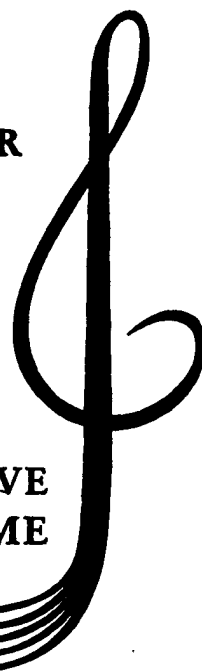


THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

anthology  
of yiddish  
folksongs

SINAI LEICHTER

VOLUME FIVE  
THE MORDECHAI GEBIRTIG VOLUME



## CONTENTS

<b>Introductory Notes / <i>Sinai Leichter</i></b>		xv
<b>The Yiddish Folksong</b>		
As a mirror to Jewish Life in Eastern Europe before W.W.II / <i>Eliyahu Honig</i>		xxiii
<b>Musical Themes of Gebirtig / <i>Issakhar Fater</i></b>		xxvii
<b>Mordechai Gebirtig — a Memoir / <i>Mrs. Eugenia Lauterbach</i></b>		xxix
<b>Gebirtig and Neuman in the Ghetto / <i>Jozef Wulf</i></b>		xxxi
<b>The Editorial Board</b>		xxxiv
***		
1. Hey, Klezmorim!	Hey, Musicians!	1
2. Kinder-Yorn	Childhood	4
3. Hulyet, Hulyet, Kinderlekh	Play On, Play On, Little Children	7
4. Avramele Un Yosele	Avramele And Yosele	11
5. Mayn Tate A Kohen	My Father Is A Kohen	15
6. Moyshele	Moyshele	17
7. Di Lyalke	The Doll	22
8. Dos Lidl Fun Goldenem Land	The Song Of The Golden Land	24
9. Kivele	Kivele	26
10. Shlof Shoyn, Mayn Kind	Sleep Well, My Child	29
11. Oy, Mamenyu Mayn	Oh, Mama Mine	31
12. Moyshele, Mayn Fraynd	Moyshele My Friend	35
13. Shlof Shoyn Ayn, Mayn Yankele	Sleep, My Yankele	40
14. Motele	Motele	42
15. Di Zun Iz Fargangen	The Sun Has Gone Down	46
16. Shloymele Liber	Shlomee Dearest	49
17. Oy, Narishe Briye	Oh, Foolish Daughter	52

18. Undzer Orem Kind	Our Younger Daughter	55
19. Khanele Un Nakhuml	Khanele And Nokheml	58
20. Kleyner Yosem	Little Orphan	62
21. Kh'vil Nisht Aza Khosn	Him I Will Not Marry	64
22. Mamenyu, An Eytse	Mama, Advise Me	67
23. Blumke, Mayn Zhiduvke	Blumka, My Jewess	71
24. Hey, Tsigelekh	Hi, Little Goats	75
25. Der Zinger Fun Noyt	Singer Of Poverty	77
26. Kum, Leybke, Tantsn	Leybke, Come Dance	79
27. Nokh A Glezele Tey	After A Cup Of Tea	83
28. Zog Mir, Levone	Tell Me, Moon	87
29. An Arbetlozer	The Unemployed	90
30. Trili Trilili	Trili Trilili	94
31. Reyzele	Reyzele	97
32. Di Nakht Kumt On Tsu Shvebn	The Night Again	102
33. A Malokh Vert Geboyrn	An Angel Gets Born	105
34. Shoyn Shtil Iz In Gesl	The Houses Are All Dreaming	107
35. Oy, Bruderl, Lekhayim!	Cheers, Brother!	111
36. Di Gefalene	The Outcast	114
37. Baym Taykhele	By The Riverside	117
38. Oreme Shnayderlekh	Poor Tailors	121
39. Azelkhe Tsvey Goldene Tsep	Those Glorious Twin Golden Braids	127
40. Ver Der Ershter Vet Lachn	Who Will Laugh First	129
41. Farvos, Zog Mir, Mamenyu	Tell Me Why, Oh Mama Mine	133
42. Dray Tekhterlekh	Three Daughters	137
43. Khalutsim-Libe	Pioneer Love	141
44. Dos Alte Por Folk	The Old Couple	144
45. Kartoffl-Zup Mit Shvomen	Potato Soup With Mushrooms	148

