברי בקשה or תחנונים. But in the end, all the poems that served for this purpose were given the name derived from their refrain, and all were called *hosha'not*. Despite the transfer of this name to the poems themselves, the refrain itself was reduced until it was said only at the beginning and the end. Saadia, and following him Sepharad, has the alphabetical *hosha'not* with the refrain "O save," two of which he uses everyday, plus a third addition beginning with אַנא, "O!", with contents suited to the number of the days. The recurring refrain is תבנה ציון רנה והעלינו בתוכה, "Build Zion in song and bring us up to it in gladness"; on the seventh day, when three acrostics were sung, the refrain is, נהדרך בארבע מצוות, "We shall glorify You with the four commandments, and we will make You King on the day of the willow," but this refrain, too, has been lost in the course of time, and is no longer found in Sepharad. In Ashkenaz, Rome and Romaniot, the *hosha'not* of Kallir are in use. They begin with an alphabetical piece with the refrain "O save"; then comes a second passage with the refrain כן הושיעה נא... כהושעת, "As You saved...so save." The second passage is identical on all days, while the first one changes; on the seventh day all the poems are recited together, with the addition of a great number of poems. The *hosha'not* of Sepharad have already diverged considerably from the litany form, as have to a lesser degree the *hosha'not* of Kallir used in other rites. In Sepharad the whole structure became more complicated, owing to the fact that the festival acquired the character of the Day of Atonement, with penitential prayers attached to the *hosha'not*. Despite early opposition, *hosha'not* were composed also for the Sabbath, when the procession was not held. The content of the *hosha'not* is above all petition for an abundant year, frequently with a petition for the messianic age attached. According to information in the *Halakhot gedolot*, *hosha'not* were recited in Palestine after the Afternoon Service as well. In the tenth and eleventh centuries processions apparently were customarily held in Jerusalem around the Mount of Olives, for which pilgrims came from far and wide.