

# Ma-oz Tzur – Jewish History in a Nutshell

**Lyrics:** Probably Mordekhahy Ben Hillel, 1250-1298. Ma-oz Tzur is an acrostic poem, the first letter of each stanza spells out the name of the poet, Mordekhahy. Many researchers pondered who this Mordekhahy was, many agree that it is Ben Hillel. Others claim that its time of composition is even earlier – the late 11<sup>th</sup> century-early 12<sup>th</sup> century. During that period, Crusaders executed European Jews and inflicted atrocities upon them.

**Music:** Benedetto Giacomo Marcello (Summer 1686 – summer 1739), an Italian composer. He composed "Estro Poetico Armonico," or "Parafraasi Sopra li Salmi" (Venice, 1724). The theme for his "Psalm XV" was quoted to be a melody of German Jews (probably living in Venice at that time).

## The full Poem:

<p>O mighty stronghold of my salvation, to praise You is a delight. Restore my House of Prayer where we'll bring thanksgiving offerings. When You will have prepared the slaughter for the blaspheming foe, Then I shall complete with a song of hymn the dedication of the Altar.</p>	<p><b>M</b>ah-ohz tzur y'shu-ahtee l'kha nah-eh l'shabe-ah Tikon bayt t'filahti v'sham todah n'zabe -ah L'et tahkhin matbabe-ah mitzar ham'nabe-ah Ahz egmohr b'shir mizmohr hanukaht hamizbe-ah</p>	<p><b>מ</b>עוז צור ישועתי לך נאה לשבח תכון בית תפילתי ושם תודה נזבח לעת תכין מטבח מצר המנבח אז אגמר בשיר מזמור חנכת המזבח</p>
<p>My soul was sated with misery, My strength was spent with grief. They embittered my life with hardship, Enslaved under the rule of Egypt. But God with his mighty power Brought out His treasured people; While Pharaoh's host and followers Sank like a stone into the deep.</p>	<p><b>R</b>a'ot sav-ah nafshi, beyagon kōhi kala. Hah-yai mereru vekoshi, b'shi-abud malkhut eglā. Uvyado hagdola hotzi et hasgula. Heil par-oh vekhol zar-oh yardu k'even bimtzula.</p>	<p><b>ר</b>עות שבעה נפשי ביגון כחי כלה חיי מררו בקשי בשעבוד מלכות עגלה ובידו הגדולה הוציא את הסגלה חיל פרעה וכל זרעו ירדו כאבן במצולה</p>
<p>He brought me to His holy abode; Even there, I found no rest. The oppressor came and exiled me, Because I served strange gods, and drank poisonous wine Yet scarcely had I gone into exile, When Babylon fell and Zerubbabel took charge; Within seventy years I was saved.</p>	<p><b>D</b>vir kodsho hevi-ani, v'gam sham lo shakateti. Uva noges vehiglani, ki zarim avadti. Vyein ra-al masakhti kim-at she-avarti. Ketz Bavel Zerubavel, leketz shiv-eem nosha-ati.</p>	<p><b>ד</b>ביר קדשו הביאני וגם שם לא שקטתי ובא נוגש והגלני כי זרים עבדתי ויין רעל מסכתי כמעט שעברתי קץ בבל זרובבל לקץ שבעים נושעתי</p>

