

Esotericism, Accessibility, and Mainstreamization: Pre-Prayer Gesturing and the Evolution of Jewish Practice

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“Certainly, there was some deep meaning in it, most worthy of interpretation, and which, as it were, streamed forth from the mystic symbol, subtly communicating itself to my sensibilities, but evading the analysis of my mind.”

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)

Moments before beginning the silent *'amidah* prayer, male and female synagogue attendees in Istanbul turn to each other and offer a fleeting hand gesture. This study tracks this inimitable practice from its hazy origins, through almost four centuries to the present day.

Beyond uncovering the sources of the custom and laying bare the justifications and explanations, this study considers the evolving meaning of this practice. To this end, I will argue that the custom goes through different stages. The practice's recorded history begins with esoteric kabbalistic lore, it then metamorphoses into an accessible template, before processes of mainstreamization threaten its existence. The survival of the practice is protected in contemporary communities that function like Nature Reserves.¹

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I. Waving today

The pre-'*amidah* wave is practiced today in numerous synagogues in Istanbul, both on the European side and the Anatolian side of the city. People can be seen gesturing to each other before the silent prayer in *Etz Ahayim* in Ortaköy, *Bet Yisrael* in Şişli, *Neve Shalom* in the old Galata neighborhood, *Hemdut Israel* in Kadıköy – Haydarpaşa, and *Bet El* in Caddebostan.² The wave involves holding up the hand with fingers pointing up and the palm angled inwards towards the gesturer, and moving the hand slowly back and forwards three or four times, while making eye contact with others in the synagogue.

On Thursday, March 26, 2015, Turkey and its Jewish community celebrated the rededication of the grand synagogue in Edirne. This synagogue – *Kal Kadosh ha-Gadol*, or as it is known in Turkish *Büyük Sinagogu* – had lain in ruins, but after extensive renovation the magnificent building was restored to its former glory. Edirne has an illustrious Jewish history: Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488–1575), author of the seminal *Shulḥan 'arukh* and other important works, taught for a time in what was then known as Adrianople. It was in this city that Karo, together with Rabbi Shelomo Alkabetz (ca.1500–1576/7) – renowned author of the *Lekha dodi* Sabbath poem – shaped the all-night vigil known

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Translations are my own; brackets in citations indicate my additions and explanatory notes, while parentheses in citations appear in the original.

- 1 I have had opportunities to consider this custom and present preliminary findings in different contexts. See Levi Cooper, *Relics for the Present*, vol. 1 (New Milford: Maggid Books, 2012), 110–12, where I discussed the practice while ruminating on the contemporary significance of a talmudic passage. As I tracked down the sources used in this study I documented the journey in a series of podcasts that can be accessed at <http://elmad.pardes.org/topic/the-maggid-of-melbourne-speaks>, and then narrated the tale of discovery in Levi Cooper, “The Turkish Gesture: A Custom in Danger of Extinction,” *Jewish Educational Leadership* 15, no. 1 (2016): 48–55. This study is a fuller and more accurate presentation and an attempt to understand the significance of the evolution of the prayer gesture.
- 2 I observed the gesture during a series of trips to Istanbul: January 9–15, 2014; March 23–29, 2015; January 12–17, 2016; February 14–19, 2017.

as *Tiqqun leil shavu'ot*. The famed Safed kabbalist and biblical commentator, Rabbi Moshe Alsheikh (1508–1593), was born in this city.

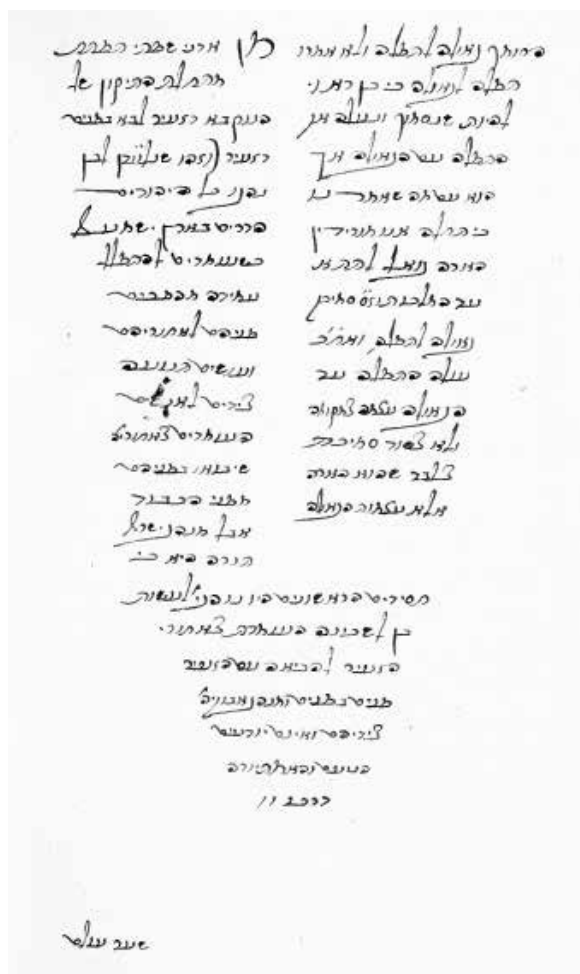
For the reopening of the synagogue – an event widely covered by the press – many people travelled to Edirne from Istanbul and from outside Turkey. The day-long festivities began with early morning prayers in the synagogue, and here too people silently gestured to each other before beginning the *'amidah* prayer.

The custom is not confined to Turkey: waving before the *'amidah* prayer is practiced in Syrian synagogues in America, Argentina, and elsewhere. Notwithstanding the fact that the practice can be seen in significant synagogues across the world, the custom and its meaning – original and imputed – have not been widely documented.³

II. Rabbi Natan Shapira

The earliest known record of the practice appears in the writings of the seventeenth century kabbalist, Rabbi Natan Shapira (d. 1662). Shapira hailed from Kraków, but moved to Jerusalem where he served as the rabbi of the Ashkenazi community in the Holy City. In 1655 he was sent by the Jerusalem community to Italy, Germany, and Holland in order to raise money. After

- 3 On hand gestures and movement in prayer, see Friedrich Heiler, *Das Gebet. Eine religionsgeschichtliche und religionspsychologische Untersuchung* (München: E. Reinhardt, 1919), 98–109; translated and abridged under the title *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 40–42. On the cultural and religious significance of hand gestures generally, see J. A. MacCulloch, “Hand,” in *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1908–1927), 6:496–98; Frederick Mathewson Denny, “Hands,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, editor-in-chief of first edition Mircea Eliade, 1987; 2nd ed., edited by Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 6:3769–71; idem, “Postures and Gestures,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 11:7341–45. For analysis of Jewish prayer gestures, see Uri Ehrlich, *Kol 'at smotay tomarnah: Ha-safah ha-lo milulit shel ha-tefilla* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999; 2nd ed., 2003), translated into English and published under the title *The Nonverbal Language of Prayer: A New Approach to Jewish Liturgy*, trans. Dena Ordan (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); Moshe Hallamish, *Studies in Kabbalah and Prayer* (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2012), 390–417 (Hebrew). On symbolism of hand gestures in Judaism unconnected to prayer – that is, in legal, exegetical, and narrative contexts – see Catherine Hezser, *Rabbinic Body Language: Non-Verbal Communication in Palestinian Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 168–83.



The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS Opp. 115

returning to Jerusalem, Shapira once again set out for Italy where he spent his final years before he died in Reggio. Shapira – often referred to as Natan Shapira the Jerusalemite – was an important figure in the transmission and transcription of the teachings of the great Safed kabbalist Rabbi Yitshak Luria (the *Ari*, 1534–1572).⁴

4 Regarding Natan Shapira, see Arye Leib Frumkin and Eliezer Rivlin, *Toledot hakhmei Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem: Solomon, 1928-1930), 2:39–41; Avraham Yaari,

Luria bequeathed a rich mystical legacy, though his lofty ideas did not reach us from his own pen. The lot fell to his disciples, and in particular to Rabbi Hayim Vital (1542–1620), who took notes and expended considerable effort to record Luria's teachings. Vital sequestered one central work entitled *Sefer 'ets hayim*, with explicit orders not to let the manuscript out of his home even after his demise. Visitors to Vital's Damascus home avidly studied the manuscript. At the same time, other writings that recorded Luria's legacy were studied and copied in centers of Jewish mysticism throughout the world.

Luria's teachings were organized into "*kavanot*" – mystical intentions that were to accompany prayers and the fulfillment of other commandments. In the seventeenth century, Rabbi Meir Poppers (1624–1662) edited these *kavanot* in what would become the most circulated version of Luria's teachings. Poppers used titles that Vital had coined: *Derekh 'ets hayim*, *Peri 'ets hayim*, and *Nof 'ets hayim*. The raw materials for Poppers' works were Vital's manuscripts. However, Poppers' organization and editing efforts were significant, to the extent that the product was truly a new work.⁵

While Poppers was editing the works in Poland, Shapira undertook a similar task in Italy. He called one of his most significant works by the title *Me'erot natan* – a work that has remained in manuscript to this day. Those who published Luria's *kavanot* had access to *Me'erot natan* manuscripts and included selections from Shapira's mystical writings. Thus Shapira's rendition

Sheluhēi erets yisra'el (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1951), 277–81; Gershom Scholem, *Shabbetai Tsevi: Ve-ha-tenu'ah ha-shabta'it bi-mei hayav* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1957), 2:392–93 n. 4; David Malkiel, "Poems on Tombstone Inscriptions in Northern Italy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Pe'amim* 98–99 (winter-spring 2004): 141 (Hebrew); idem, "Christian Hebraism in a Contemporary Key: The Search for Hebrew Epitaph Poetry in Seventeenth-Century Italy," *JQR* 96 (2006): 139 n. 45; Yosef Avivi, *Kabbala Luriana* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 2008), 2:701–11, 892, 936 (Hebrew).

Most sources give Shapira's date of death as 1 Iyar 5426 (May 6, 1666); Scholem suggested that he died on Friday, 2 Iyar 5426 (May 7, 1666) or Friday, 5 Iyar 5427 (April 29, 1667); based on his tombstone, Malkiel gave the date 21 Shevat 5762 (February 10, 1662).

