

Ge'ulla for Sefira: Fourth Shabbat After Pesah *Shekhula Akhula*, by R. Solomon ibn Gabirol

Translated and introduced by Dr. Gabriel Wasserman

This is the fourth in our series of installments on *ge'ulla* piyyutim recited in the Eastern Ashkenazic Rite during the six Sabbaths between Pesah and Shavu'ot, before the conclusion of the blessing *Barukh atta hashem ga'al yisra'el*. This will be our last of four *ge'ullot* by the Iberian poet R. Solomon ibn Gabirol; those for the next two weeks will be by other poets. Ibn Gabirol lived decades before the First Crusade; he wrote this piyyut as a general prayer complaining about the long exile, but Eastern Ashkenazic communities later adopted it for Sefirat Ha'omer, the period when they commemorated the tragedies of the Crusades.

Like two of the *ge'ullot* that we have already recited, this one also begins with two rhyming adjectives describing the sorry state of the Jewish people in exile, *Shekhula Akhula*. But there are also an important new features here: in this *ge'ulla*, every stanza here is written in the form of a short dialogue. Contrast this to Weeks 2 and 3, where the *ge'ullot* were entirely in Israel's voice, and week 1, when the first three stanzas were entirely in Israel's voice, and the last stanza was God's response. Israel keeps asking, throughout the poem, how long the exile will last, how long she needs to keep waiting until the *ketz*, the end-time. God's response, in every stanza, begins with the words *ho'hili 'aniya*, "Wait, O poor one".

This focus on the *ketz* connects us to the apocalyptic visions in the Book of Daniel, which use the word a number of times; and particular to Daniel 12:6, where Daniel asks "How long until the miraculous *ketz*", which is the refrain of *Shenotenu Safu*, which we recited on Week 2. That line is not quoted explicitly here, but we do have a reference to a nearby verse, Daniel 12:6: *For the matters are closed and sealed until the time of the ketz*; the poet, in the third stanzas, has Israel ask: "When will you interpret the closed and sealed (date for the end-time)?"

Ibn Gabirol plays with homophones: he says that the Jewish people, children of Rachel (*ra'hel*), are being sheared like a ewe (Hebrew *ra'hel*). He calls the Jewish people *kaftor*, apparently because they are beloved to God like a *kaftor va-ferah*, an "apple and a flower" (adornments of the Menorah, Exodus 25:31), and he speaks of the day of *I Kaftor*, "The Land of Kaftor", meaning the day of the Exodus from Egypt. The terms *I Kaftor* is from Jeremiah 47:4, and the poet understands it as Egypt because Genesis 10:14 lists the "Kaftorites" as descendants of Mitzrayim, Egypt. The poet says that in previous exiles Israel "drowned" (*nitba' with tet*) in troubles, but their suffering was "redressed" (*nitba' with tav*); while we do not know exactly how the poet would have pronounced these letters, his Sephardic Hebrew definitely would have pronounced them much more similarly than Ashkenazic Hebrew, perhaps even identically.

The poem is written in a syllabic meter, as very common in Iberian/"Sephardic" poetry; as in all the other *ge'ullot* that we have recited over the past weeks, the meter is four full vowels in each foot, where *sheva* and *hataf* vowels do not count for anything. There are two feet in each line. The only exception to this meter is the words *ho'hili 'aniya*, "Wait O poor one", which open God's response in each stanza; they form a foot with five vowel. In the Ashkenazic world, such meters, of Iberian origin, were less familiar, and therefore Ashkenazic manuscripts and printed editions contain corruptions of the text in a few places, so I have been guided by the Geniza fragment T-S 8H19.7 to fix these spots. Moreover, the Ashkenazic versions of the piyyut have a longer refrain at the ends of the stanzas; I have indicated this in small font and parentheses.

Like many of the piyyutim recited in Ashkenazic rites during the Sabbaths of Sefirat Ha'omer, this *ge'ulla* has been set to music by quite a few composers. Most famous is the setting by David Aizenstadt (1890–1942, murdered in the Holocaust), which is available on Youtube in a performance by Yitzchak Meir Helfgot.

