

GALEET: In every family, I think there are different ways – you know, whether it's languages, whether it's words, whether it's music, whether it's food, whether it's religious practices – there are ways that you can still reconnect, and it's not too late to find some of those traditions that can be meaningful to you.

SARAH: This is Heritage Words, a podcast about the words we've inherited from our ancestors and the meaning they bring to our lives. Heritage words is produced by the HUC-JIR Jewish Language Project, which raises awareness about Jewish ancestral diversity through the lens of language. I'm your host, Sarah Bunin Benor. Our guest today is Galeet Dardashti. Galeet is an anthropologist and a musician, and a composer. And she's earned a reputation as a trailblazing and award-winning performer and scholar of Middle Eastern Jewish culture. Galeet has a PhD in anthropology, and her research focuses on Mizrahi cultural politics. She's taught at NYU and the Jewish Theological Seminary, and she recently completed a fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania. As a performer, Dardashti is widely known as the leader and founder of Divahn, and from her solo release, *The Naming*, an album I love to listen to, and she recently released a new album called *Monajat* where she sings with her, her grandfather, remixed samples of her grandfather, who was a famous Iranian singer. And she also co-created the award-winning podcast "The Nightingale of Iran," about her family's Persian musical legacy. If you heard that podcast, then you know a lot already about Galeet's family history. And today we're going to dig into some of that, especially focusing on language. Welcome to the show, Galeet.

GALEET: Thank you so much for having me.

SARAH: Well, today, let's start by talking about the very first language that your parents bequeathed to you: your name. First, tell us your full name.

GALEET: Okay. My full name is Galeet Joon Dardashti. I also have a Hebrew name, Yo'ela.

SARAH: So, Galeet is not your Hebrew name?

GALEET: I know, and I did the same thing. We did the same thing to our children. Or at least one of our children. Yeah, it's a thing. It's when you want to have a lot of names. Okay, so my first name, Galeet. There is no real interesting story to this name, except that I am the only one of my sisters that has an Israeli name or a Hebrew name. My parents just liked that name. They had some friends who would name their child Galeet, and they had been in Israel and heard the name, and they just thought it was pretty, and it means little wave. So, you know, Gal and Galeet, so wave, little wave. And my middle

name, Joon. So I was born in the month of June. There's that. And Joon in Persian means darling. And so they thought it would be cute if they gave me the middle name Joon. I am also the only one in my family that has a Persian name. So I'm very excited about that. And then my last name, Dardashti, or Dardasht, or Dardashti, depending on who I'm speaking to. That is a Persian name. And in fact, my family in Iran, we were one of the first to actually adopt a surname in Iran. That was like in the late 1800s that our family took on the name Dardashti. And it means "from Dardasht." And Dardasht was a Jewish neighborhood in Isfahan. And you probably would only call yourself Dardashti once you left Dardasht. Right? Because if you're living there, then you know you're just Fareed, or you're just, whoever you are. So, yeah. In the late 1800s, when my family left Isfahan for Tehran, that's when they took on Dardashti. And apparently everyone who's named Dardashti can trace their roots to Isfahan. And supposedly they're all related to me. But I'm not really sure if that's totally true, because there are a lot of Dardashtis, and that's the story of my name. Oh, and Yo'ela, my father's grandfather was Yoel. And so that's how I'm named after him, Yo'ela.

SARAH: Okay. Wow. So let's give the audience who hasn't heard your podcast just a general summary of your family history, where your ancestors are from, where they moved to, and where you grew up.

GALEET: Yeah. So my father's family is from Iran. Grew up in Tehran. Oh, and my dad came to this country when he was 19. On my mom's side, they're Ashkenazim and my mom's grandparents, my great-grandparents, immigrated from, you know, Poland-slash-Russia. Right before World War Two. Actually, my great grandfather won a sweepstakes, and he had money to come to the United States so that, you know, there's that lore in my family, but yeah, came to New York. And so my mom, my mom has been a New Yorker for, and her family lived in New York since my great-grandparents came.

SARAH: Okay. So tell us about the languages they spoke.

GALEET: My maternal grandparents spoke Yiddish. And my grandmother was very involved in the kind of socialist movement and in speaking Yiddish with that whole community, that whole historical movement. I never learned Yiddish from my grandmother or my grandfather. My grandmother was much more into Yiddish and much more active in speaking Yiddish and went to, like, Yiddish group, you know, when she retired in Florida would get together and speak with her friends in Yiddish. And my great-grandmother, I'm very lucky to have known her. I mean, she was the one, you know, who had the accent and, and spoke Yiddish and called me a *tayere kind* when I was little. And I thought, and I said, I'm not tired. Of course, not knowing that that meant

I was a sweet girl. So I heard a lot of Yiddish from my mom's side, and I was actually closer to my mom's family. We would see them more often, and I learned a lot of Yiddish songs from my grandmother and from my mom, by the way. So I'd say Yiddish on that side. And then on my father's side. So he spoke Persian, but I didn't. So he and all of his siblings and my dad actually grew up in Iran, so it was his native tongue. But I never learned Persian. My father never had any—saw no reason to ever teach me Persian. Made sure that I learned Hebrew like a nice Jewish girl. And I learned that in, you know, a few years of day school and then more years of Hebrew school, Hebrew High, and then university, grad school. But. Yeah. No Persian. But I would hear it. Growing up, I heard my dad speaking to his siblings and to his parents, but not so many friends, because we were really not very connected to the Persian-Jewish community or non-Jewish Persian community.

SARAH: So, how did you hear your dad speaking to his relatives? Was it phone conversations or the audiotapes that they exchanged?

