

Let It Be: The Hebrew Version

Judaism has a long history of prayers to express the human emotions such as joy, thanksgiving, sorrow and hope. The traditional liturgy has continuously been adapted and interpreted to reflect personal and communal needs. In this unit we will learn about a poem written by Naomi Shemer in connection to the Yom Kippur war and see how it became a prayer of hope for many.

[Her personal archive](#) includes many more songs and documents that tell the story of Israel over the years.

Naomi Shemer was probably the most famous female song composer in Israel, most famously known for her song “Yerushalayim shel Zahav” – “Jerusalem of Gold.” The idea for her song “Lu Yehi” originated before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, when Shemer wanted to adapt the Beatles’ song “Let it Be” into Hebrew. She wrote the lyrics during the first days of the war, expressing hope and prayers that the soldiers would come home in peace. Shemer played the song to Chava Alberstein in its original tune, but at the suggestion of Shemer’s husband, Mordechai Horowitz, she decided to compose a new tune for it. This process can be seen in the draft where the words “from the song of the Beatles: a Hebrew version” are crossed out and changed to: “Words and melody: Naomi Shemer.”

At the height of the war, on the eve of Sukkot, 1973, Shemer played the updated song on Israeli television. The live performance, on the program “Mifgash Omanim,” attracted an incredible amount of attention. The nation was in the midst of the Yom Kippur War, and the song provided a morale boost to the families waiting for news of their loved ones. The song immediately became popular also among soldiers, thanks to a version of the song performed by Chava Alberstein and the group HaGashash HaHiver.

The second verse of the song was omitted from most versions, since Shemer thought that it touched on the particularly gruelling experience of receiving a message about the death of one’s soldier (“the messenger standing at the door”), despite the fact that the verse expresses the hope that the messenger will come bearing good news.

Translation of the final version of “Lu Yehi”:

There is still a white sail on the horizon
Opposite a heavy black cloud
All that we seek – may it be
And if in the evening windows
The light of the holiday candles flickers
All that we seek – may it be

May it be, may it be – please – may it be
All that we seek – may it be.

What is the sound that I hear
The cry of the shofar and the sound of drums
All that we ask for – may it be
If only there can be heard within all this
One prayer from my lips also
All that we seek – may it be

May it be...

Within a small, shaded neighbourhood
Is a small house with a red roof
All that we ask for – may it be
This is the end of summer, the end of the path
Allow them to return safely here
All that we seek – may it be

May it be...

And if suddenly, rising from the darkness
Over our heads, the light of a star shines
All that we ask for – may it be
Then grant tranquillity and also grant strength
To all those we love
All that we seek – may it be

May it be...

Group Activity

In times of crisis and difficulty we often try to think of hopes for a better future.

Divide students into groups and have them think of a few examples of things that need repair in our world and what their hopes are moving forward.

Each group forms a list and presents it to the class in pantomime or drawing, while the rest of the students need to guess what the issue is.

Discussion Questions

Naomi Shemer's poem has become a form of prayer in Israeli society.

- What is the connection between crisis and prayer?
- Why is the original draft of a song interesting for historians?
- What other famous songs do you know that were released at times of war?
- What makes a musician a cultural icon?
- Can you think of any other musicians who are cultural icons from Israel or from your own country?

Creative Activity

- Compose a short poem or song which sends a message of hope in times of strife.
- Add another verse to Naomi Shemer's poem that resonates with you and expresses your hopes for the future.

Primary Sources in this Unit

Draft of "Lu Yehi"

Naomi Shemer's Archive

