

## Suggestions for working with and teaching songs from the album

# WHO AM I?

by Neal Katz

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*One of the goals of the album WHO AM I? is to transmit Jewish values and texts in a fun and exciting way. Another goal is to offer new setting for traditional texts to be used in synagogue, religious school, youth group and camp settings. The following suggestions are some thoughts I had while writing or collaborating on the songs. I hope this will help you teach the music. Good luck!*

### Or Chadash

"Or Chadash," speaks about the significance of Israel for the Jewish people. The Hebrew text is taken from the end of the Yotzer prayer said each morning in the traditional prayer book. The song offers an historical look at the relationship between the land of Israel and the Jewish people. It is an overview of the relationship Jews have had with the land since Abraham's covenant through times of dispersion. The bridge is a reference to the 1948 return. The word OR meaning - light - and CHADASH meaning - new - is a powerful image. You can use this song in a discussion or class on Zionism, Israel, Jewish history, and prayer. Or Chadash was written for the Zemer Lach 2000 Zionist Song Competition and has been well received at camps and concerts.

### Who Am I?

This song is based on various texts from the time when Moses was on Mt. Sinai encountering God at the burning bush. Moses' initial reluctance to lead the Jewish people stemmed from fact that he wasn't sure he could see it through - that the task might have been too great. However, after accepting the position, he became one of the great religious and national heroes of all time. The song works well when teaching about leadership, tikun olam (repairing the world), the life of Moses, and at Passover time. It was written in Jerusalem for a special service at Hebrew Union College honoring a past professor - the Torah portion that week was the story of the burning bush.

### Ki Vesimcha

This was actually written as a soft melody for havdalah. The text speaks about how nature joins in the praise of God. The setting was an outdoor service. Yet somehow, the theme of joy took over and the song became upbeat and lively. I found that this was even better for a closing havdalah song as well as a closing song in any service. It gets the participants clapping and moving their bodies. The Latin feel of the percussion in the recording helps push the music along - but as a solo guitar piece, you have to be on top of the rhythm. The song can be used outdoors, in a song session, or as a closing song in a prayer service. As a teaching piece, you can talk about the role of joy in prayer, the fact that we feel joy in nature since nature can be a sign of God's presence, and you could use it to talk about the prophet Isaiah. The song was written at Camp Ben Frankel in Carbondale, IL.

## Ein Kol Chadash

This is more of a performance piece than a participatory song. It can be used to teach about Ecclesiastes. In general, Jewish students do not have much exposure to the text of Ecclesiastes beyond the song "Turn, Turn, Turn." The texts selected for this song reflect Ecclesiastes' questioning of the meaning of life - the texts are similar to our existential questions today.

## Bakesh Shalom

"Bakesh Shalom" promotes the necessity of peace between Jews and Arabs. This was the first collaboration between myself and classmate and lyricist Alan Cook. It was written in Jerusalem in the fall of 1998. This song took three years of revision to complete as events in Israel continued to change. Ultimately, the song teaches that the values of peace and brotherhood are the best goals toward which we should aim our efforts. Clearly, this song can be taught on many levels. Using this song, you can teach about the Jewish values of seeking peace and brotherhood, the situation in Israel, and Jewish and Arab history.

## Psalms 23

Like Ein Kol Chadash, this is performance piece. I wanted to take a text associated with mourning and funerals and give it a spin. Ultimately, the reason the text is comforting is that it promotes the idea that God will take care of you and support you in your times of need. I found that to be an uplifting message. I brought in a gospel choir to help give the folk music a lift so that it was a song of joy.

## And Now Israel

"And Now Israel" is a song which uses Biblical texts to promote the value of doing Mitzvot. The lyrics utilize sources from Deuteronomy and the prophet Micah. The question "And now Israel, what are the things that God has required of you?" occurs in both texts (Deuteronomy and Micah) in slightly different forms. The English text of this song is the answer from Deuteronomy - that God requires us to do mitzvot to honor Him. But from where do the mitzvot come? From our hearts. The Hebrew bridge is the prophet Micah's answer to the question - translated as "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." This is a great teaching song about mitzvot, Biblical texts, and for posing the questions to the participants directly - what do they think God requires of them?

## Lecha Adonai

I grew up with the Lecha Adonai march and I found that it ended too abruptly when walking around with the Torah. In understanding that melody was written to promote a theme of majesty. I decided to write a melody that evoked joy, could get people singing and dancing as the Torah is paraded around, and it could go on for as long as the leader needed. The music is clearly based in chasidic chord progressions like Shlomo Carlebach's songs. As well as its appropriate use at services, it is also a nice addition to a chasidic medley of songs such as Hora, Am Yisrael Chai, V'ha-eir Einenu, Yism'chu Hashamayim and others.

## Mi Chamocha

This was an early song of mine written in 1995 at Congregation Ner Shalom in Woodbridge, VA. I was looking for a new melody for this text to use during the NFTY in Israel trips in the summer of 1995. The melody is easy to learn and it evokes a sense of joy and movement. This is the feeling I thought the Mi Chamocha should promote - as it was the song the Hebrews sang when they crossed through the Sea of Reeds. The English intro does not have to be used. I added it on much later to give the song a context. That way, it can function as a full prayer unto itself without needing someone else to read an introduction.

## Maoz Tzur

This song takes the Maoz Tzur text and makes it more upbeat. The classic melody to this text is more formal and the English version of the classical melody is outdated. This song attempts to give the Hebrew text a more modern feel and the English text speaks about the role of God in Jewish history. Just as God was with us when...so God should also be with us today. This song can be taught and sung during Chanukah as well as at the end of a service or when discussing Jewish history.

## Mi Sheberach

This version of Mi Sheberach was written in the summer of 2001 for the Para Rabbinic Fellows program in Cincinnati, OH. The idea behind the song was to capture the feeling of the traditional prayer structure of Mi Sheberach. In most congregations where a Mi Sheberach is sung - there is usually a list of names read then a song. However, the traditional prayer inserts the name of the sick person in the middle of the text and then goes on to say that we pray for their healing. My version of Mi Sheberach has one stanza that ends "v'nizkor y'kareinu" which means "and we remember our loved ones..." Then while the guitar quietly strums the chords in the background, the service leader will read or ask for names for Mi Sheberach. When that list of names is finished, the song-leader will come back to an E7 chord and then go into the 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza which begins "Grant them a full healing..." This version is an easy to play and easy to learn version of Mi Sheberach that is being used by a number of congregations. I encourage you to try it at your services.

## Oseh Shalom

There are hundreds of Oseh Shalom melodies floating around in Jewish Music Land. When I wrote this version, I had 2 goals in mind - one was that it should be an easy melody with a double part that a lot of room for improvised harmonies - and the other goal was to include an English text in the prayer-song. This would allow the congregant to sing the English text of this prayer with as much enthusiasm and heart as they would sing the Hebrew. This is great for coming out of silent prayer, opening or closing any prayer service, for quieting down a song-session, and for healing services. The English text and melody was written in Tyler, TX at my student congregation - Beth El. Be careful during the opening notes not to slip into the Klepper melody. Enjoy!