

From The Parnas:

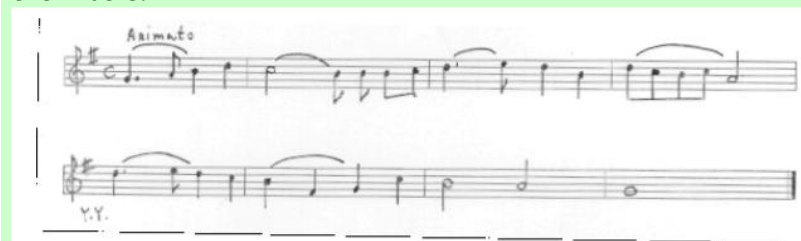
By Mark I. Wolfson

This coming Shabbat is the last day of Passover. That means that it's one of three very special days in the Jewish calendar - the final days of the festivals. The Torah tells us that there are three times per year when (at least) all the men were required to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem to appear before the Lord. These are the festival of unleavened bread (Pessah), the festival of weeks (Shabuot) and the festival of booths (Succot). On the final day of all three festivals, we use a special melody for many parts of the service. It's called La Despedida (The Farewell). It's the melody of a song that was very popular in Spain and composed about 500 years ago.

Rev. Dr. Alan Corré, Minister of Mikveh Israel from 1956-1963, tells us the story of La Despedida. As Dr. Corré explains, the song tells the story of a woman who had to say goodbye to someone she loved very dearly. He was leaving on a journey of several months, sailing on a ship from the harbor. Waving goodbye, she sang gently to herself - sadly, because he was leaving, but not too sadly because she was sure, with God's help, she would see him again on his return.

Our congregational ancestry and most of our customs come from the Jews of Spain and Portugal. Spain, for several hundred years before the expulsion in 1492, had a very large and prosperous Jewish population. The Jews of Spain were among the most prominent members of Spanish society. They were also very dedicated to Judaism and took special pleasure in celebrating the festivals. These were times of great joy, donning their finest clothes, and preparing the choicest of meals. At the conclusion of the festivals, they were sad to see it go, but hopeful that with God's help, they would return in a few months time.

It was the custom in many of the coastal communities to go down to the shore or the harbor on the final day of the festival and bid farewell to the holiday, as if it were one of the ships leaving from the harbor. The song matched their sentiments perfectly, and to this day we use this melody on the last day of each of the three festivals. It's a very catchy tune -here is the music:



We are very excited that Reverend Corré will be visiting Mikveh Israel in the fall. He will join us for a Shabbat weekend on September 29th, Shabbat Ha'azinu, between Kippur and Succot. It will be wonderful to hear him reflect on his years at Mikveh Israel, and rekindle the love for the history and lore of the congregation.

I hope to see you all this coming Shabbat, as we sing La Despedida and bid farewell to the festival of Passover. We sing with great pride as we remember the Jews of Spain and the rich tradition they left with us to carry forward into the next generation.