

The Modern Jewish People – Same Tunes, Different Words

Talking about Hanukkah Songs

Reuven Greenvald

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Jewish Agency for Israel

Zionist Hanukkah Songs

מי ימלל – *Who Can Retell*

מי-ימלל, גבורות יהוה; ישמיע, כל-
תהלתו. (תהילים קו 2)

Who can retell the mighty acts of the
Lord, recite all his praises. (Psalms
106:2)

Who Can Retell

Lyrics: Menashe Ravina (1899-1968)
(Literal Translation)

Who can retell
Who can retell the heroic acts of
Israel,

Who can count them?
In every generation, a hero arises
And saves the people.

Hark!

In those days and today,
Maccabee is the savior and redeemer
But today all the People Israel
Must unite, arise, and be saved.

מי ימלל
מילים: מנשה רבינא (1899-1968)

מי ימלל גבורות ישראל,
אותן מי ימנה?
הן בכל דור יקום הגבור
גואל העם.

שמע!

בימים ההם בזמן הזה
מכבי מושיע ופודה,
וכימינו כל עם ישראל
יתאחד, יקום ויגאל.

Listen to the Song

http://www.zemereshet.co.il/FlashPlayer/player.asp?perf_id=7256

על הנסים – *For the miracles*

מודים אנחנו לך. שאתה הוא ה' אלהינו
ואלהי אבותינו... על הנסים ועל הפקדון ועל
הגבורות ועל התשועות ועל המלחמות
שעשית לאבותינו בימים ההם בזמן הזה:
(סידור: הוספה בברכת "מודים" תפילת
שמונה עשרה)

We thank you, that You are the Lord our
God and God of our ancestors... *for the
miracles, for the deliverance, for the
heroic deeds, and for the triumphs that
you did for our ancestors in those days,
and in our time.*

(Siddur: Addition to Thanksgiving
Blessing, Amidah Prayer)

Days of Hanukkah
(Literal Translation)

Hebrew Version: Avraham Avrunin

Days of the *hanukkah* (dedication), the
dedication of our Temple
In joy and happiness they fill our hearts
Night and day our dreidels spin,
A lot of sufganiyot we eat on those
(days).

Illumine, kindle the many candles of
Hanukkah!
For the miracles and wondrous deeds
that were brought about by the
Maccabees.

Listen to the Song

http://www.zemereshet.co.il/FlashPlayer/player.asp?perf_id=7257

ימי החנוכה
נוסח עברי: אברהם אברונין (1869-1957)

ימי החנכה חגגת מקדשנו,
בגיל ובשמחה ממלאים את לבנו,
לילה ויום סביבוננו יטב,
ספגניות נאכל בם לרב.

האירו, הדליקו נרות חנכה רבים!
על הנסים ועל הנפלאות אשר חוללו המכבים.



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Discussion Questions for Zionist Hanukkah Songs

1. The lyrics for *Mi Yimalel* (Who Can Retell?) were written by Menashe Ravina, one of the creators of Hebrew folk music in the early 20th century, and the lyrics for *Yemei ha-chanukkah* (Days of Hanukkah) were written by Avraham Avrunin, a Hebrew linguist and educator. Both lyricists borrowed phrases from traditional sources (see sidebars) – what do you learn about Zionist conceptions of Hanukkah from their adaptations of these traditional phrases?
2. What other messages about Hanukkah's significance in contemporary Israel do these songs offer?



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American Hanukkah Songs

Who Can Retell?

(English Version for Singing)

Who can retell the things that befell us,
Who can count them?
In every age, a hero or sage
Came to our aid.

Hark!

In days of yore in Israel's ancient land
Brave Maccabeus led the faithful band
But now all Israel must as one arise
Redeem itself through deed and sacrifice.

Days of Hanukkah or ***O Hanukkah***

(English Version for Singing)

Hanukkah, O Hanukkah, come light the menorah
Let's have a party, we'll all dance the horah
Gather 'round the table, we'll give you a treat
Dreydles to play with and latkes to eat.

And while we are playing the candles are burning
low

One for each night they shed a sweet

Light to remind us of days long ago

One for each night they shed a sweet

Light to remind us of days long ago.

Discussion Questions for American Versions of Hanukkah Songs

1. Figuratively speaking – what “gets lost in translation” when comparing the Hebrew and American versions?
2. What messages about Hanukkah for American Jews English versions do you see in the English versions?



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Yiddish Hanukkah Song

Yiddish Words	Transliteration	Literal Translation
חנוכה אוי חנוכה	(Oy), Chanukah oy Chanukah	(Oh), Chanukah, Oh Chanukah
אַ יום-טוב אַ שיינער	A yontif a sheyner,	A beautiful celebration.
אַ לוסטיקער אַ פריילעכער	A lustiker a freylekher	Such a cheerful and happy one,
נישט דאָ נאָך אַזוינער	Nisht do nokh azoyner	There is none like it.
אַלע נאָכט מיט דריידלעך שפילן מיר	Ale nakht mit dreydlech shpiln	Every night with the dreidels we
פרישע הייסע לאַטקעס, עסן אָן אַ שיעור.	mir, Frishe heyse latkes, esn on a shir.	will play, Fresh, hot latkes we will eat
געשווינדער, צינדט קינדער	Geshvinder, tsindt kinder	endlessly. Come quickly children
די חנוכה ליכטלעך אָן,	Di Chanukah likhtlech on,	Light the Chanukah candles
זאָגט על-הניסים, לויבט גאָט פאַר די נסים,	Zogt "Al Hanisim", loybt Got far di nisim,	Say " Al Hanissim ", praise God for the miracles,
און לאַמיר אַלע טאַנצען אין קאָן.	Un lomir ale tantsen in kon.	And we will all dance together in
זאָגט על-הניסים, לויבט גאָט פאַר די נסים,	Zogt "Al Hanisim", loybt Got far di nisim,	a circle!
און לאַמיר אַלע טאַנצען אין קאָן	Un lomir ale tantsen in kon.	Say " Al Hanissim ", praise God for the miracles, And we will all dance together in a circle!

Yemai ha-Chanukkah/Days of Hanukkah is based on a Yiddish song, written by Mordkhe Rivesman (1868-1924, Lithuania & Russia), who as a child studied in traditional cheder and as an adult was involved in Yiddish education, folk music and theater.

Discussion Questions for Yiddish Version of Hanukkah Song

1. What images about Hanukkah are important to the Yiddish version?
2. How does the Yiddish version compare and contrast with the Hebrew and American versions?

Summary Question: What do these similarities and differences say to you about Hanukkah's messages for different types of Jews? Which, if any, resonates for you?

How to read a Dreidel

Letter	Letter name	Hebrew word	Translation of Hebrew	Game action:	Game action: (Yiddish)
נ	Nun	Nes נס	miracle	do Nothing	(<i>nisht</i>)
ג	Gimmel	Gadol גדול	great	Get all	(<i>gesht</i>)
ה	Hey	Hayah היה	happened	take Half	(<i>halb</i>)
ש	Shin	Sham שם	there	Share (add token)	(<i>shtel</i>)

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References

- Rabbi Peretz Rodman, "A Zionist Hanukkah," [www.myjewishlearning.com](http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Hanukkah/History/Modern_Observances/Zionist.shtml?p=0)
http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Hanukkah/History/Modern_Observances/Zionist.shtml?p=0
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oh_Chanukah
- <http://www.songsformypeople.com/khanuke-chanukkah.html>