- 5 Regarding Meir Poppers, see Hayim Yosef David Azulai, *Shem ha-gedolim* (Livorno: Gio. Falorni, 1774), sec. *mem*, parag. 72; Frumkin and Rivlin, *Toledot hakhmei Yerushalayim*, 2:38–39; Mordechai Margalioth (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Great Men in Israel* (Tel Aviv: J. Chachik, 1946–1950), 4:1019–21 (Hebrew); Meir Wunder, *A Thousand Pearls (Elef Margalioth)* (Jerusalem: Ha-makhon le-hantsahat yahadut Galitsya, 1993), 326–28 (Hebrew); Avivi, *Kabbala Luriana*, 1:50, 2:636–56, 717–23, 891–92, 934.

of Luria's *kavanot* has reached us in two forms: non-autograph manuscripts and printed works that incorporate select materials from the manuscripts, often without attribution.

The most reliable textual witness of *Me'orot natan* is a seventeenth century manuscript written in Italian script and held in the Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford. The earliest surviving documentation of the waving custom appears in this manuscript:

And this is that which appears according to the humble opinion of N [שְׁנֵי לַעֲדָרֵי נ"ן, *she-nir'eh la-'aniyut da'at "n"*], because of this all the Jews who live in the land of Ishmael have the practice as they stand to pray *'amidah*, they turn their faces to [look] behind them and they make a gesture with the hands to the people standing behind them, that they should go in front of them out of respect. But the custom of Israel is considered Torah, for the early pietists [*hasidim ha-rishonim*] had this practice to do thus to the Holy Presence that stands behind the *ze'ir* [that is, *ze'ir anpin*, literally "small face," microprosopus, referring to one aspect of God's revealed presence in the world] to bring it with the *ze'ir* face to face. And the custom of their forebears remains in their hands and they know not the reason. And truth indicates its path.⁶

Shapira understood that the custom reflected a kabbalistic worldview of God's presence in the world, and he briefly laid out the meaning of the rite. A discussion of the kabbalistic explanation is beyond the scope of this study; in the present context suffice it to point out that in Lurianic lore, the rite described here is part of the process of cosmological *tiqqun* [repair]. Shapira's parenthetical note – the opening parenthesis appears in the manuscript – on the custom is a comment on the following line: "From 'God, open my lips' [Ps 51:17]," that is, the opening line of the *'amidah*, "Begins the repair of the *nuqva* [the feminine aspect] of *ze'ir anpin*, that it should come in the *ze'ir anpin*." The gesture, therefore, is part of the theurgic process of repair.

6 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Opp. 115 [Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, National Library of Israel, F18444], page 145b; opening parenthesis in the original, end of the passage marked. Regarding this manuscript, see Avivi, *Kabbala Luriana*, 2:704–6.

Even without delving into the kabbalistic meaning of the rite, there is room to offer observations and tentative conclusions. As noted, the passage begins with a parenthesis indicating that this is a supplementary addition to the text. The acronym שְׁנִלְעֵרֵן [she-nir'eh la-'aniyut da'at "n"] is a unique iteration of a common acronym and is one of the standard markers employed by Shapira to indicate that the ensuing words are his own addition: the Hebrew letter *nun* indicating Shapira's first name – Natan.

Shapira, however, appears not to have practiced the wave himself, as he notes that it was a custom of “all the Jews who live in the land of Ishmael.” The uncommon designation “the land of Ishmael” – a phrase that does not appear in the Bible⁷ – presumably refers to the Ottoman Empire. Thus, Shapira did not start the wave: he did not innovate the practice, he merely reported its existence and advocated its retention. Thus far, I have been unsuccessful in identifying a source that predates Shapira. As scholars have noted, it is often difficult, if not impossible, to identify the origins of any particular gesture.⁸ Shapira's testimony identifies the prayer waving gesture as an existing custom, hence the contemporary Istanbul wave must be at least some four hundred years old.

In Shapira's eyes, it was clear that the custom was a kabbalistic practice. Shapira was also well-aware that people who were performing the rite were not cognizant of its significance in mystical lore. The practitioners had their own understanding of the wave that focused on interpersonal relationships; that is, “that they should go in front of them out of respect.” Scholars have noted that the interpersonal sphere was the most significant source of inspiration for prayer gestures.⁹ But this case is different: the interpersonal sphere

7 As to why the phrase never appears in the Bible, see Y. Moshe Emmanuelli, *Sefer bereishit: Hesberim ve-ha'arot* (Tel Aviv: Ha-hevra le-ḥeker ha-mikra, 1978; 2nd ed., 1984), 244; Yehuda Kil, *Da'at mikra: Bereishit*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1997), 439, commenting on Gen 16:12.

8 Betty J. Bäuml and Franz H. Bäuml, *Dictionary of Worldwide Gestures*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997), 4. A direction of enquiry that goes beyond the scope of this study would suggest examining the possibility of a similar practice in the surrounding non-Jewish milieu. By way of example, see Yosef Yinon [Paul Fenton], “Hashpa'ot sufiyot 'al ha-kabbala bi-Tsefat,” *Mahanaim* 6 (1993): 170–79. Regarding hand gestures across cultures, see sources cited above, n. 3.

9 Heiler, *Prayer*, 41. Regarding specific Jewish prayer practices, see Ehrlich, *Nonverbal Language of Prayer*, 15–19, 27, 40–45, 50, 59–60, 78–79, 102–5, 113–15, 122–27, 129,

did not provide the infrastructure for the relationship with God; rather, the gesture itself was understood by its practitioners as an interpersonal act.

According to Shapira, practitioners invested the act with accessible meaning without considering the kabbalistic significance of the gesture. Shapira was not particularly critical of this state, for “the custom of Israel is considered Torah.” The fact that the people did not know “the reason” did not perturb Shapira; he was perfectly fine allowing people to conduct the rite without understanding it one whit.

I have no way to determine whether the practice was indeed originally a kabbalistic rite whose meaning developed over time, or whether it was originally an interpersonal gesture that was later invested with esoteric meaning. Despite not being able to ascertain the evolutionary direction of the practice, it is clear that by the time it was first recorded, the custom already had a dual nature. Those versed in mystical lore, understood the wave to be a kabbalistic practice with theurgic import. This meaning of the practice was beyond the ken of most. Those who did not fathom the esoteric significance of the rite, still wavered because they connected to the interpersonal meaning. As we will see, this duality continued to echo throughout the history of the gesture, though the balance between the two aspects tilted in favor of accessible meanings.

III. Livorno

The custom next appears in the work of Rabbi Isac Nunes Vias, an Italian rabbi who died sometime before December 1788. Not much is known about Nunes Vias. He hailed from a Livorno rabbinic family of Marrano extraction and his literary legacy rests on a series entitled *Siah yitshaq*.¹⁰ The series was

132, 140–42, 144, 147–49, 150–54, 167–70, 173, 183, 195–96, 201–3, 207, 216–17.

10 On Isac Nunes Vias, see Alfredo Toaff and Aldo Lattes, *Gli studi ebraici a Livorno nel secolo XVIII* (Livorno: Belforte, 1909), 13–14; Cecil Roth, “Nunes Vais,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 12:1272–73. I have taken the spelling of his name from Toaff and Lattes. His first name is also recorded as Yitshak Yosef.

Nunes Vias’ date of death is unclear. Roth gives the year 1768. In 1765, Nunes Vias penned an approbation; see *Tiqqun hatsot laylah* (Livorno: Moise Attias, 1765), [1a]. A year later he published *Siah yitshaq: Heleq rishon... Yoma...* (Livorno: Moise Attias, 1766). His name is mentioned with an epitaph on the title page of his next work, *Siah yitshaq:... Hagigah...* (Livorno: Gio. Vinc. Falorni, 1788?) and

planned for three volumes, each volume being a commentary on a different tractate of Talmud. The first volume was on tractate *Yoma*, the second on *Ḥagigah*, and the third on *Shevu'ot* – the title “*Siaḥ*” [שיח] forming an acronym for the three tractates. Volume one on *Yoma* was published in 1766; volume two on *Ḥagigah* appears to have been published in 1788; volume three on *Shevu'ot* was never published, and I have not found evidence of the survival of a manuscript.¹¹

Besides the commentary on tractate *Ḥagigah*, volume two also contains an addendum on prayer.¹² This section was excerpted from *Beit yitshaq* – Nunes Vias’ commentary on Karo’s *Shulḥan ‘arukh*. The *Beit yitshaq* manuscript was never published and its whereabouts is not recorded. In this excerpted work, Nunes Vias noted the waving practice.

Nunes Vias opened his comments by saying: “That which the Jews in the land of Ishmael have the custom”¹³ – Livornian Nunes Vias was obviously not describing a local practice. Moreover, the unusual designation “land of Ishmael” would suggest that Shapira’s *Me’orot natan* was the source for Nunes Vias. Indeed, when explaining the reason for the practice, Nunes Vias simply cited Shapira – his report of an accessible meaning and the esoteric roots of

in the volume’s peritexts (*ibid.*, first pagination 1, 2a, 2b, second pagination 60a, 82a). Alas the year of publication of this volume is unclear. 1788 is printed on the title page, but the Hebrew year of publication is given as the numerical value of *meitim yehayeh el* (“the Almighty will revive the deceased”) – presumably a reference to the author’s demise – that is, 1794. The volume is adorned by two approbations: one from Livorno rabbis dated 15 Tevet [5]549 (January 13, 1789) and the other from the author’s brother-in-law, Rabbi Yishmael Hakohen of Modena (1723–1811), dated Tuesday, 8 Kislev [5]549 (8 Kislev was not on a Tuesday in that year, suggesting that there is an error in the way the date is recorded). The author’s son who was responsible for publishing his father’s manuscript also wrote an introduction which is dated 24 Kislev [5]549 (December 23, 1788). Thus Nunes Vias died after 1766 but before December 1788. I have been unable to determine how Roth concluded that he died in the year 1768.

