

The First in an Occasional Series

Adon Olam



Most of us are familiar with the liturgical poem 'Adon Olam – L-rd of the Universe, sung chiefly at the end of Shabbat and festivals services. Its authorship is debated among scholars, but most ascribe it to the Jewish poet and philosopher **Shelomo Ibn Gabirol** (1021- 1051).

Adon Olam became known throughout the Jewish world. It proclaims the eternity of G-d (*He was, He is and He shall be glorious for evermore*); His uniqueness (*He is One, there is none else, alone, unique beyond compare*); His providence and protection (*into His hand my soul I place, when I awake and when I sleep*).

Adon Olam is placed in our siddur early on – (at the beginning of the day Chief Rabbi's New Siddur, page 10) serving as an introduction to the Morning Prayer. This is in order to instil in us the reverence of the A-lmighty thus bringing us into proper devotion for prayer. We also bring the day to a close reciting Adon Olam right at the end of our bedtime prayers (Chief Rabbi's New Siddur, page 250), reaffirming our faith in G-d.

We conclude our Mussaf Prayers on Shabbat and Festivals by singing Adon Olam.

Unsurprisingly, there are many musical settings for Adon Olam in a variety of styles. Also, you'll find special tunes for special occasions. We have a majestic melody for Yamim Noraim. On other festivals we imbue the text with the unambiguous festival's flavour. For instance, on Chanukah we sing Adon Olam to the tune of Maoz Tzur and on Pesach to the tune of Addir Hu. Perhaps we should mention here the website www.shulmusic.org where you can find many synagogue compositions including a long list of melodies for Adon Olam.

Here are some examples of compositions, some better known and some less so.

Salamone De Rossi (c.1570-c.1630) served as composer at the court of the Gonzaga Dukes of Mantua. He was probably the first Jew to gain recognition for his composing style which was considered rather innovative for that period. In his book for the Mantua Synagogue, '*Hashirim Asher LiShlomo*', we find a beautiful and fairly solemn setting for Adon Olam in early Baroque style. You can hear a very elegant rendition of it on our CD '*The Song In Prayer*', performed by our Neimah Singers.

A much-loved melody, usually reserved for special occasions, is the 'De Sola' (Blue Book, page 276), brought over from Amsterdam by Rabbi David Aaron de Sola (1796-1860) who was appointed as minister at the Bevis Marks

Synagogue in 1818. In 1857 he published *'The ancient Melodies of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews'*. His Adon Olam is still sung in Sephardi and Ashkenazy congregations to this day.

Another classic favourite with British communities, is the setting by Simon W. Waley (1827-1876) for the West London Synagogue. This melody became so popular that it was readily adopted by orthodox communities (yes, we sing it frequently here in SJWS!). It can be found in the 'Blue Book' on page 91.

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Moderato. No 17. ADÓN ÓLOM. A.W.
Sopr.
Alt.
Ten.
Bass.
KAN. Reelit.
vhu o chod v'en seho ni l'hamehil lé l'hach hi ro, bli ro

The melody I will focus on today and sing together with you is probably the most well known tune for Adon Olam. There are possibly very few who never heard this one and it's known even beyond the Jewish world. But not many know its origins.

Eliezer Mordechai Gerowitsch (1844-1914) was a very distinguished cantor composer. His main cantorial appointment was to the Rostov on Don's (southern Russia) Chor Shul (choral synagogue) in 1887. He was to Eastern European Chazanut what Sulzer and Lewandowski were for western European synagogue music. In 1890 he published his first book *'Shire T'filoh'* dedicated to the High Holydays. We sing his *T'veinu* (titled in his book as *'S'rok Olenu'*) in the Selichot Service and on Yom Kippur.

In his second book *'Schirej Simroh'* published in 1904, we find his Adon Olam which started life as a serious choral four part harmony piece with a cantor's solo (please see attached pictures). However, it became so well-liked that it soon spread throughout synagogues acquiring a lighter character. If you are still not sure to which tune I refer, you can find it in the above www.shulmusic.org. It is number 28 on

the Adon Olam list and under its composer it simply says, 'Traditional'!

Its popularity is such that it is performed in a diversity of styles. To illustrate this I recommend you to listen to the rendition of Yehuda Glantz. Argentinean born Yehuda, who is based now in Israel, is an artist, singer and composer who developed a style that fuses Chassidic and Latino music creating a sort of 'Gaucha Klezmer' idiom. You can hear his interpretation of the Gerowitsch Adon Olam on YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78nGYFopaAI>, where he accompanies himself on the 'charango' (small South American stringed instrument) adding some Aramaic and Spanish verses! Enjoy. Although I'm also Argentinean born, please don't expect such a rendition from me!

Although there is only one Master of the Universe, there are many different ways to praise him and sing to him.

Shabbat Shalom,

Cantor Moshe Haschel