

Bo'u l'Gani, Come to my Garden: Piyutim in Kindergartens, 2015

Report to the Matanel Foundation

Come to my Garden—Background

“Come to my Garden” is a special program, intended to expose kindergarten teachers, children and parents to the rich, multi-voiced heritage of singing piyutim from the various Jewish traditions, with the intention of integrating them into the kindergartens’ routine.

The program was initiated during the 2015–2016 school year, as part of a broader perspective that seeks to enrich the Israeli cultural sound track, and the educational system in particular, through a variety of sources drawing from the wisdom of previous generations.

The piyutim were carefully chosen through practical experience with preschool children, and were adapted to daily life, the annual cycle, birthdays and various celebrations, and the kindergartens’ pedagogic curricula.

In order to develop and operate the program, the Ministry of Education, Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi and “Invitation to Piyut” joined forces, with the support of the Matanel Foundation. In addition to unique musical arrangements and recordings, special lesson plans for kindergarten teachers, focusing on the selected piyutim, are being developed by a joint team of professionals from the Ministry of Education together with program staff.

The Project in Detail

CD

Eighteen original recordings of new, accessible arrangements, created specifically for the project, comprise a high-quality CD with an accompanying booklet of lyrics. The recordings include piyutim from twelve traditions, with their characteristic instruments and a variety of male and female vocalists. The CD is distributed to the hundreds of kindergarten teachers and children participating in the project.

Professional Training for Kindergarten Teachers

750 kindergarten teachers were introduced to the project at a festive event held at the Jerusalem Convention Center. Additionally, hundreds of kindergarten teachers throughout the country, from both the secular and

national-religious school systems, were provided with professional training, facilitated by the project's content staff and professional music teachers.

"Paytan Ba'Gan"

A group of male and female piyut singers (*paytanim*) were specially trained as part of the project, and they visit the kindergartens in order to provide an experiential dimension to the process. Generally, family members are also invited to these events, creating particularly moving multi-generational encounters and connections.

Lesson Plans

Lesson plans about the piyutim, specifically adapted for the kindergarten children and teachers, are being written. Rachel Malka, an experienced kindergarten teacher, led the staff that developed these plans, with professional guidance from members of "Invitation to Piyut." For a complete list of the lesson plans, click [here](#).

Project Progress

CD Production

- Production of the project's first CD, comprising 18 piyutim, has been completed.
- The CD comes with a booklet containing the words of all the piyutim.
- Some 1200 sample CDs, containing a number of tracks from the complete disc, were produced and distributed as part of the promotional activities. The CDs were received with great enthusiasm and praise. Many of the teachers began working with the disc in the kindergartens even prior to beginning professional training.
- The full CD will be distributed to some 130 kindergarten teachers during their professional training and to some 1700 children in participating kindergartens in Jerusalem and Ashdod, at the "Paytan b'Gan" events and at festive conferences that are part of the implementation plan for 2015.

Implementation

- Collaboration with the Ministry of Education is a unique aspect of this program. It has enabled us to meet many kindergarten teachers at different stages and with various scopes of employment.

- During the summer, the program was presented to some 750 kindergarten teachers at a major national-religious education system event.
- Additionally, we facilitated workshops at four professional-training days for supervisors, each attended by over 100 kindergarten teachers.
- We presented two additional workshops for some 130 leading kindergarten teachers from throughout the country at special professional-training sessions for head supervisors in Beer Sheva, and an intensive seminar within the framework of a leadership course for kindergarten teachers, attended by leading teachers from the southern region.
- Comprehensive seminars at pedagogic centers—we developed a special, 30-hour training seminar in conjunction with the program, and it is being implemented at five pedagogic centers throughout the country; in Jerusalem, Ashdod, Beit Shemesh, Maaleh Adumim and Rosh Ha'Ayin. Some 130 kindergarten teachers, who facilitate the program at their kindergartens, are participating in the seminar.
- We are operating a broader implementation program in 60 kindergartens in Jerusalem and Ashdod. In addition to the professional training in which the teachers participate, an instructor personally mentors the teacher in implementing the program; a *paytan* (musician who sings piyutim) visits the kindergarten, usually in the context of a festive event with parents; and major musical events take place. A number of kindergartens, children and parents will participate in each event.

To conclude, the program is unequivocally a great success. Feedback from all the different participants and partners is outstanding. We are hopeful that what has begun with the support of the Matanel Foundation, will continue to grow and influence broad circles of children and parents in Israel and in Jewish communities abroad.

With sincere gratitude for your support,
and looking forward to the next stage,

Yair Harel

Uri Kroizer

Tamar Rechnitz

Artistic Director and Editor-in-Chief

Director of Education and Community

Director

Appendix: Selected Responses from Program Participants—Kindergarten Teachers, Supervisors, Parents and Children

- “The children love the subject of piyut.”
- “I have participated in many professional training seminars, but never in such an interesting and exciting one.”
- “I was particularly moved when a 90-year-old great grandmother came to me at the end and, with tears in her eyes, thanked me for the opportunity to participate in a kindergarten activity with her great granddaughter.”
- “On Friday, we celebrated Family Day at the kindergarten with the paytan Mr. Amram Buskila. It was an absolute pleasure, and the parents left feeling great.”
- “The parents couldn’t believe how well the children sang the piyutim. They were very excited, as some of the parents said that we had taken them back in time, to the piyutim of their parents and grandparents.”
- “It was simply wonderful, and different from all the Family Days I have celebrated at the kindergarten. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to participate in this project.”
- “One mother sent me a film clip of her aging father singing the piyut ‘Wings of the Dove’ together with his grandson, who had learned it in the kindergarten. She told me that, at home, they are amazed at the fact that he sings piyutim all day.”
- “One of the mothers wrote me: ‘Thanks to you, this has been one of my son’s most moving experiences.’”
- “I feel that this is an experiential process with deep emotional significance. For me, it is not just an educational project, but a connection to a personal-family circle that includes aspects of culture, Judaism, faith, tradition, values and transmission of messages.”
- “Personally, I feel that you have taken the royal road in exposing kindergarten children to such a varied repertoire, including Hebrew, classical and theater songs, world music and piyut. This is an ideal model. The children enjoy all of it and are open to everything, regardless of their own ethnic origins.”
- “I arrived at the kindergarten and, without preparation, put on the disc. I watched the children, who were busy playing, and I noticed that some of them stopped playing and started to listen, some laughed, others were interested, humming and moving along with the melody.”
- “The children cooperated amazingly. There were no interruptions or talking. It was a great pleasure, an elevated state of mind that stayed with me for a long time afterwards.”