11 *Siaḥ yitshaq: Yoma*, [7]. The volume also reproduced comments of some medieval authorities. Significantly it included the writings of the Provençal scholar Rabbi Menaḥem Hameiri (1249–1315), which were only printed under the title *Beit ha-behirah* in Jerusalem in 1885. The two published volumes *Siaḥ yitshaq* were reprinted in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in 1960–1961.

12 Isac Nunes Vias, “Quontris tefillat kol peh,” in *Siaḥ yitshaq: Ḥagigah*, 60a–81b.

13 *Ibid.*, 60c.

the practice. Nunes Vias added: "And he" – referring to Shapira – "concluded that the custom of Israel is Torah. See there."

Nunes Vias' accurate citations from Shapira's *Me'orot natan* suggest the possibility that the eighteenth century Italian scholar may have seen the seventeenth century Italian manuscript of *Me'orot natan*, or another such manuscript. Indeed, Shapira's works were widely copied in Italy.¹⁴ Thus the Italian connection buttresses the contention that Nunes Vias saw a *Me'orot natan* manuscript. Moreover, we can say without a doubt that Nunes Vias was familiar with Shapira's writings. Besides the *Siah yitshaq* trilogy, Nunes Vias wrote an approbation for a slender work on *Tiqqun hatsot* – the kabbalistic ritual of mourning the destruction of the Temple at midnight. The title page announced that this work followed the rite described by Shapira.¹⁵

Nunes Vias did not add anything significant. He faithfully recorded Shapira's words, acknowledging the duality of the custom and accepting Shapira's analysis: The custom was a kabbalistic practice that had been invested with useable meaning, and it should be retained.

IV. Korzec and Dubrowna

Soon after Nunes Vias mentioned the custom, but seemingly unconnected to his *Siah yitshaq*, the waving practice was also recorded in print in Poland. Returning to Shapira's literary legacy: Selections from Shapira's *Me'orot natan* were edited and published in Korzec (today Korets, Ukraine) in 1782 under the title *Peri 'ets hayim* – the very title that Poppers had taken from Vital.¹⁶ In this volume the custom is recorded within the text; no parentheses are used, and the unique acronym attributing the passage to Shapira has been excised.¹⁷ Other Korzec volumes printed with the title *Peri 'ets hayim* in 1785

14 Avivi, *Kabbala Luriana*, 2:702.

15 Shapira's rite was printed in *Tuv ha-'arets* (Venice: Presso Gio. Imberti., 1655), 64b ff. According to the title page of *Tiqqun hatsot laylah* (Livorno: Moise Attias, 1765), the rite was taken from *Sha'arei tsiyon* by Rabbi Natan Nuta Hanover (1620–1683), which was first published in Prague 1662.

16 Avivi, *Kabbala Luriana*, 2:649, 701–2, 704–6.

17 *Peri 'ets hayim* (Korzec: Johann Anton Krieger, 1782), 44b. Regarding the publisher and the Korzec printing press, see A. Tauber, "Koretz Prints," *Kirjath Sepher* 1 (1924/25): 222–25, 302–6; 2 (1925/26): 64–69, 215–30, 274–77 (Hebrew); idem, "Additions to my Article on Koretz Printing," *Kirjath Sepher* 4 (1927/28): 281–86

and 1786 make no mention of the custom. A further edition of *Peri 'ets ḥayim* was published in Dubrowna (today Dubroŭna, Belarus) in 1804, and here too the custom is mentioned.¹⁸ The Dubrowna edition is a montage of Popper's *Peri 'ets ḥayim* and Shapira's *Me'orot natan* that had been published under the title *Peri 'ets ḥayim*.¹⁹

The language of the passage under discussion is nearly identical to the Italian manuscript, with only a few minor changes that do not significantly change the meaning of the passage. For instance, the kabbalistic explanation which Shapira described as "the reason" has become "the true reason mentioned above." The near identical text indicates that the Korzec printers used a *Me'orot natan* manuscript when they prepared their *Peri 'ets ḥayim* in the late eighteenth century.

The Dubrowna *Peri 'ets ḥayim*, which mentioned the custom, became rather popular: Rabbi Ḥayim of Volozhin (1749–1821) cited this edition in his famous *Nefesh ha-ḥayim*; the kabbalist Rabbi Shelomo Eliashov (1841–1926) – known by the title of his commentary on Lurianic kabbalah, *Leshem shevo va-’aḥlama* – used this edition²⁰; and the 1980 edition of *Peri 'ets ḥayim* in block letters is based on the Dubrowna edition.²¹ Despite the volume's

(Hebrew); I. Rivkind, "Koretz Prints," *Kirjath Sepher* 4 (1927/28): 58–65 (Hebrew); Emanuel Ringelblum, "Johann Anton Krieger, Printer of Jewish Books in Nowy Dwór," trans. Henryk Katz, *Polin* 12 (1999): 199–211.

- 18 *Peri 'ets ḥayim* (Dubrowna: Barukh ben Eliyahu and Yitshaq ben Shemuel, 1803), 50c–d; *Peri 'ets ḥayim* (Dubrowna: n.p., 1804), 50c–d. *Bibliography of the Hebrew Book 1470-1960* notes that these two printings are the same edition printed in 1804 with different title pages. Indeed, the edition with an 1803 imprint includes approbations written in 1804. I did, however, find differences between the two volumes on the last page in the spelling of the names of those who worked in the printing press: errors in the 1803 imprint are corrected in the 1804. The National Library of Israel holds copies of these rare volumes. Dubrowna 1803: R2°23V12322; Dubrowna 1804: 2°23V12326; Scholem Reading Room, R4706; also accessible at <http://hebrewbooks.org/19621>.
- 19 Yosef Avivi, "Kitvei rabbi Hayim Vital be-kabbalat ha-'ari," *Moriya* 10, no. 7–8 (1981): 85 n. 22; idem, *Kabbala Luriana*, 2:649.
- 20 A 1983 photocopy of the Dubrowna edition with Eliashov's handwritten comments is held in the National Library of Israel, Scholem Reading Room, 2°2021.2.
- 21 *Peri 'ets ḥayim* (Jerusalem: Or ha-bahir, 1980); the waving passage appears in this edition on p. 211b.

popularity, the mention of the custom largely went unnoticed.²² I have yet to identify Ashkenazi kabbalistic writings that picked up on the reference or that described the practice.

V. İzmir

The waving custom is next found in the writings of the prolific Rabbi Ḥayim Palache of İzmir (1787–1868). In *Kaf ha-ḥayim* – Palache’s twelfth book, first published in Salonika in 1859 – the author acknowledged the custom: “Regarding the practice that before standing to pray we[?] make a movement with the hands, this [person] to that [person] and this [person] to that [person].”²³ Palache referenced *Siaḥ yitshaq*, who cited Shapira, though he did not offer a detailed discussion. He then added his own explanation for the custom:

For it is because we say [just before *’amidah* in the morning prayer]: “Together [those who crossed the Reed Sea] all praised and crowned [God]” and a person must show himself in each and every detail as if he went out from Egypt and from the Splitting of the Reed Sea, and our intent is that we too are now – all of us together – coming to accept the yoke of His sovereignty. ... And therefore we make a movement with the hands and call one to another, as if to say that we are all coming with one heart to pray before God and to accept His Divinity, may He be blessed.²⁴

In an addendum published at the back of the volume, Palache added a passage that had been omitted from the body of the volume:

- 22 Yosef Ḥayim of Baghdad – who I will discuss below – also referenced the Dubrowna *Peri ’ets ḥayim*, though not in the context of the waving custom (see note 44 and accompanying text).
- 23 Ḥayim Palache, *Kaf ha-ḥayim* (Salonika: n.p., 1859), 99a–b, sec. 15:1. The number 12 appears at the bottom of the title page, denoting that this was Palache’s twelfth book. The number 72 appears at the bottom of the title pages of both volumes of *Mei ha-ḥesed* (Izmir: H.A. Di Sigura, 1881–1885) – one of Palache’s commentaries on midrash. On Ḥayim Palache, see Yisrael Yitshaq Ḥasida, *Rabbi Ḥayim Palache u-sefarav* (Jerusalem: Mokirei maran ha-habif, 1968).
- 24 *Kaf ha-ḥayim*, loc. cit. Regarding the prayer mentioned at the beginning of the passage see Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin (Philadelphia: JPS, 1993), 21–22.

And even though we are coming to pray silently we rouse one another, to indicate that we are all praying with one heart, “with one language and the same words” [Gen 11:1] to the only and singular God.²⁵

Palache linked the gesture to the Exodus experience that is recalled in the morning prayers. Just as there was unity amongst the Israelites after the miraculous Exodus, so too supplicants enter the realm of prayer with a simple act that reflects a declaration of unity. The unity of the Israelites after the Exodus is a theme highlighted by the sages. Thus, for instance, when the Israelites reached Mount Sinai, the biblical verse that describes how they were encamped at the foot of the mountain employs a verb in the singular. According to rabbinic exegesis, the use of the singular form rather than the plural reflects that they were encamped “as one person with one heart.”²⁶ The pre-*amidah* wave is timed to correlate with the prayer that recounts the Israelites’ praise after they crossed the Reed Sea.

Palache’s explanation raises a question: If the gesture is specifically linked to the theme of the pre-*amidah* passage of the morning service, should supplicants wave before the *amidah* of the other prayer services where the pre-*amidah* passage is different? Contemporary evidence buttresses this question: supplicants in communities where the custom is preserved wave at each service, not just at morning services.

Palache addressed this issue by noting that the evening and afternoon prayers both have lines that bespeak unity. The evening prayer refers to the Splitting of the Sea, albeit not in the passage immediately preceding the silent *amidah*. The afternoon *amidah* is preceded by a prayer where supplicants say: “And all creatures shall bless ... And we will bless God ...” (Ps 145:21, 115:18).²⁷ These verses also suggest speaking as one in praise of the Almighty. For various reasons (that are not relevant to the present discussion), the pre-*amidah* prayers differ from service to service. Notwithstanding these differences – opined Palache – the focus on unity is eminently appropriate for the evening prayer and the afternoon prayer. Hence the wave is practiced at

25 *Kaf ha-hayim*, 293a.