<p>The Agagite, son of Hammedatha, plotted to cut down the lofty fir; But it proved a snare to him, and his insolence was silenced. You raised the head of the Benjamite, but the enemy's name You blotted out. His numerous sons and his household You hanged upon the gallows.</p>	<p><b>K</b>erot komat berosh bikesh Agagi ben Hamdatah. veni-hyata lo l'fah ul'mokesh, vega'avato nishbata. Rosh yemini niseta, ve'oyev shmo mahita. Rov banav vekinyanav al ha'etz talita.</p>	<p>כָּרוֹת קוֹמַת בְּרוֹשׁ בְּקֵשׁ אֲגָגִי בֶן הַמְּדַתָּא וְנִהְיְתָה לוֹ לִפְח וּלְמוֹקֵשׁ וּגְאֹנָתוֹ נִשְׁבַּתָּה רֹאשׁ יְמִינִי נִשְׁאֵת וְאוֹיֵב שְׁמוֹ מְחִית רַב בָּנָיו וְקִינָיו עַל הָעֵץ תְּלִית</p>
<p>The Greeks gathered against me, in days of the Hasmoneans. They broke down the walls of my towers, and defiled all the oils. But from the last remaining flask a miracle was wrought for the Jews. So the sages of the day ordained these eight days for songs of praise</p>	<p><b>Y</b>'vanim nikbetzu alai, azai bimei Hashmanim. Ufartzu homot migdalai, v'tim'u kol hashmanim. Uminotar kankanim na'asa nes lashoshanim. Bnei vina yemei shmona kav'u shir urenanim.</p>	<p>יָוָנִים נִקְבְּצוּ עָלַי אֲזַי בִּימֵי חֲשַׁמְנַיִם וּפָרְצוּ חוֹמוֹת מִגְדָּלַי וְטָמְאוּ כָל הַשְּׁמָנִים וּמִנּוֹתָר קִנְקָנִים נַעֲשָׂה נֶס לְשׁוֹשָׁנִים בְּנֵי בֵּינָה יְמֵי שְׁמוֹנֶה קִבְּעוּ שִׁיר וְרִנָּיִם</p>
<p>O bare Your holy arm and bring the end of salvation. Wreak vengeance upon the wicked nation, On behalf of your faithful servants. For deliverance has too long been delayed; And the evil days are endless. O Reject the enemy into the shadows of idolatry, and set up for us the seven shepherds</p>	<p><b>H</b>asof z'roa kodshekha, vekarev ketz hayeshu'a. N'kom nikmat avadeikha me'uma haresha'a. Ki arkha hashu'a, ve'ein ketz limei hara'a. Dheh admon betzel tzalmon, hakem lanu ro'im shiv'a</p>	<p>חֲשׂוֹף זְרוּעַ קֹדֶשְׁךָ וְקִרְבֵּי קֵץ הַיְשׁוּעָה נִקְמֵם נִקְמַת עַבְדֶּיךָ מֵאֲמַה הַרְשָׁעָה כִּי אָרְכָה הַשָּׁעָה וְאִין קֵץ לִימֵי הַרְעָה דְּחַה אֲדַמּוֹן בְּצַל צִלְמוֹן הַקֵּם לָנוּ רוּעִים שִׁבְעָה</p>

### **More about its contents:**

Main source: Wikipedia.

The poem recalls the many times when Jewish communities were saved from the people around them. The second stanza tells of the exodus from Egypt. The third stanza tells of the end of the Babylonian captivity. The fourth retells the miracle of the holiday of Purim. Only the fifth tells of the Hasmonean victory that is commemorated by Hanukkah.

The first and last stanzas are written in the present tense. The first expresses hope for the rebuilding of the Temple and for the defeat of enemies, who are metaphorically referred to as barking (menabe'ah). The final stanza once again calls for divine retribution against the enemies of the Jewish people. The term Admon, meaning "the red one" refers to Christianity in general, which in traditional Jewish sources is viewed as being born of Rome, which is called "Edom" (the root of the word Admon) because

the original nation of Rome is considered to consist of the descendants of Esau, who were known as Edom.

The last stanza includes another acrostic, in the first three words of the stanza. It reads in Hebrew קַזַּךְ (ḥazak) which means strong. We use this word whenever we finish reading a Book of Torah – Be strong and strengthened, and also is the blessing to Joshua Ben-Nun when he took over the leadership over the People of Israel, after the passing away of Moshe: וְקַזַּךְ וְעִמָּץ – Ḥazak ve-Ematz – be strong and courageous. This is also the blessing that is bestowed on Rabbis upon their ordination.

**Additional Tunes:**

*Hasidut Breslav:*

<https://youtu.be/OQixfEA20f8>

More can be found on YouTube...

**Naomi Shemer new version for Ma-oz Tzur Y’Shu-ati:**

In the late 60’s, the poet and composer Naomi Shemer visited the Israeli strongholds along the Suez Canal during the Attrition War. It was during the days of Ḥanukkah and she was impressed by the spirit and resolve of the soldiers she met, that sang at the top of their lungs (“so the Egyptians on the other bank of the Canal would hear”) Ma-oz Tzur.

That experience inspired her to write this poem, representing the spirit of the original poem: we, the People of Israel, are strong and capable of defending ourselves, with the Devine Intervention that makes miracles happen. The poem and music were first released in 1971.

