GOD, MASTER. This piyyut, commonly attributed to mystics of the 1st millennium, uses imagery based on the visions of Ezekiel that describe a variety of heavenly hosts. It further develops the theme enunciated in the previous prayers that everything in creation praises God. Here that thought is extended to the heavenly hosts: even heavenly powers offer praise to God. The use of an alphabetical acrostic may suggest that God’s word is the primary constitutive element of all creation.

HAPPY. Not infrequently in alphabetical poetry, the letter sin (ש) is substituted for the similarly sounding samekh (ש), as it is here. Such substitutions are even found in biblical acrostics. Most, if not all, worshippers in ancient times did not have prayer-books, and this substitution is quite natural in an oral culture.

S’RAFIM...OFANIM. Angelic songs figure prominently in ancient mystical texts. Descriptions of different groups of angels singing hymns to God surely mirrored the seekers’ own mystical experiences. The angels pictured here are closest to God’s throne. In Jewish mystical thought, the ofanim are the wheels of God’s chariot, first mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel; the s’rafim are the fiery angels pictured as flaming serpents in Isaiah’s vision of heaven. The holy beings (hagot ha-kodesh) were thought of as the legs upholdng God’s throne.