26 Exodus 19:2 *va-yiḥan* instead of *va-ya-hanu*; see *Mekhilta de-rabbi Yishma’el*, Horowitz-Rabin edition (2nd ed., Jerusalem: Shalem Books, 1997), 206.

27 This prayer, known as *Ashrei*, includes a collection of biblical verses: Ps 84:5; 144:15; 145; 115:18. Regarding this prayer, see Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, 75 (and the additional references according to the index on p. 485).

all three daily services. Palache did not relate to the additional *Musaf* prayer, though nowadays supplicants gesture before that prayer as well.

Palache signed off with a brief acknowledgement of a third possible explanation that was appropriate for all prayer services: Supplicants are mimicking the angels who take leave from each other before accepting the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven. This approach had not been documented previously, though imitation of the angels is a central and recognized prayer rubric.²⁸ As we will see, this explanation gained currency in subsequent writings.

The testimony of the great rabbi from Izmir is significant on two fronts. First, he may be the earliest recorded authority to have practiced the wave. Second, Palache offered two new explanations for the practice, though he was aware of the kabbalistic approach documented by Nunes Vias and based on Shapira.

Why did Palache offer different explanations? Two viable explanations for Palache's exegetical choice present themselves. First, Palache may be preserving the strand of tradition that did not see the practice as a mystical rite. Indeed, Palache opened his first explanation with the words: "And from when we were young, we used to say"²⁹ – suggesting that his explanation harked back to earlier era.

Second, Palache's approach jibes with the move from esotericism to useability. The standard Izmir waver might have had great respect for kabbalistic tradition, but he or she may not have found meaning in *nukva*, *ze'ir anpin*, or any other mystical aspect of God's revealed presence. Palache's decision to focus on the interpersonal explanations made the practice more accessible and more meaningful for the layperson.

I do not know if Palache actually saw Shapira's words, but he certainly saw the citation in Nunes Vias' *Siah yitshaq*. Palache would have understood that he was following a well-worn path in presenting understandable meaning for this rite invested with kabbalistic significance. That path dated back to his youth and was reflected in the written record of the practice. A difference nevertheless emerges: While Shapira reported that laypeople who did not

28 See Ehrlich, *Nonverbal Language of Prayer*, 24–28, 126, 129–31, 207–11, 216–17.

29 *Kaf ha-hayim*, 99a. Palache's phrase is borrowed from, *b. B. Qam.* 92b: "When we were young we were considered like grown people; now that we are old we are considered like children."

know the kabbalistic meaning manufactured useable meaning for themselves, Palache was forthright in presenting the interpersonal explanation as a central thread, even though he was cognizant of the mystical meaning. As we will presently see, this approach continued to echo from the mid-nineteenth century through to the present day.

VI. Aleppo

As noted from the outset of the discussion, expatriate Syrian communities also gesture before the *'amidah*. The Syrian wave dates back at least to the nineteenth century, when it was recorded by Rabbi Avraham Shalom Hai Hamawi (1838–ca. 1900).³⁰ Hamawi was born in Aleppo but travelled extensively. His life was beset with loss of loved ones and poverty. Despite the hardships he endured, Hamawi succeeded in publishing an impressive collection of his writings. While his works mostly deal with prayer and Jewish law, they also abound with esoteric lore, including amulets, charms, cures, dream interpretation, and palmistry. In two of his works, Hamawi mentioned the custom of waving before the *'amidah*.

In the first work which deals with the laws of the festival of Sukkot, Hamawi merely cited from Nunes Vias' *Siah yitsḥaq* that referenced Shapira, without adding any of his own information.³¹ Let me cheekily point out that in one of his other books Hamawi complained about people copying charms from his books: "Let me tell you another thing, that most of my

30 Regarding Hamawi, see David Sion Laniado, *Li-kedoshim asher ba-'arets* (3rd ed., Jerusalem: E. Laniado, 2009), 131; Yosef Kohen, "Introduction," in Avraham Hamawi, *Yimmalet nafsho* (Jerusalem: Y. Kohen, 1990), 3–10; Yaron Harel, *The Books of Aleppo: The Rabbinic Literature of the Scholars of Aleppo* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1997), 125–38, 402 (Hebrew); David Sutton, *Aleppo: City of Scholars* (Brooklyn: Artsroll, 2005), 194–96; Shimon Vanunu, *Entsiklopediya arzei ha-levanon* (Jerusalem: Yefei Nof, 2006), 1:185–87.

Hamawi's date of death is uncertain: *Bibliography of the Hebrew Book 1470-1960* gives ca. 1900; Sutton gives 1888 (although he is mistaken in the year of birth). The English spelling of his surname is also unclear: Sutton gives "Hamway," while in the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem the "Hamawi" brothers run a butcher shop (see <http://www.machne.co.il/en/category/the-hamawi-brothers>), and there was an Arab biographer and geographer of Greek extract called Yāqūt ibn-'Abdullah al-Rūmī al-Hamawī (1179–1229).

31 Avraham Shalom Hai Hamawi, *Beit simḥah* (Jerusalem: R. H. Hakohen, 1961), 83, sec. 5.

very own books – a number of people copied them, and they were unable to understand anything from them, for they are all sealed.”³² Of course, the plagiarism that Hamawi complained about is incomparable to citing another work with attribution. Despite decrying unauthorized copying, Hamawi was generous with his esoteric knowledge: after complaining, he then shared with his reader a particular amulet for improving business, before returning to the plagiarists: “And they copied it, and they did not understand it; [they were unable to discern] between their right and their left (for they thought they were wise). But out of love for you, my dear reader, I have revealed [it] to you. It should be for you alone, and not for others besides you.”

Returning to the pre-*amidah* gesture: Hamawi offered a fuller presentation of the custom in a work printed in 1878 that focused on the laws and prayers of the Hebrew month of Elul. He began with a few important words of introduction: “That which is practiced in our land Aleppo and in most places.”³³ Hamawi seems to be reporting the custom from personal experience, suggesting that he saw the custom in Aleppo and in other locales. Regrettably, Hamawi did not identify those other places.

Where else – besides Aleppo – might Hamawi have seen the waving custom? Hamawi travelled extensively, meaning that he could have seen the practice in any number of communities where he sojourned. His widespread travels are reflected in the eclectic approbations for his printed works; a collection that includes rabbis from Jerusalem, Fez, Gibraltar, Hebron, Livorno, Marrakesh, Meknes, Pressburg, Rabat, Salonika, Sefrou, Izmir, Tunis, and other places. Hamawi also reportedly visited Sana’a and Baghdad.³⁴ Most

32 Idem, *Ha-’ah nafsheinu* (Izmir: Y. S. Di Sigura, 1870), 24a, sec. 5, para. 3.

33 Idem, *Beit el* (Livorno: E. Ben Amuzag, 1878), 123a. While *Beit simḥah* was first printed only in 1961, a reference to *Beit simḥah* in the 1878 *Beit el* suggests that *Beit simḥah* was already written.

Hamawi wrote *מה שנוהגים בארצנו אר"ץ זבת חלב וסוכה*, a phrase that contains two references to Aleppo: the first acronym stands for *אר"ם צובה* – the rabbinic name for the city taken from the Bible (1 Sam 14:47; 2 Sam 10:6, 8). The second “acronym” is not really an acronym but a play on the biblical phrase *zavat ḥalav* [flowing with milk] that could be read as “Halab” – the original ancient name and the current Arabic name of the city. It may also be a reference to the legend quoted by the twelfth century traveller, Petahya of Regensburg, that the Arabic name of the city came from Abraham who pastured his sheep in the hills of Aleppo and distributed their milk to the poor; see A. Benisch (trans.), *Travels of Rabbi Petachia of Ratisbon* (London: Trubner, 1856), 52, 53.

34 Sutton, *Aleppo*, 195.

of Hamawi's works were printed in Livorno; two were printed in Izmir and another in Calcutta. Hamawi may have seen the waving in Izmir – he visited that city and printed two works there, one in Hebrew in 1870 and the other in Ladino in 1877.³⁵ The Izmir Hebrew volume, as well as another two of his works printed in Livorno in 1874 and in 1878, carried approbations from the aforementioned Hayim Palache.³⁶

After mentioning where the wave was practiced, Hamawi then cited the popular explanation that Shapira had mentioned, “that they should go in front of them out of respect.”³⁷ Hamawi continued, recording an explanation that we have not seen until now, but – as we will presently see – has survived in collective memory until the present day:

Apparently the reason for this custom is to make peace, one with another; like asking forgiveness, one from another, in order that everyone will be with love and kinship, as one person, so that the prayer will be accepted.³⁸

Hamawi seems to be reporting what he was told about the practice. Despite his deep involvement in esoteric tradition, Hamawi did not detail the kabbalistic explanation for the practice that he saw in his hometown and elsewhere. He merely mentioned the existence of a mystical angle when he referenced Nunes Vias who had cited Shapira. Thus the dual meaning of the custom persisted, though accessible meanings were given more prominence than esoteric underpinnings.

VII. Baghdad

The illustrious Rabbi Yosef Hayim of Baghdad (1834–1909) bequeathed a rich and varied literary legacy, including responsa, compendia of law, sermons, commentaries, liturgical poems, pseudonymous and anonymous works, quiz

35 Hamawi, *Ha-'ah nafsheinu*; idem, *Zekher 'asah* (Izmir: n.p., 1877).

36 For the approbations see *Ha-'ah nafsheinu*, [2-3]; Avraham Shalom Hai Hamawi, *Davak mei-'ah* (Livorno: Y. Kushta, 1874), [2-4]; *Beit el*, [1a-b], second series. The approbations in the first two works are identical, the third is very similar. The approbations are dated Iyar [5]627, that is spring 1867, and Palache notes that Hamawi had visited Izmir.