<p>O Refuge and Rock of my salvation Whom we praise in pleasance. Far, far away, beside my home, orchards exude their fragrance. I will pass through all the tunnels, caverns and fortresses, Through grottoes rocky and trenches dusty.. Somewhere in the depths of night, someone intent lies, Seeking my life, observing silently.</p>	<p><b>M</b>ah-ohz tzur y’shu-ahtee l’kha nah-eh l’shabe-aḥ Harḥek, Harḥek, leyad beiti, hapardessim nat’nu re’ah. Avo baminharot uvam'tzadot uvam'arot Uvenikrot tzurim uvim'chilot afar. Ei-sham belev halailah, daruch vacharishi, Tzofeh bi mevakesh nafshi.</p>	<p>מַעוֹז צוֹר יְשׁוּעָתִי לְךָ נֶאֱדָה לְשִׁבְחֵךְ הַרְחֵק הַרְחֵק לְיַד בֵּיתִי הַפְרַדְסִים נִתְּנוּ רִים אֲבוֹא בַּמְּנִקְרוֹת וּבַמְצֻדוֹת וּבַמְעֻרוֹת וּבַנְּקֻרוֹת צוּרִים וּבַמְחִילוֹת עֶפְרַיִם אֵי שֵׁם בְּלֵב הַלַּיְלָה דְּרוֹךְ וְחַרִּישִׁי צוֹפֵה בִּי מִבְּקֶשׁ נַפְשִׁי</p>
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<p>O Refuge and Rock of my salvation, unwavering, unyielding stronghold and trove. Almond trees beside my home are covered white with blossom down the grove. I will pass through all the tunnels, caverns and fortresses, through grottoes rocky and trenches dusty. Somewhere in the depths of night, someone intent lies, Seeking my life, watching me silently.</p>	<p><b>Mah-ohz tzur y'shu-ahtee</b> mivtzar ikesh vekishe'ah. Atzei shaked leyad beiti omdim beloven pore'ah. Avo baminharot uvam'tzadot uvam'arot Uvenikrot tzurim uvim'chilot afar. Ei-sham beleiv halailah, daruch vacharishi, Mabit bi mevakesh nafshi.</p>	<p><b>מָעוֹז צוֹר יְשׁוּעָתִי</b> מִבְּצָר עִיקֵשׁ וְקִישׁוֹחַ עֲצֵי שֶׁקֵד לַיָּד בֵּיתִי עוֹמְדִים בְּלוֹבֵן פֹּרוֹחַ אָבוֹא בַּמְּנַהֲרוֹת וּבַמְּצֻדוֹת וּבַמְּעֻרוֹת וּבַנְּקֻרוֹת צוּרִים וּבַמְּחִילוֹת עֶפֶר אֵי שֵׁם בְּלֵב הַלַּיְלָה דָּרוֹךְ וְחָרִישִׁי מַבִּיט בִּי מִבְּקֵשׁ נַפְשִׁי</p>
<p>O Refuge and Rock of my salvation in endless battle victorious. My sister Ayelet's smile will be tinged with all her weariness. I will pass through all the tunnels, caverns and fortresses, through grottoes rocky and trenches dusty. Somewhere in the depths of night, someone intent lies, Seeking my life, in ambush silently.</p>	<p><b>Mah-ohz tzur y'shu-ahtee,</b> bikrav ein ketz yenatze'ach. Eilai Ayelet achoti chiyuch ayeif teshale'ach. Avo baminharot uvam'tzadot uvam'arot Uvenikrot tzurim uvim'chilot afar. Ei-sham beleiv halailah, daruch vacharishi, Oreiv li mevakesh nafshi.</p>	<p><b>מָעוֹז צוֹר יְשׁוּעָתִי</b> בְּקִרְבֵּי אֵין קֵצַ יִנְצַח אֵלֵי אַיִלַּת אַחֹתִי חַיִּיךָ עֵיף תִּשְׁלַח אָבוֹא בַּמְּנַהֲרוֹת וּבַמְּצֻדוֹת וּבַמְּעֻרוֹת וּבַנְּקֻרוֹת צוּרִים וּבַמְּחִילוֹת עֶפֶר אֵי שֵׁם בְּלֵב הַלַּיְלָה דָּרוֹךְ וְחָרִישִׁי אוֹרֵב לִי מִבְּקֵשׁ נַפְשִׁי</p>
<p>Woe upon him I sting, woe upon him from my honey's taste; Woe upon him who seeks my life to take</p>	<p>Avoy lo me'uktzi, va-avoy lo m'divshi, Avoy l'm'vakesh nafshi</p>	<p>אָבוֹי לוֹ מֵעוֹקְצִי, וְאָבוֹי לוֹ מִדְּבִשִׁי אָבוֹי לְמִבְּקֵשׁ נַפְשִׁי</p>

The following link is to the original performance by the Military Band called L'hakat HaNaḥal – translated as the “Band of the River”. However, in the IDF, Naḥal (נח"ל) was the acronym for the service that combined military service with service in new agricultural settlements. The acronym stands for No-Ar Ḥalutzi Loḥem – meaning Pioneering Fighting Youth.

<https://youtu.be/XqN-TnNXZio>