46. Hungerik Dayn Ketsese	Hungry Cat	153
47. Mayn Yoyvl	My Jubilee	157
48. Avreml Der Marvikher	Avreml The Swindler	159
49. Farvos Veynstu, Sheyndeles?	Sheindele, What's On Your Mind?	164
50. Ikh Hob Dikh Lib	I Love You	168
51. Krigs Invalid	War Invalid	172
52. Arbetloze Marsh	March Of The Unemployed	177
53. Mayn Heym	My Home	180
55. Di Mame	The Mother	185
57. Bay Gvirim A Dinstmoyd Tsu Zayn		190
58. A Lidele, Tayer Vi Gold		192
59. Ker,Bezeml, Ker	Sweep, Little Broom, Sweep	194
60. Hershele	Hershele	198
61. Gevald Vel Ikh Shrayen!	Oh, For Crying Out Loud!	201
62. Hey, Tsigaynerl!	Hi, Gipsy	206
64. Tik-Tak	Tic-Tock	209
68. Oy, Mayn Khaver	Oh, My Friend!	211
69. Undzer Tokhter Khaye	Our Daughter Chaya	214
70. Hob Rakhmones	Show Some Kindness	218
	***	
<b>Gebirtig's Ghetto Songs / Sinai Leichter</b>		222
71. Undzer Shtetl Brent!	Our Town Is Burning!	229
72. Erev Yom-Kiper	Eve Of Yom Kippur	234
73. Shifreles Portret	Shifrele's Portrait	238
74. Blayb Gezunt Mir, Kroke!	Farewell To You, Kroke!	240
75. Minutn Fun Yeush	Moments Of Despair	243
76. Minutn Fun Bitokhn	Moments Of Hope	246
77. Glokn-Klang	Ringng The Bells	249

78. A Tog Fun Nekome	A Day Of Vengeance	253
79. Gehat Hob Ikh A Heym	I Had A Home	256
80. S'Tut Vey!	This Pain!	259
81. Ikh Hob Shoyng Lang...	It's Been So Long...	266
82. A Suniker Shtal	A Ray Of The Sun	270
83. Mayn Kholem	My Dream	274
84. S'iz Gut!	It's Good!	284
85. Undzer Friling	Our Springtime	288
86. In Geto	In The Ghetto	292
87. Zun, Zun, Zang.	Sun, Sun, Song	295
<b>APPENDIX –Supplement to Volumes I-IV</b>		<b>299</b>
A Yiddishe Mame	A Jewish Mother	301
A Brivele Der Mamen	A Letter to Mother	305
Mayn Shtetele Belz	My Little Town Belz	309
Unter Dayne Vayse Shtern	Beneath the Starry Splendour	313
<b>Index of Names and Places</b>		315
<b>Bibliography</b>		317
<b>Gebirtig Recordings</b>		319
<b>Alphabetical Index</b>		320
Introduction and Essays in Hebrew & Yiddish		טו-טז

## INTRODUCTORY NOTES

*by Sinai Leichter*

### 1. The Structure of this Book

There are several possibilities regarding the order of the songs of Gebirtig. One would be to follow the system of the four previous volumes of the Anthology, namely to arrange the songs according to subject, which, in any case, would follow the three periods in Gebirtig's life: first the songs written in his youth, describing Jewish life as he saw it in his native Krakow prior to and including World War II, songs of love, of nature, of nostalgia; the second period, concentrating on social problems, such as poverty, unemployment, struggle for the rights of the laborer, songs influenced by his sympathy with the Bund movement, (which was essentially Socialist and oriented on the development of Yiddish culture) and the third period, songs of Jewish struggle against Anti-Semitism, starting with his immortal "*Undzer Shtetl Brent*" (written in 1938) and continuing with the songs like "*Blayb Gezund mir Kroke*", "*Shifrele's Portret*", "*Erev Yom Kippur*", until his death on June 4, 1942.

Another way of arranging the songs would be in *chronological* sequence, as described by the Gebirtig biographer, Natan Gross of Tel Aviv, in his book "*Mayn Fayfele*", published in 1997 and including some 50 songs of Gebirtig's youthful period, found at the "*Moreshet*" Institute at Givat Haviva. This book also contains important biographical details, as well as a "Calendarium" of chronological events and dates when the songs were written.

There is also a third way, namely, to follow the order of the songs which Gebirtig himself made when he copied all his

## THE YIDDISH FOLKSONG

As a Mirror to Jewish Life in Eastern Europe before World War II

*by Eliyahu Honig\**

Before dealing with the works of the great creators of Yiddish song, it is important to reflect a little on the place of the folk song in general in our culture.

Folklore as expressed in the folk-song generally reflects the life and customs of a people – English, American, Russian, Australian, Scottish and other folk-songs depict the trades and work situations, hardship and heroism, rebellions, wars and the events that affected a people – all recalled in a process of collective memory in songs that have been passed on from generation to generation, in most cases with the name of the author long forgotten. The melodies were sometimes original, sometimes borrowed, often changing with each generation.