37 Above, n. 6.

38 *Beit el*, loc. cit.

questions on Torah matters, riddles, and more. Yosef Hayim's most famous work is undoubtedly *Ben ish hai* – first published in Jerusalem in 1898 and still a popular volume that is studied by many. The structure of *Ben ish hai* is distinct: The work is essentially a weekly program of study that spans two years and covers much of practical Jewish law. Each section opens with a short exposition which often assumes familiarity with kabbalistic lore and is linked in some tenuous way to the weekly Torah reading. The exposition leads to a topic in Jewish law that is not necessarily connected to the weekly Torah portion. The section then offers a succinct presentation of that topic. In the context of the laws of prayer, Yosef Hayim recorded the waving custom:

And the custom of the Spanish Jews [*sefaradim*] when they are about to pray the *'amidah* prayer – before the prayer they turn their face back a little way and they make a gesture with their hands to the people standing behind them and at their sides.³⁹

Yosef Hayim was meticulous in recording and commenting on the customs of Baghdad Jewry. In addition, he corresponded with colleagues in the Holy Land to inquire about the practices of the Kabbalists in Jerusalem and in Hebron. In this case, Yosef Hayim identified the custom as the practice of the "*sefaradim*" – Jews of Spanish extract. In his *Ben ish hai*, Yosef Hayim did not use the term "*sefaradim*" consistently: In some cases, it is clear that he included himself in the category.⁴⁰ In other cases, the class is not entirely clear, and the reader is left to ponder whether Yosef Hayim included himself.⁴¹ Regarding waving: Comparing the way Yosef Hayim described this custom with the way he describes Baghdadi customs, indicates that he was not including himself. Furthermore, contemporary Iraqi Jews who take Yosef Hayim's legal writings as a baseline, are unfamiliar with the practice.⁴²

39 Yosef Hayim, *Ben ish hai* (Jerusalem: Salaman, 1898), first year, *beshallah*, sec. 2.

40 For instance, *Ben ish hai*, first year, *vayyeira*, sec. 6: "and we the descendants of *sefaradim*" [*va-'anahnu benei ha-sefaradim*]; see also *ibid.*, sec. 7, 12; *devarim*, sec. 9; second year, *qorah*, sec. 10; *balaq*, sec. 4.

41 See *Ben ish hai*, first year, *miqqets*, sec. 11; *vayhi*, sec. 14.

42 Regarding the term "*sefaradim*" and its application to Iraqi Jewry and specifically to Yosef Hayim, see Zvi Zohar, *The Luminous Face of the East* ([Benei Brak]: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2001), 39–44, 51–52 (Hebrew). Zohar demonstrates the complexity of the issue and offers a nuanced explanation for what being *sefaradi* meant for Iraqi rabbis who were not of Spanish extract. In the present context, I merely wish to point out that Yosef Hayim and his community did not wave.

Yosef Hayim was a native of Baghdad. Apart from visiting the Land of Israel in 1869, he spent his entire life in Iraq. From the language of the passage it is apparent that the custom he was reporting was not practiced in the local Baghdadi synagogues. How then did he know about the custom of Spanish Jewry? We cannot ascertain how Yosef Hayim came to know about the waving practice, though a number of possibilities present themselves. First, he may have seen the gesture – not in Baghdad, but during his 1869 pilgrimage via Syria to the Land of Israel.⁴³ Second, he may have heard about the custom from a visitor to Baghdad; perhaps Hamawi himself had described the custom when he visited Baghdad. Third, Yosef Hayim may have read about the custom in one of the earlier works that recorded it, like the writings of Hamawi or Palache, or in the 1804 Dubrowna *Peri 'ets hayim*, or even in Nunes Vias' work. I am yet to find a reference to Hamawi's works in Yosef Hayim's voluminous writings, but the Baghdadi scholar was undoubtedly familiar with Palache's *Kaf ha-hayim*, and his *Ben ish hai* includes a reference to the Dubrowna *Peri 'ets hayim* and to Nunes Vias' writing.⁴⁴

Despite the fact that the practice belonged to a group whose traditions Yosef Hayim did not necessarily record, he nonetheless offered an explanation for the custom:

And the reason for this is also to mimic the angels. For it is their way to accept the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven one from

43 Yosef Hayim mentions his pilgrimage in his *Ben yehoyada* (Jerusalem: Salaman, 1898–1904), 2:18b, commenting on *b. Pes. 3b, s.v. de-'ant*. His visit was also reported in the contemporary Hebrew press; see *Ha-levanon*, January 31, 1870, pp. 2–3. See also Yaakov Hillel (ed.), *The Ben Ish Hai: The Life, Times and Heritage of the Great Leader of the Babylonian Jewry, Rabbi Yosef Hayyim of Baghdad* (Jerusalem: Shalom LaAm Center, 2011), 132–56 (Hebrew).

44 Palache's *Kaf ha-hayim* is cited in the paragraph immediately preceding the waving discussion; see *Ben ish hai*, first year, *bashallah*, sec. 1. For further references to Palache's writings, see *Ben ish hai*, first year, *lekh*, sec. 12; *vayyeira*, sec. 15; *toledot*, sec. 12; *vayyishlah*, sec. 5; *vayyeishev*, sec. 15; *vayyiggash*, sec. 9; *terumah*, sec. 6; *tetsaveh*, sec. 3; *tsav-pesah*, sec. 16; *emor*, sec. 17; *shelah*, sec. 8, 9; *huqqat*, sec. 18; second year, *bereishit*, sec. 29; *lekh*, sec. 13; *vayyeitsei*, sec. 5, 21, 27; *vayyishlah*, sec. 4, 7; *vaeira*, sec. 14; *yitro*, sec. 13; *vayyiqra*, sec. 12; *shemini*, part 2, sec. 1; *tehorot*, sec. 22.

The 1804 Dubrowna *Peri 'ets hayim* is cited in *Ben ish hai*, second year, *vayyiqra*, sec. 27.

Nunes Vias' "Quntres tefillat kol peh" is cited in *Ben ish hai*, first year, *tetsaveh*, sec. 3.

another, and they give permission one to another, in order to demonstrate the unity and the kinship that exists between them. As if to say: We are all as one. We agree with one thought and with one mind to accept the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven.⁴⁵

Yosef Hayim opened the explanation saying that the practice was “also” linked to angels, for in the previous line he noted that each person should recite the *’amidah* with feet in line and together in order to mimic the angels who are depicted in Ezekiel 1:7 with the words “And the legs of each were a single rigid leg.”⁴⁶

What was the significance and effect of the angels’ giving permission to each other? Yosef Hayim continued: “And through this the praise of the Holy One blessed be He rises and is elevated when it is done out of unity and love.” Thus – according to Yosef Hayim – the conduct of the angels in Heaven was the inspiration for the practice of Spanish Jews. They were imitating the angels: Just as the angels approach the Almighty with unity by formally asking each other for permission, so too Spanish Jews were formally asking for the right to approach God in prayer and then doing so on the backdrop of that expression of unity.

This approach echoes the second and third explanations of Palache. In his second explanation, Palache had focused on unity, while in his third explanation he had described supplicants as mimicking the angels as they take leave from each other before accepting the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven. Yosef Hayim appears to have understood the two explanations as one. I should point out that Yosef Hayim did not cite Palache here, though – as I noted above – Yosef Hayim was familiar with Palache’s writings and extensively cited from Palache’s *Kaf ha-ḥayim* and his other works.

Yosef Hayim continued with an indistinct reference to the original kabbalistic explanation:

And our great master R[abbi] N[atan] Shapira gave a reason for this custom according to *sod* [literally: secret, referring to Jewish esoteric tradition], and he praised [the practice]. And according to his reason, even if there is no other person next to him or behind him, he should also do this.⁴⁷

45 *Ben ish ḥai*, first year, *beshallah*, sec. 2.

46 See Ehrlich, *Nonverbal Language of Prayer*, 24–26, 208–9.

47 *Ben ish ḥai*, loc. cit.

This is a curious passage. For one, Yosef Hayim did not assist readers in finding Shapira's explanation, nor did he indicate where he had seen the explanation. Yosef Hayim did not even fully explicate the reason. More significant is the change in emphasis: As we recall, Shapira had said that the practice was a kabbalistic rite that the uninitiated had cast in accessible terms; Yosef Hayim seemed to describe the opposite – an interpersonal gesture that Shapira had creatively cast in kabbalistic terms.

Yet Yosef Hayim – ever sensitive to kabbalistic lore – added a detail that had not been previously stated. If the practice was merely a matter of interpersonal relationships, then it made no sense to wave when one prayed alone. Yet since the practice had kabbalistic significance as a gesture to a manifestation of the divine presence, “even if there is no other person next to him or behind him, he should also do this.”

Yosef Hayim's testimony indicates that the practice was widely known in the late nineteenth century. It also preserves the dual nature of the meaning of the custom.

VIII. Expatriate Aleppians

As indicated by the evidence gathered thus far, the pre-'*amidah*' wave is not the sole province of Turkish Jewry. Indeed, contemporary expatriate Aleppo Jewish communities around the world also preserve the gesture before prayer. Two works that document Aleppo customs, written by Aleppian scholars in Israel, mention the wave.

In a work published in 1990, Rabbi Avraham Ades recorded the waving practice as a living Aleppo custom.⁴⁸ Ades cited the testimony of Dr. Haim Daye – an Aleppo Jew who moved to Israel in 1987 – that the practice was still current in Aleppo. In seeking to explain the practice, Ades first cited the popular reason mentioned by Shapira “that they should go in front of them out of respect.”⁴⁹ Ades did not mention Shapira as the source. He also recorded Daye's explanation, which presented a slightly different perspective on the rite: “For with this gesture, we are asking permission to pray in front

48 Avraham ben Ezra Ades, *Derekh erets* (Benei Brak: Ha-makhon le-hafatsat 'erkhei ha-masoret shel yahadut aram tsova, 1990), 16–17.

49 Above, n. 6.

of them," that is, in front of those standing behind.⁵⁰ Understandably, Ades cited his fellow Aleppian, Hamawi, as well as Yosef Hayim and finally Palache. Ades made no mention of the esoteric meaning of the custom, even though he would have seen indications of the kabbalistic angle in the writings of the authorities he cited.

