

phrase "I am Raphael" in the acrostic. The title of the song, "You, God, are mighty," conveys a message of religious content and praise of God. The pizmon text calls on God to have mercy on his chosen people, alluding to their exile among strangers; it draws heavily on biblical portions, including Job 36:5, Isaiah 62:6, and Psalm 1:2. The phrase concerning oppression by strangers resembles, but does not draw directly on, passages in the prophetic literature, notably Jeremiah 5:19 and Ezekiel 11:9.

Like most pizmonim, "Attah El Kabbir"’s Hebrew text was composed to match the assonance and rhyme scheme of the original Arabic lyrics, the title of which is recorded in Hebrew script. In this manner, the Arabic text *sudam ya na bir* was transformed to *attah el kabbir*. The original song was a classical Arabic *muwashshah*, a vocal piece with regular rhythm and rhyme, divided into three main sections. The opening section is termed a *dawr*; the middle section is the *khānah*, which provides a contrast in tune, mode and/or register; the final section brings back the musical refrain of the opening *dawr* (Faruqi 1981:219).

The pizmon melody, which is set in the Arab maqām nahāwand, is frequently used in Brooklyn to teach nahāwand to students. At the same time, while it is a "model" melody for maqām nahāwand, the tune contains allusions to other related maqāmāt. This reflects an understanding that

the trained singer never sings in one maqām only. No song is ever written in one maqām. Usually the composer will start with one maqām, he'll reel on to another maqām . . . but he'll always, must and will, come back to the original, opening maqām. "Attah El Kabbir"—you can do whatever you want between it. Maybe if we analyzed the song, I'll show you places where it is not pure nahāwand. Cause no song is ever pure one maqām—always variations. But, however, the close always is the same maqām as the opening. (J. Saff, 23 October 1984)

When it is performed, "Attah El Kabbir" is frequently preceded by an instrumental introduction (*taqṣīm*) or vocal improvisation (*layālī*) which serves to establish the main maqām, as is heard in the performance on the recording accompanying this book. The performance further incorporates vocal improvisation within the verses of the pizmon. Here Moses Tawil is said to have "sweetened" his performance of "Attah El Kabbir" by exploring the "tetrachords" of maqām nahāwand as well as touching on related maqāmāt (D Tawil, 10 May 1985). In this manner, too, Moses Tawil demonstrates his mastery of an Arab aesthetic where

EXAMPLE 2.1. Comparison of maqām nahāwand with Western minor scale (Idelsohn 1923:73).

Nahāwand.	1	1/2	1	1	1/2	5/4	3/4
Western Harmonic Minor Scale	1	1/2	1	1	1/2	1-1/2	1/2

the singer or the artist has liberty of giving it his own tradition, which is



Cantor Moses Ashcar. Courtesy Sephardic Community Center.

Sephardic Community Center  
Purim Pizmon Concert

in honor of

Meyer 'Mickey' Kairey



Plate 5 Program cover, Purim Pizmon Concert in honor of Meyer 'Mickey' Kairey. Courtesy Sephardic Community Center.

