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Light for Dark Nights

Khanukah with Book of J in San Francisco. Liberation! Lights! Old songs!

Friday, December 7

8:00pm

SF Live Arts at St Cyprians

2097 Turk St

San Francisco, CA

[Tickets](#)

In addition, I would like to share with you this song, recorded a week after the Pittsburgh killings. This song is known as the “Berdichever Kaddish,” “A Dispute With Gd,” “Hassidic Chant,” or simply “Kaddish.”



Its narrator is Levi Yitzkhak, son of Sarah, the Khasidic rabbi of Berdichev until

puts Gd on trial, expressing his pain, love and faith. He closes with the opening lines of the Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead.

The song was collected by folklorist Joel Engel on a gathering trip to Berdichev in the Khasidic hub of Volhynia. His 1923 arrangement draws from folkloric, Euroclassical, and liturgical music styles. The musical braiding is echoed by language braiding, as the song flips between the Yiddish vernacular, biblical proof-texts in Hebrew, and liturgy in Aramaic—a lingua franca in late antiquity, but now a language used to prevent angels from understanding the Kaddish prayer.

This song has been extensively recorded by cantors, but was made famous by Paul Robeson. When he sung it in 1958 at Carnegie Hall, his introduction traced connections between Ethiopian Orthodox liturgy, Byzantine chant, African-American preaching, and this Berdichever Kaddish. For more context and a complete transcription of Robeson's comments, read Jonathan Karp's "Performing Black-Jewish Symbiosis: The Hassidic Chant of Paul Robeson."

One of the many things that moved me this week were the allies who showed up—to mourn with us, to protect us, to join with us in the struggle for a better world. Our communities stand together: We keep our hands on the plow and hold on. Source of Mercy, bless us with the strength to fight white supremacy and fascism with all our hearts, all our souls, and all our power. Amen.

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