In a collection of customs associated with prayer, the gesturing practice was discussed by Rabbi Yosef Abadi Shayo (1893–1976) and his grandson Rabbi Rachamim Moshe Shayo.⁵¹ Here the gesture is described with the following words: "The congregation stands and greets each other with peace [*ve-notenim zeh la-zeh shalom*] with an indication, with a head movement or with their hand."⁵²

In the footnotes to this line, the reason for the custom is explicated: "In order to show love and kinship before prayer."⁵³ This objective is then explicitly linked to a famous passage from the Lurianic oeuvre:

Before the person sets about his prayer in the synagogue ... it is imperative that he accepts upon himself the commandment of "And you should love your fellow as yourself" [Lev 19:18], and meditate on loving every person from the Children of Israel as [he loves] himself, for through this his prayer will ascend

50 *Derekh erets*, 17.

51 Yosef Abadi Shayo was the son of Rabbi Ezra Abadi Shayo (1870–1939), an important Aleppo rabbi and teacher. Regarding Yosef Abadi Shayo, see Laniado, *Li-kedoshim asher ba-'arets*, 295 (and the many references according to the index on p. 406); Harel, *Books of Aleppo*, 253, 409; Sutton, *Aleppo*, 321–22; Vanunu, *Entsiklopediya arzei ha-levanon*, 2:1040–41; Rachamim Moshe Shayo, "Mavo," in *Ginze Eretz: Responsa on Tur Shulhan Aruch by Rabbi's [sic] of Aram Soba (Haleb)*, ed. Rachamim Moshe Shayo (Jerusalem: Siah yisra'el, 2001), 28–30 (Hebrew).

52 Yosef Abadi Shayo, "Seder u-minhagei ha-tefillot be-ke[hillat] ko[desh] Aram Tsova bi-mei ha-hol," in *Ginze Eretz*, 16; Yosef Abadi Shayo and Rachamim Moshe Shayo, *Minhagei Aram Tsova–Halab*, unpublished, 24. *Minhagei Aram Tsova–Halab* was prepared for printing in Jerusalem 2008 but was not published. Comparing a reproduction of a page of Yosef Shayo's autograph manuscript (*Ginze Eretz*, 20) and the work prepared for publication (*Minhagei Aram Tsova–Halab*, 51–53) indicates that the grandson edited the grandfather's work without indicating where he changed the original text.

53 *Ginze Eretz*, 16 n. 19; *Minhagei Aram Tsova–Halab*, 24 n. 20.

as part of all the prayers of Israel, and [the prayer] will be able to ascend up high and to be fruitful.⁵⁴

This passage had not been cited before in the context of the waving gesture, presumably because the passage focused on the beginning of the prayer service, not on the moments immediately before the *'amidah*. Read with this in mind, the link was a creative stretch from the original context of the Lurianic passage.

The footnote also referenced Palache, before acknowledging that not all communities wave and declaring that the value of unity in practice trumps a practice that is aimed at promoting unity:

And indeed here in the Holy Land there are places that have this custom, and there are places that do not have this practice. And a person should not change the practice of his locale, so that his prayer will rise together with all the prayers of Israel.⁵⁵

The practice has not survived in the Ades synagogue in Jerusalem. This synagogue, founded in 1901, is officially known as the Great Synagogue Ades of the Glorious Aleppo Community and is considered the center of the Syrian community in Israel. Unlike in its American and Argentinian counterparts, the waving custom is no longer practiced there. The wave, however, remains part of the synagogue's collective memory: Oral testimonies recall that the old-timers used to wave before the *'amidah*.⁵⁶

It is noteworthy that, unlike the sources we have encountered thus far, the Aleppo sources make no mention at all of the kabbalistic perspective of the waving custom. This is the case even though it is apparent from the sources the writers cite that they were aware of the mystical angle. Thus Aleppo tradition features the interpersonal narrative: waving is a communal practice that expresses camaraderie. To be sure, communal unity is linked to communion with God, but the sources do not mention the theurgic import of the prayer gesture.

54 Hayim Vital, *Kol kitvei ha-'ari* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1988), vol. 9: Sha'ar ha-kavanot, part I, 2. On the custom that developed from this passage, see Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalah: In Liturgy, Halakhah and Customs* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000), 356–82.

55 *Ginze Eretz*, loc. cit.; *Minhagei Aram Tsova–Halab*, loc. cit.

56 As reported by regular attendees to Yosef Avivi, February 5, 2016. Author interview with Esther Yamin (née Halleli), September 11, 2017.

IX. İstanbul

When interviewed or asked informally, contemporary Istanbul Jews – both laypeople and rabbis – offered varieties of three explanations for the practice.⁵⁷ First, the Hahambaşı [chief rabbi] of Turkey, Rabbi İsak Haleva (b. 1940) echoed one of the explanations recorded by contemporary Aleppian expatriates: we are asking permission to pray in front of the people behind us.

Second, Istanbul Jews explained that the *'amidah* prayer is ideally a serious spiritual journey. Supplicants strive to leave this earthly realm for a moment of communion with God. As Murat Bildirici – a Turkish Jew whose family originally hailed from Syria – explained to me with a smirk: “Who knows if we will return?” Supplicants therefore turn to their fellow congregants and bid each other goodbye before embarking upon this venture. Bildirici and others offered a narrative of prayer as a spiritual journey whose final destination is clouded in uncertainty. While waving is a familiar farewell hand gesture, I have not found this explanation in the earlier sources.⁵⁸

The third explanation offered by Istanbul Jews was less fatal. God is only interested in hearing prayers, provided that the supplicant’s interpersonal relationships are exemplary. Heartfelt though prayers may be, if the supplicant is not on good terms with other human beings he or she has no license to beseech God. Nazlı Doenyas explained her understanding of the practice in moving terms:

57 Interviews conducted with Yusuf Andiç, Gabi Behiri, Murat Bildirici, Luna Bildirici, Refi Chaban, the rabbi of the Eşkenazi Sinagogu (Ashkenazi synagogue) in Istanbul Mendy Chitrik, Nazlı Doenyas, Hahambaşı Rabbi İsak Haleva, the rabbi of Ortaköy Nafi Haleva, and the rabbi of Yeniköy İzak Peres. January 9–15, 2014; March 23–29, 2015; January 12–17, 2016; February 14–19, 2017.

58 On farewell hand gestures, see Bäuml and Bäuml, *Dictionary of Worldwide Gestures*, 280–81. Bildirici’s explanation is reminiscent of a hasidic tradition associated with Rabbi Uri of Strelisk (Polish: Strzeliska Nowe; d. 1826) who was known for his ecstatic prayer. According to hasidic collective memory, every morning Uri was concerned lest his body expire while he exerted himself in devotional prayers. See Yehiel Mikhel Hibner, *Ma’aseh yeḥi’el, Meikhal ha-mayim, Mikhla de-’asvata* (Szatmar: N. M. Oesztreicher, 1907), 16d; Yisrael Berger, *Eser tsaḥṣaḥot* (Piotrków: A. Y. Kleiman, 1909), sec. 5, nos. 6–7. It is difficult to conjure up a plausible link between Uri of Strelisk and the waving custom.

We turn to each other, look into the eyes of those in our surroundings and acknowledge each other. At that moment we strive to connect, to make peace, to ask for forgiveness. To acknowledge that we are here for the same purpose: to connect to God. We are not praying alone, but as part of a community. This creates a bond between people. It is only after that introduction that we turn to talk to God.

The emphasis on looking into the eyes of fellow supplicants – as so eloquently described by Doenyas – is not mentioned in the sources I have cited thus far. Notwithstanding, in a responsum penned by Rabbi David ibn Zimra (*Radbaz*, ca. 1480–1572), looking at others as a prayer ritual is emphasized. Ibn Zimra highlighted the practical value and the mystical efficacy of looking at people who evoke feelings of love.⁵⁹

Murat Bildirici added to Doenyas' explanation: "Before entering God's palace there should be no broken hearts within the community." Doenyas, Bildirici, and others emphasized the importance of actively and consciously seeking to repair interpersonal relationships. Before daring to commune with God, conflict between friends must first be resolved.⁶⁰ Turkish informants

59 David ibn Zimra, *Sh[e'elot] u-t[eshuvot] ha-radbaz: Heleq shelishi* (Fürth: Itsik ben David et al., 1781), 14c–d, no. 472. See also Yinon, "Hashpa'ot sufiyot," 175–77; Uri Safrai, "'Worship of the Heart' in the Kabbalah of the Sixteenth Century" (PhD diss., Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2016), 151–54 (Hebrew).

60 This too is reminiscent of a passage in a prayer attributed to the hasidic master Rabbi Elimelekh of Leżajsk (1717–1787), one of the central personalities in the formative period of Hasidism. Elimelekh is credited with composing a *Tefillah qodem tefillah* [a prayer before prayer] that includes the beseeching words: "[God,] put in our hearts, that we all see the good in our friends and not their faults. May we each speak with our peers in a straightforward manner that is desirable before You. And may no hatred, from one person towards another, rise, Heaven forefend." See, for instance, *Tehillim: ... Mishpat tsedek...* (Breslau?: n.p., 1830–1831), 16–17. Regarding the phenomenon of prayers before prayers in general, see Hallamish, *Studies in Kabbalah and Prayer*, 11–45. As with Uri of Strelisk, it would seem highly improbable to link this prayer with the waving custom. For one, if Elimelekh was indeed doing unorthodox hand movements during prayer (as other early hasidic masters were described as doing), then those gestures might have been highlighted by his opponents and defended by his son in a famous letter of defense that he penned; see *No'am Elimelekh* (Lemberg: S. Rapaport, 1787), 110d–112a; Mordecai Wilensky, *Hasidim and Mitnaggedim: A Study of the Controversy between Them in the Years 1772–1815* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1970, 1990), 168–76 (Hebrew).

thus echoed the Lurianic tradition about repairing interpersonal relationships before communing with God, though they seemed to be unaware of this link.

