

יְדִיד נֶפֶשׁ, אָב הַרְחֵמֶן, מְשׁוֹרֵי עֲבֹדְךָ אֶל רְצוֹנְךָ,
 יְרוּץ עֲבֹדְךָ כְּמוֹ אֵיל, יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה מִוֶּל הַדָּרֶךְ,
 כִּי יַעֲרֵב לוֹ יְדִידוֹתֶךָ, מִנִּפְתַּת צוּף וְכָל טַעַם.

הַדּוֹר, נֶאֱהָ, זִיו הָעוֹלָם, נִפְשֵׁי חוֹלַת אֶהְבֶּתְךָ,
 אֲנֵא, אֵל נָא, רִפָּא נָא לָהּ, בְּהִרְאוֹת לָהּ גַעַם זִיוָךְ,
 אֲז תִתְחַזֵּק וְתִתְרַפָּא, וְהִיְתָה לְךָ שְׂפַחַת עוֹלָם.

וְתִיק, יְהֵמוֹ רַחֲמֶיךָ, וְחוּס נָא עַל בֶּן אוֹהֶבְךָ,
 כִּי זֶה כְּמָה נִכְסוּף נִכְסוּף לְרֵאוֹת בְּתַפְאֶרֶת עֲזוֹךְ,
 אֲנֵא, אֵלִי, מִחֲמַד לְבִי, חוֹשָׁה נָא, וְאֵל תִּתְעַלֵּם.

הַגְּלִיָּה נָא, וּפְרוֹשׁ חֲבִיב עָלַי, אֶת סִפְתֵי שְׁלוֹמְךָ,
 תִּתְאִיר אֶרֶץ מְכַבּוֹדְךָ, נְגִילָה וְנִשְׁמָחָה בְּךָ,
 מִהֵר אֶהוֹב, כִּי בָא מוֹעֵד, וְחַנְּנִי כִימֵי עוֹלָם.

BELOVED OF MY SOUL יְדִיד נֶפֶשׁ. Written by Eleazar Azikri (1533–1600), Y'did Nefesh has become one of the favorite songs with which to introduce the Friday evening service. (Some Hasidim sing it every morning before services begin.) Y'did Nefesh was characterized by its author as a love song directed to God. The poem is built out of an acrostic of the name of God: each stanza begins with one letter of the four-letter divine name, *yod-hei-vav-hei*, and each develops the metaphor of God as lover. When sung, both Sephardic and Ashkenazic musical traditions utilize haunting melodies evoking intense desire. The version here accords with the author's handwritten manuscript, found in the library

of the Jewish Theological Seminary. For example, many printed versions leave out the word *ki* (“for”) in the third line, though it is present in the original. Similarly, later versions substituted the word *simhat* (“joyful”) for *shifhat* (“servant”) in the sixth line.

COMPASSIONATE FATHER אָב הַרְחֵמֶן. The Hebrew word for “compassionate” is derived from the same root as the word meaning “womb” (*rehem*). The combination of the two words thus creates a phrase that combines masculine and feminine images.

LIGHT OF THE WORLD זִיו הָעוֹלָם. As the sun sets and the day's light dims, our yearning for light—spiritual light, a sense of God's presence—increases. Here, the poet longs for the spark (*ziv*) of divine light that animates all creation and nourishes our souls. By the last stanza of the poem, this spark no longer seems sufficient; we pray that the spark expand to a radiant glory, illuminating all.

HER לָהּ. The Hebrew word for soul (*nefesh*) is feminine. In addition, the aspect of God found in this world, within us, is thought of in mystical Jewish literature as the feminine aspect of the Divine, the Shekhinah.

ANCIENT ONE וְתִיק. In mystical literature, the “ancient of days” is one of the aspects of the Divine.