In the same way Yiddish folk and popular songs reflect Jewish life in a lyrical and dramatic way.

They evoke tender introspection, emotional outpouring, sometimes satirical or coarse, but always a true reflection of the lives of the people in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe and that is why they have survived to this day.

There were literally thousands of such songs and most have come down to us with some changes and variations which in themselves reflect the changing and dynamic conditions of the Jewish people, songs that were all lovingly passed on from generation to generation.

There were love songs and lullabies, songs on poverty and illness and eating, on Heder learning and pleading with the

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\* From a Lecture given in Vancouver, Canada

Issakhar Fater

## MUSICAL THEMES of GEBIRTIG\*

Mordechai Gebirtig did not create his melodies while sitting at the piano, because he had no formal musical education, had never learned to play an instrument, nor could he write any musical notes. Yet, judging from his songs, one gets the impression that he had a very good grasp of the typically Jewish melody lines, as well as an excellent sense of rhythm. He could, however, play on his shepherd's flute, which usually increased his musical inspiration and thus captured the hearts of the Jewish masses.

Let's consider the two basic elements of his music: the "melos" and the rhythm. The former creates the melody-line and the musical contents, while the latter constitutes the "movement" of the song. What were the sources of Gebirtig's melodies? First and foremost, their origin goes back to the prayers and the prayer-houses of Ashkenazic Jewry; to the songs of the Jewish houses heard on Friday night and to the Hassidic chants; to the monotonous sing-songs of the Talmud students and to the chant of the Torah reading. Environmental elements also played an important part in Gebirtig's melodies, which he had skillfully adjusted and absorbed in his music.

With very few exceptions, Gebirtig's songs were composed (and written down by his friend Julius Hoffman) in the minor keys. It is noteworthy that his song "*S'iz Gut*"

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\* This precis is based on the Yiddish original.



DOS ALTE POR FOLK  
THE OLD COUPLE

דאס אלטע פאר פאלק  
ווג הקשישים

טעקסט און מוזיק: מ. געבירטיג  
Text and Music: M. Gebirtig

Allegretto

Gm Eb D<sup>7</sup> Gm D<sup>7</sup> Gm

Kha-ye, mayn vay-bl, du shlofst? Ikh shlof nisht, mikh nemt nisht keyn shlof.  
 קה-יֵה, מַיִן וַיִּבֵּל, דו שְׁלֹפְסְתָּ? אִיךְ שְׁלֹפְ נִישְׁת, מִיךְ נֵמֵט נִישְׁת קֵיִן שְׁלֹפ.

Gm Bb D<sup>7</sup> Gm D<sup>7</sup>

zey-ger in droysn shlogt tsvey in der nakht, un ikh hob biz itst nokh  
 זַיִגֶר אין דרויסן שְׁלֹגְט צוויי אין דער נַאכְט, און אִיךְ הוֹב ביז אִיִּשְׁט נֹאכְט

Gm D<sup>7</sup> Gm G<sup>7</sup> Cm

oyg nisht far makht, kh'layd I-yov's yi-su-rim, s'nemt gor nisht keyn sof,  
 אױג נִישְׁת פֿאַר מַאכְט, קְהַלַּיִד אִיִּיִּוֹב'ס יִיִּסּוּרִים, ס'נֵמֵט גֹר נִישְׁת קֵיִן סוֹף,

Gm D<sup>7</sup> Gm Bb D<sup>7</sup> Gm

el-ter, oy, iz a Gots-shtrof, di el-ter, oy, iz a Gots-shtrof.  
 אֵלֶּטֶר, אױ, אִז אַ גוֹט'ס־שְׁטְרוֹף, די אֵלֶּטֶר, אױ, אִז אַ גוֹט'ס־שְׁטְרוֹף.

instr. Gm Cm Gm Eb Dm rit. Gm D<sup>7</sup> Gm

Khaye, mayn vaybl, du shlofst?  
 - Ikh shlof nisht, mikh nemt nisht keyn shlof.  
 Der zeyger in droysn shlogt tsvey in der nakht,  
 Un ikh hob biz itst nokh keyn òyg nisht farmakht,  
 Kh'layd Iyov's yisurim, s'nemt gornisht keyn sof,  
 Di elter, oy, iz a Got's-shtrof.