None of the Istanbul informants identified a textual source for the waving practice, nor were they particularly concerned about the existence of a source. For a mimetic gesture that is still practiced, this is unsurprising. The words of American anthropologist Edward Sapir (1884–1939) ring true:

[W]e respond to gestures with an extreme alertness and, one might almost say, in accordance with an elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known by none, and understood by all. ... the laws of gesture, the unwritten code of gestured messages and responses, is the anonymous work of an elaborate social tradition.⁶¹

Like their expatriate Aleppo counterparts – none of the Istanbul interviewees made any reference to the kabbalistic angle of the practice.⁶² In effect, the useable explanations of the custom had eclipsed the esoteric meaning rooted in Lurianic lore.

When interviewing contemporary Istanbul Jews, it was clear that the practice is widely perceived as a local custom, an intangible cultural artefact understood to be meaningful. Yet according to the Hahambaşı the wave was not practiced in Istanbul in his youth “thirty years ago.” The rabbi of *Bet Yisrael* synagogue in Şişli, David Sevi, confirmed this. According to Haleva, the custom was brought to Istanbul by Jews who hailed from Izmir.⁶³ The Izmir roots of the custom are unsurprising: Palache recorded the wave and apparently gestured himself, and Izmir Jews accord great respect to the venerable sage of their city. Even today, Izmir Jews slightly rise in their seats at the mere mention of Palache’s name.

61 Edward Sapir, “The Unconscious Patterning of Behavior in Society,” in *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir in Language, Culture and Personality*, ed. David G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958; 4th printing 1963), 556; first published in E. S. Drummer (ed.), *The Unconscious: A Symposium* (New York: Knopf, 1927), 114–42.

62 See also Moshe-Mordechai van Zuiden, “Hurray for Turkish Jews,” *The Times of Israel*, June 19, 2017, <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/hurray-for-turkish-jews>.

63 Public sermon in *Bet Yisrael* synagogue, Şişli, Istanbul, February 11, 2017. My thanks to Rabbi Mendy Chitrik for sharing this sermon with me. Haleva confirmed this information when I spoke to him on February 18, 2017.

The Izmir-to-Istanbul transition points to the mobility of customs in general, and how quickly and easily a ritual practice can become entrenched in a community as an integral part of the culture. Mobility, however, is a double edged sword: just as a custom can become part of a community's prayer narrative, it can also swiftly disappear – as in the case of expatriate Aleppians in Jerusalem. It is to this disappearing act that I now turn.

X. Mainstreamization

Up to this point I have described a process of sidelining the esoteric frame of the waving practice in favor of widely accessible narratives. Despite the move toward understandable meaning, the custom today is marginal. To be sure, there are significant communities that preserve the custom as part of their daily prayer ritual, but these are distinct groups; in particular, Jewish communities in Turkey and expatriate Aleppo communities. Outside these insular pockets, the custom is not widely practiced and is generally unknown.

The fact that Ashkenazi Jews are ignorant of the practice may not surprise us, but that non-Ashkenazi communities are unfamiliar with the custom is unexpected. This is particularly so, given that Yosef Hayim of Baghdad recorded the custom in his popular compendium of Jewish law. This state of affairs is indicative of a third stage of evolution of the custom: mainstreamization followed by mainstreaming.

Let me clarify the two related terms I am employing here. The transitive verb “mainstreaming” can be defined as actively incorporating into a central group. It is often used to describe the objective or process of integrating students with special needs into regular educational settings. Following from this, I use the term “mainstreaming” when describing a conscious process of making Jewish practice conform to a prevailing current. Mainstreaming is a development that is advocated, encouraged, and even actively pursued. Mainstreaming may be driven by compassion or by ideals, and it often reflects a particular social agenda. Mainstreaming may be a violent process that ignores differences, seeks to obliterate uniqueness, and strives to blunt diversity. At times, mainstreaming might even invalidate, degrade, or simply discard practices that are not in line with the perceived mainstream.

I use the relatively new term “mainstreamization” to refer to a similar development that occurs *without* a person, persons, or group actively orchestrating the process or campaigning for the result. Mainstreamization occurs

as a by-product of other processes, such as urbanization or displacement of a community. Mainstreamization is often an evolving process that occurs almost imperceptibly and generally unconsciously.⁶⁴

One of the key factors in facilitating mainstreamization is often new and improved modes of communication: movable type, etchings and engravings, postal networks, international journals, telegraph and telephone, and modern electronic means. Such media, perforce, bring disparate communities into virtual close proximity. With urbanization and more so with migration, far-flung and relatively isolated Jewish communities find themselves in actual close proximity to each other. Naturally – and to an extent unconsciously – they begin to compare their traditional practices. While communal identities may be retained, over time melting pots of contemporary society succeed in erasing many idiosyncratic customs.

With regard to the waving gesture, mainstreamization occurred as a result of the displacement of communities and the concomitant move to the nascent State of Israel. After arrival in the Land of Israel, communities that had previously been separated by vast distances and political borders found themselves living near each other. With this new geographic proximity, communities were now in a position to easily observe and freely comment on each other's conduct.

I highlighted the Aleppo practice, noting that waving has been preserved in insular communities in America and Argentina but not in the Aleppian flagship synagogue in Jerusalem. A contemporary Aleppian scholar – the aforementioned Rachamim Shayo – citing community elders, explained why Aleppians in Jerusalem did not preserve their traditional customs:

When Aleppian scholars moved to Jerusalem, they saw that Jerusalem customs were mostly like the customs of the holy

64 For an example of mainstreamization of Jewish practice in the context of hasidic custom, see Levi Cooper, "Bitter Herbs in Hasidic Galicia," *JSIJ* 12 (2013): 1–40. For mainstreamization in a different context, see Naveen Mishra "The Mainstreamisation of Cultural Diversity: The Corporates, Media and Similarisation of Publics in India," *Journal for Communication and Culture* 2 (2012): 139–59. I have avoided familiar terms like assimilation, acculturation, and integration because they lack the nuanced gap between mainstreaming and mainstreamization that I want to amplify here. In the present context, I also seek to avoid engaging with the baggage and problematic uses of those familiar terms; see Todd M. Endelman, "Assimilation," in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, ed. Gershon D. Hundert (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1:81–87.

community of pietists of *Beit El*, that are based according to the holy writings and customs of our master the *Ari* [Luria].⁶⁵

Rachamim Shayo continued, explaining that the Aleppian scholars were well versed in Lurianic teachings, hence assimilating local Jerusalem practice was not anathema to their tradition. Outside of Jerusalem, Aleppian communities mostly preserve their original practices.

Neat as it may seem, Shayo's explanation would not explain jettisoning the waving practice which – as we saw – easily fit into the Lurianic structure. Moreover, Shayo's approach does not account for the gradual erosion of Aleppian customs in Jerusalem, as recounted by old-timers. Nor does Shayo's reason explain why Aleppians around the world are renowned for zealously guarding their traditional customs, while their counterparts in Jerusalem appear to be willing to trade their ancient practices for local customs. It would appear that Shayo is offering an *ex post facto* explanation for the evolutionary process I have dubbed mainstreamization.⁶⁶

What began as a process of subtle, unorchestrated mainstreamization was furthered by intense mainstreaming of Jewish practice. Various legal authorities advocated mainstreaming of Jewish practice, such as Rabbi Sabato Morais (1823–1897) and Rabbi Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel (1880–1953), who both sought to promote unity even at the expense of erasing their own Sephardic traditions.⁶⁷ The most significant mainstreaming project was masterminded by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (1920–2013), whose legal and political activism aimed at uniting Jewish practice in the State of Israel under the banner of Yosef Qaro's legal legacy. While it may be too early to fully sketch the contours of Ovadia Yosef's impact, it is evident that his vision included active mainstreaming of Jewish custom. With regard to the non-Ashkenazi

65 *Ginze Eretz*, 4 n. 1. *Beit El*, also known as *Midrash Hasidim* and *Yeshivat Ha-mequb-balim*, is a center for the study of Jewish mystical tradition. It was founded in 1737 in Jerusalem and continues to function to this day.

66 Compare the nuanced response of another community – the expatriate Djerban Jewish community – to similar circumstances: Meir Mazuz, "Haqdamah," in Khalfon Moshe Ha-kohen, *Berit kehuna ha-shalem* (4th ed., Benei Brak: Yeshivat kisei rahamim, 1990), 1:2–10.

67 Arthur Kiron, "Golden Ages, Promised Lands: The Victorian Rabbinic Humanism of Sabato Morais" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1999), 164–70; Ben-Zion Meir Hai Uziel, *Piskei 'uzi'el be-she'elot ha-zeman* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1977), nos. 1–2; idem, *Mishpetei 'uzi'el* (Tel Aviv: Levitzki, 1935–1940), vol. 2: *even ha-ezer*, no. 83.

world – Sephardim, communities from Arab countries, communities from North Africa, and others – Ovadia Yosef’s mainstreaming project achieved unparalleled success.⁶⁸

Ovadia Yosef’s *Halikhot ‘olam* – an eight volume detailed response to Yosef Hayim’s *Ben ish hai* – was part of his gargantuan mainstreaming endeavor. In this work, Ovadia Yosef responded to each passage of Yosef Hayim’s *Ben ish hai*. This collection of responses was based on controversial public lectures that Ovadia Yosef delivered in his youth. The work was printed some sixty years later, once Ovadia Yosef was a recognized and accepted judicial authority, who wielded considerable political clout.⁶⁹ In *Halikhot ‘olam*, Ovadia Yosef’s comment against the pre-*‘amidah* wave fits his mainstreaming vision:

And it is appropriate to be careful, for if people do so [that is, gesture] before the *‘amidah* prayer of the afternoon prayer and of the evening prayer, they should pay attention when they respond *amen, yehei shemeih rabba* [“Amen, may His great name,” a phrase from the responsive *qaddish* prayer recited before the *‘amidah* in the afternoon and evening] to focus well, that they should not be preoccupied with these movements, and [then] when they respond *amen, yehei shemeih rabba* their heart is not with them.⁷⁰

The seemingly harmless, friendly, or mystically significant gesture is perceived by the jurist to precipitate problematic circumstances. Heretofore the wave had been construed as part of preparation for prayer – either as a gesture

68 Ovadia Yosef’s approach to the practices of Ashkenazi communities is complex, though beyond the present scope. See, inter alia, Ovadia Yosef, *Yabi’a omer* (Jerusalem: Porat Yosef, 1954–2009), vol. 5, *oraḥ ḥayim*, no. 43; vol. 6, *oraḥ ḥayim*, no. 43; vol. 6, even ha-‘ezer, no. 14.