שְׂכוּלָה אֶכּוּלָה / לָמָּה תִּבְכֶּי
הַנּוֹאֵשׁ לִבִּי / מֵאֲשֶׁר תִּחְכֶּי
קִצֵּי גַמְשֵׁיךָ / וְאֶרְךָ חֻשְׁכֵּי
הוֹחִילִי עֲנִיָּה / כִּי עוֹד מְעַט כִּי
אֲשַׁלַּח מַלְאָךְךָ / לְפָנֹת דַּרְכֵי
וְעַל הַר צִיּוֹן / אֶסּוֹף מֶלֶכִי
אִמְרוּ לְצִיּוֹן / יי מֶלֶךְךָ
הִנֵּה מֶלֶכְךָ / יָבוֹא לָךְ

(יי מֶלֶךְךָ יי מֶלֶךְךָ)

לְאֵלֵי אֱלֹהֵי / כַּמָּה אֶיֶּחַל
וְעַד אֵן תִּמְשׁוּךָ / גְּלוֹת הָחֵל
וּבְנֵי רָחֵל / גְּזוּזִים כְּרָחֵל
וְאֲנִי בְּכָל-זֹאת / תִּמְיֵד אֶיֶּחַל
הוֹחִילִי עֲנִיָּה / לְפֹקֵד וּמוֹחֵל
כִּי לֹא לְעוֹלָם / בָּךְ אֲנִי בּוֹחֵל

(יי מֶלֶךְךָ יי מֶלֶךְךָ / אִמְרוּ לְצִיּוֹן יי מֶלֶךְךָ) עוד מְעַט וְהִיִּית / לִי וְאֲנִי לָךְ
הִנֵּה מֶלֶכְךָ / יָבוֹא לָךְ

(God asks:) O bereft and consumed one, why do you cry?

Does your heart despair of what you have been waiting for?

(Israel responds:) My end-time (*ketz*) (for my redemption) drags on, my darkness extends long,

(God says:) Wait, O poor one, for it will be soon that

I will send my angel to clear my way,

And upon Mt. Zion I shall anoint my king.

Tell Mt. Zion: “The Lord reigns!”

Behold, your king is coming to you!

(Israel says:) For my God, my God, I wait so much,

How long will there drag on the exile of the multitude?

The children of Rachel are sheared like a ewe (*rahel*),

And yet, despite this, I constantly wait in hope.

(God responds:) Wait, O poor one, for (me, I) who take note of you and forgive you,

For it will not be forever that I reject you.

In a short while longer, you’ll be mine, and I’ll be yours,

Behold, your king is coming to you!

מְתֵי יִקְרַב / וַיִּגַע הַתּוֹר
 סְתוּם וְחָתוּם / מְתֵי תִפְתָּר
 אֲרָמוֹן זָרִים / מְתֵי תִסְתָּר
 הוֹחִילִי עֲנִיָּה / לְמַחְסֵה וּמְסֻתּוֹר
 כִּי עוֹד יֵשׁ לָךְ / מִרְפָּא וּמַעֲתוֹר
 וַיִּפְרַח כִּפְתָּר / כְּפִיּוֹם אֵי כִפְתָּר
 וַיִּצְיֵן בְּמִצְחֶךָ / צִיץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁלַף (״ מְלֶךְ ״ מְלֶךְ / אָמְרוּ לְצִיּוֹן ״ מְלֶךְ)
 הִנֵּה מֶלֶכְךָ / יָבוֹא לָךְ

הַמוֹנֵי לְפָנַי / בְּאַחַת נְטֻבַע
 מִנֶּפֶס וּבְכֹל / בְּקָרוֹב נְתַבַע
 הִיִּתִי אֲנִי / כְּעֵיט נִצְבַע
 נִקְבְּצוּ עָלַי / מִלְּכֹוֹת אַרְבַּע
 וְאָכַל בְּשָׂרִי / וְעוֹד לֹא נִשְׂבַע
 הוֹחִילִי עֲנִיָּה / לְצוֹר אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂבַע
 כִּי בֹא יָבֹא / דוֹד אֲשֶׁר הִלֵּךְ (״ מְלֶךְ ״ מְלֶךְ / אָמְרוּ לְצִיּוֹן ״ מְלֶךְ)
 הִנֵּה מֶלֶכְךָ / יָבוֹא לָךְ

(Israel asks:) When will (my) turn approach and arrive,
 When will you interpret the closed and sealed (date for the end-time)?
 When will you tear down the palace of the strangers? (Christian and Muslim fortresses around the world, or perhaps the Dome of the Rock)
(God responds:) Wait, O poor one, for the shelter and refuge,
 For you will yet experience healing and blessing,
 And the apple (*kaftor* — Israel) will blossom, as on the day of (the Exodus from) the Land of Kaftor (Egypt).
 And there will bud on your forehead the bud (or: crown) that has been cast away,
 Behold, your king is coming to you!

(Israel says:) My throng of people, in earlier times, was drowned (*nitba'*, with *tet*) in but one place (at a time),
 From Nof (Egypt) and Babylonia, (their plight) was quickly redressed (*nitba'*, with *tav*).
 (But now) I have been like a vulture that is dyed in blood (from all the other birds that have attacked it,
 Four kingdoms have gathered around me,
 (The enemy) has consumed my flesh, but is still not satiated.
(God responds:) Wait, O poor one, for the Rock (God), who has sworn
 That (your) beloved (God), who has walked (off from you), will come, yes come!
 Behold, your king is coming to you!