מַיִן וַיִּבֵּל, דו שְׁלֹפְסְתָּ?  
 אִיךְ שְׁלֹפְ נִישְׁת, מִיךְ נֵמֵט נִישְׁת קֵיִן שְׁלֹפְ.  
 דער זַיִגֶר אין דרויסן שְׁלֹגְט צוויי אין דער נַאכְט,  
 און אִיךְ הוֹב ביז אִיִּשְׁט נֹאכְט נִישְׁת פֿאַרמאַכְט,  
 קְהַלַּיִד אִיִּיִּוֹב'ס יִסּוּרִים, ס'נֵמֵט גֹרנִישְׁת קֵיִן סוֹף,  
 די אֵלֶּטֶר, אױ, אִז אַ גוֹט'ס־שְׁטְרוֹף.

- Khayiml, zog mir, du shlofst?  
- Ikh shlof nisht, s'iz, Khaye, zeyer mius,  
Ikh shtekhn di zaytn, es mutshet der hust,  
In shver vi a tsentn ot do oyf der Brust,  
Dos veter vet, Khayele, morgn zayn mius,  
Ikh raysn di hent und di fis.

- Khayele, zog mir, du shlofst?  
- Ikh shlof nisht, dermont zikh on zey,  
Fun Yoslen iz lang shoyrn keyn brivl geven.  
On Sheyndl - Got veyst vos mit ir iz geshen,  
Fun ale fir kinder geblibn mir tsvey,  
Gehat amol nakhas fun zey.

- Khayiml, zog mir, du shlofst?  
- Ikh shlof nisht, oykh ikh fun zey trakht,  
Haynt Khaneles bet oyfn boydem gezen,  
Amol iz dos betl far undz nutslekh geven,  
Oykh Yankeles vigl, mir hot zikh gedakht,  
Ikh ze im, ikh her vi er lakht.

- Khayele, zog mir, du shlofst?  
- Gedrimlt, gekholemt fun zey,  
In shtub ale kinder, ikh bet zikh bay zey:  
Oy, kinderlekh, shrayt nisht, der kop tut mir vey!  
Nor bald iz der zisinker kholem farbay -  
Oy, s'benkt zikh nokh yenem geshray.

- Khayiml, tust zikh shoyrn on?  
- Yo, s'togt shoyrn, es krayt shoyrn der hon,  
Geloybt der in himl, gepatert a nakht,  
Gedreyt zikh fun veytik, keyn oyg nisht farmakht,  
Nor bald, mayn lib Khayele, brengt undz der sof  
Dem shtiln, dem eybikn shlof.

- חיימל, זאג מיר, דו שלאָפסט?  
- איך שלאָף נישט, ס'איז, חיה, זייער מיאוס,  
מיך שטעכן די זייטן, עס מוטשעט דער הוסט,  
און שווער ווי אַ צענטן אָט דאָ אויף דער ברוסט,  
דאָס וועטער וועט, חיהלע, מאָרגן זײַן מיאוס,  
מיך רײסן די הענט און די פֿיס.

- חיהלע, זאג מיר, דו שלאָפסט?  
- איך שלאָף נישט, דערמאָנט זיך אָן זיי,  
פֿון יאָסלען איז לאַנג שוין קיין בריוול געווען.  
און שיינדל - גאָט ווייסט וואָס מיט איר איז געשען,  
פֿון אַלע פֿיר קינדער געבליבן מיר צוויי,  
געהאַט אַמאָל נחת פֿון זיי.

- חיימל, זאג מיר, דו שלאָפסט?  
- איך שלאָף נישט, אויך איך פֿון זיי טראַכט,  
היינט חנהלעס בעט אויפֿן בוידעם געזען,  
אַמאָל איז דאָס בעטל אונדז נוצלעך געווען,  
אויך יאַנקעלעס וויגל, מיר האָט זיך געדאַכט,  
איך זע אים, איך הער ווי ער לאַכט.

- חיהלע, זאג מיר, דו שלאָפסט?  
- געדרימלט, געחלומט פֿון זיי,  
אין שטוב אַלע קינדער, איך בעט זיך בײַ זיי:  
אוי, קינדערלעך, שרייט נישט, דער קאָפּ טוט מיר וויי!  
נאָר באַלד איז דער זיסינקער חלום פֿאַרביי -  
אוי, ס'בענקט זיך נאָך יענעם געשרײ.

- חיימל, טוסט זיך שוין אָן?  
- יאָ, ס'טאָגט שוין, עס קרײט שוין דער האָן,  
געלויבט דער אין הימל, געפטרט אַ נאַכט,  
געדרייט זיך פֿון ווייטיק, קיין אויג נישט פֿאַרמאַכט,  
נאָר באַלד, מיין ליב חיהלע, ברענגט אונדז דער סוף  
דעם שטילן, דעם אייביקן שלאָף.