Regarding Ovadia Yosef, see Zohar, *Luminous Face of the East*, 312–52; Benjamin Lau, *From “Maran” to “Maran”: The Halachic Philosophy of Rav Ovadia Yosef* (Tel Aviv: Miskal, 2005) (Hebrew); Ariel Picard, *The Philosophy of Rabbi Ovadya Yosef in an Age of Transition: Study of Halakhah and Cultural Criticism* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2007) (Hebrew); idem, “Maḥazir ha-‘atarah le-yoshnah,” in *The Gdolim: Leaders Who Shaped the Israeli Haredi Jewry*, ed. Benjamin Brown and Nissim Leon (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2017), 807–31.

69 Regarding *Halikhot ‘olam*, see Lau, *From Maran to Maran*, 29–31; Picard, *Philosophy of Rabbi Ovadya Yosef*, 53–54; idem, “Maḥazir ha-‘atara le-yoshnah,” 808–9.

70 Ovadia Yosef, *Halikhot ‘olam* (Jerusalem: Makhon Ma’or Yisra’el, 1998–2003), 1:129.

laden with Lurianic import or as an interpersonal prerequisite for addressing God. Yet Ovadia Yosef fearlessly introduced a new element – the need to focus on the responsive *qaddish* – that led him to conclude that the gesture constituted an unwarranted distraction and should therefore be proscribed.

Ovadia Yosef's argument is curious, for it could be reasoned that the silent gesture allows supplicants to avoid a verbal interruption of the prayer service.⁷¹ Moreover, to the extent that his argument is convincing, it could only hold true for the afternoon and evening prayers, but not for the morning prayer, where there is no *qaddish* immediately before *'amidah*.

These considerations – the silent nature of the gesture and the possible distinction between different services – did not detain Ovadia Yosef. After declaring his legal distaste for the custom, he encouraged readers to join the mainstreaming crusade: “And the one who warns and the one who is careful, may their peace increase like a river.” In other words: abandon the practice and urge others to ditch it as well. Thus the colorful mosaic of Jewish practice was whitewashed.

Perhaps it is important to note that Ovadia Yosef's program was not born out of disdain for Yosef Hayim (who, as we recall, did not wave himself, but recorded the wave). On the contrary, Ovadia Yosef held the great Baghdadi scholar in the highest esteem.⁷² At the very least, we might say that an eight volume response to a one volume work indicates that Ovadia Yosef recognized Yosef Hayim's centrality. Ovadia Yosef may have even been troubled by the reality that he found himself in: Consistently disagreeing with a foremost scholar of Jewish law and custom, and persistently undermining his authority. Indeed, Ovadia Yosef recounted a dream where Yosef Hayim came to encourage him in his work, including his public teaching and attempts

71 As Bäuml and Bäuml noted: “When words fail, gestures are well known to be an effective means of communication” (*Dictionary of Worldwide Gestures*, 4).

72 See, for instance, Ovadia Yosef's approach to Yosef Hayim's pseudonymous work, *She'elot u-teshuvot torah lishmah*. In Ovadia Yosef's mind it was impossible that the great Baghdadi scholar could be behind such a ruse: “It is extremely difficult to say – Heaven forefend – that [Yosef Hayim] would lie in order to hide the name of the author” (Yosef, *Yabi'a omer*, vol. 9, *orah hayim*, no. 96). Regarding this pseudonymous work see Levi Cooper, “A Baghdadi Mystery: Rabbi Yosef Hayim and *Torah Lishmah*,” *Jewish Educational Leadership* 14 (2015): 54–60 and the sources cited therein.

to bring people back to traditional Jewish practice.⁷³ Notwithstanding any hesitation he may have had, Ovadia Yosef was not to be swayed from his melting-pot motive. Waving in prayer was just one casualty in Ovadia Yosef's determined mainstreaming campaign.

XI. Nature Reserves

I have sketched the survival and evolution of the waving practice, from the seventeenth century through to contemporary times. This exploration identified the strata of the custom's evolution. The analysis demonstrated how a custom survives and its meaning develops over time. Looking at the sweep of sources we can discern three tropes: esotericism, accessibility, and mainstreamization.

The earliest record of the custom dates back to the seventeenth century, and describes a practice rooted in kabbalistic lore. In its oldest form, the custom may have had nothing to do with unity, friendship, or interpersonal relationships. Alternatively, it is possible that the waving custom existed before Kabbalists imbued it with mystical import. Regardless of the true origins of the practice, the recorded history begins at the point when the wave was already steeped in esoteric meaning.

While Jewish practice has often been fashioned by esoteric considerations, this realm had been beyond the ken of most. The mere mention of a kabbalistic core may have sufficed for a custom to take root, even though people did not truly fathom its meaning.

As people gestured before praying, they developed or preserved accessible explanations for their conduct. Instead of mystifying the practice by offering lofty, esoteric, and untouchable reasons, people brought the custom down to earth. At first, these understandable explanations lived alongside the mystical reasons in testimonies of the practice: The earliest record of the custom notes that people were already offering more useable explanations. With time, these accessible reasons took the place of the esoteric lore; the kabbalistic frame was sidelined and useable narratives were given prominence.

This account suggests the possibility of a fascinating evolution of a ritual practice: A kabbalistic custom that is preserved and survives the ages, but

73 Ovadia Yosef, *Taharat ha-bayit* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1988–2006), 2:14–15. For a different take on the dream, see Picard, "Maḥazir ha-'atarah le-yoshnah," 815–16.

is framed and reframed so that it makes sense to those who are not fluent in Jewish mysticism. The accessibility of these new explanations may have contributed to the very survival of the practice, giving it meaning for a broader cross-section of synagogue attendees.

At the third stage, processes of mainstreamization and mainstreaming threaten the survival of this special prayer gesture. Yet unconscious mainstreamization or even proactive mainstreaming do not, perforce, result in erasure. Thus the custom endures and even thrives in enclaves that are, to some extent, protected from outside influence. These communities are untouched by subtle mainstreamization because of geographic location, and for sociological reasons are somewhat insulated from aggressive mainstreaming attempts.

Such communities that preserve the custom function like Nature Reserves. They are cordoned off from outside influences. They operate as closed ecosystems that effectively or actively shut out foreign stimuli and safeguard native life.⁷⁴

The ideal of the Nature Reserve may not always succeed – as in the case of the Ades synagogue in Jerusalem – because encroaching elements overcome the barriers of the protected area. In some cases – like the Aleppo communities in America – the formation of a Nature Reserve is a conscious decision and its maintenance requires constant and vigilant communal effort. In other cases – like in the Istanbul synagogues – the Nature Reserve is formed by circumstances such as geographic and political detachment from other Jewish communities. In both these cases, the Nature Reserve protects against the extinction of an inimitable custom.

Valiant attempts to sketch Ovadia Yosef's political and judicial biography began during his lifetime. These worthy studies tell us little about Ovadia Yosef's impact and legacy over time – a story which is still unfolding today. It is possible that in coming years we will see a reassertion of distinct communal identity as a backlash to Ovadia Yosef's aggressive mainstreaming policies.

Thus, for instance, in 2016 a private printing venture in Israel issued a new prayer book based on the rulings of Hayim Palache. This daily prayer

74 On the Nature Reserve as a metaphor for describing a community dedicated to preservation of custom, see Levi Cooper and Maoz Kahana, "The Legal Pluralism of an Enclave Society: The Case of Munkatch Hasidism," *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 48 (2016): 83–85.

book came after two volumes for the High Holy Days that were printed before Ovadia Yosef's demise (though not with his approbation). The series is described as catering to Sephardic and Eastern Jews in general, specifically to expatriate Turkish Jews, in particular those from Izmir. While the first volume of this series made no mention of the gesture, the subsequent two volumes recorded Palache's instruction regarding waving, though only in the context of the morning service.⁷⁵ Just by way of contrast, prayer books that are currently in use in Istanbul do not mention the gesture, though it is widely practiced.⁷⁶ It would appear that it is unnecessary to include an instruction regarding a practice that is transferred through mimesis.

Prayer books are a potent tool for fashioning identity, and for facilitating mainstreaming.⁷⁷ It remains to be seen what impact – if any – this new edition will have on Turkish Jews in Israel. To date, this new prayer book has not gone through an additional print run.

Despite the possibility of a revival of distinctive practices, it would appear that the continued mainstreamization of Israeli society means that we will never see a full return to idiosyncratic communal practice. This makes the preservation of Nature Reserves all the more significant, and the documentation of their unique customs all the more pressing.

75 Mordekhai Asher (ed.), *Maḥzor le-yom ha-kippurim: Mas'at shelomo ḥayim* (Kedumim: M. Asher, 2007) – no mention of waving; idem, *Maḥzor le-rosh ha-shanah: Mas'at shelomo ḥayim* (Kedumim: M. Asher, 2012), 288 n. 1 – waving mentioned only at morning service; idem, *Mas'at shelomo ḥayim: Siddur...* (Kedumim: M. Asher, 2016), 77 n. 1, 329 n. 1 – waving mentioned only at morning services; cf. 139, 172, 224, 359, 390, 450, 458, 473, 482 (other services).

76 *Sefer Avodat Ašana* (Istanbul: Yosef Moshe Halevi, 1908, 1955, 1969) with instructions in Ladino; reprinted with Turkish transliteration on facing page under the title *Sidur Ahavat Siyon* (Istanbul: Ajans Class Reklamcılık-Yayıncılık Organizasyon ve Pazarlama, 1986); *Sidur Kol Yaakov* (Istanbul: Gözlem, 2006), with Turkish translation and transliteration.

77 See Nissim Leon, *Gentle Ultra-Orthodoxy: Religious Renewal in Oriental Jewry in Israel* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2010), 83–109 (Hebrew), in particular 99–105 regarding the limitations of Ovadia Yosef's influence. See also Zohar, *Luminous Face of the East*, 351–52.