GALEET: Oh no, I never heard the audiotapes until very recently when we did the podcast. But no—through, yeah—we would get together with our cousins and, you know, it depended where we lived. We did live in LA briefly, and then I would, I heard more. I lived in LA from like age 6 to 13. So I would definitely hear more Persian then. And we were connected to some of our family in LA that was Persian. And yeah, I would hear my father on the phone, we would get together and see our cousins and our uncles and aunts, and we would hear Persian, and we would have Persian food, and my *safra* would make us Persian food. And we would, you know, get together when we were in Israel, Florida, New Jersey. So, yeah, I mean, here and there, I would of course hear Persian. And my mom learned some Persian before we were born. So, you know, my mom would kind of speak a little bit of Persian with my family, and they would all laugh at her Persian, but she was very cute with her Persian. But none of us ever learned or saw any reason to learn. It just never occurred to us when we were younger.

SARAH: Yeah. Well, I will ask you about the heritage words that were passed down to you. But first, you mentioned Yiddish songs. What Yiddish songs did you learn from your mom and your grandma?

GALEET: Oh God. So many. I mean, of course, we were a singing family, as I know you know. We sang professionally, my sisters and I, my two sisters and I, and my parents. And there was a good amount of Yiddish in those performances, so *Hobn Mir a Nigndl* was a standard in our performances and in our medleys. Those were the years of medleys. I mean, I know a ton of Yiddish songs like, you know, *Oyfn Pripetshik*. I probably know maybe eight Yiddish songs that I could probably sing well. And you

know, when my grandmother who had Alzheimer's, you know, in the end, that was kind of the only thing, the only way I could connect with her was singing these Yiddish songs. You know, I'd bring my guitar and we would sing because really, we couldn't communicate in any other way. But she—it was amazing. She still could sing these Yiddish songs, Like *Rozhinkes Mit Mandlen*. You know, songs like that. Some of the classics.

SARAH: Mm. My grandmother also had Alzheimer's, and I didn't start learning Yiddish until after she died, but she and I had learned some Yiddish songs, and I did sing those with her near the end, and it was a nice connection, very special. Yeah.

GALEET: Yeah. I know, it's really amazing about, you know, language and memory, and music specifically. That was kind of amazing to me. So yeah, I was really happy that I could connect with her in that way. And I loved singing those Yiddish songs. That was a really fun connection to my heritage, which I'm sure you're not going to be surprised to hear that music really was and is the major way that I have connected to my, my family ancestry.

SARAH: You mentioned that you called your dad's mom *safta*. Was that because she lived in Israel at that point?

That actually is a question that I haven't really thought about. I'll have to ask my dad why we didn't call them their Persian names, but they were, I don't know, maybe they were already far removed at that point from Iran. And they liked being called *saba* and *safta*. They had probably already undergone their transition to Zionism and immigration to Israel, and maybe that was why.

SARAH: So let's move on to your heritage words. So you mentioned that your grandma used to call you *tayere kind*, dear child. What other words do you remember hearing from your grandparents on either side?

GALEET: Yeah. So, I mean, there was a lot. There was definitely a lot of Yiddish spoken. The words, though, I have to admit that that kind of stuck with me more were the words that I guess I found funny, like *ungepatchke*. Right. I mean, that was a word that my mom did use a lot. That's a word that's still in my vocabulary. I think part of the reason is, first of all, it sounds funny, *ungepatchke*, meaning like, gaudy things that don't go together well. My mom would be like, Do you like this outfit or is it too *ungepatchke*? You know, stuff like that, and that would make me giggle. And I would laugh really hard just because the word is just so long and funny and sounds funny and or *mechuteneste*. So my mom, when she would be like, well, my *mechuteneste*, you know, she would kind

of be like funny when using it because her *mechuteneste* was my *saffa*, who's, you know, very Persian. So it particularly sounded funny. You know that mother-in-law.

SARAH: She would say it in kind of humorous way?

GALEET: I think so. My mom understands a lot of Yiddish. She doesn't speak a lot of it. So I think when she did use it, it was kind of like ironic like it was like for show a little bit, kind of in the way that I use some of the Persian-ness, some of it that I have, and we can get to that. We can get to that later. But the words that have stuck are words that are either made up or not entirely made up. So I'm going to tell you something that is a secret. I'm going to tell you one of our secret words. And hopefully, you know, people will kind of keep it on the down low when they hear this podcast because, you know, this is like my secret family word. I hope I don't get in trouble for exposing my family, but the main word that has continued in my family from Yiddish is H.S, which stands for *hob sekhel*. Have sense. So my mom said that she thinks it started being used by, my great-grandfather would say H.S. if he was, or just like H.S. if he wanted them to like, know that maybe he was like trying to negotiate. And don't say that this thing that he's negotiating about is too beautiful, because then we can't get as good of a price. Or if somebody, you know, if you're saying like, oh, you know, this person's sick, and then they're like walking over to you, you have to, you know, be discreet. It basically means like, be discreet. *Hob sekhel*. So that is very much still used in my family. So now, you know, our code word is, is H.S. And the other word that is made up that is not Yiddish but it sounds like it is. And it was invented according to my mom by my grandmother's cousin Bea, and that is the word *puchel*. And that's the word for flatulence. That's the fart word. And I said to my mom, I don't understand. Why did you have to invent a word, like, didn't you have a word for that? And she said, oh no, because Jews don't fart. So I don't understand why they needed to invent that word. But that is a word that is used in my immediate family. That is like *the* word. We don't really say fart, we say *puchel*. So I don't know where it came from. I would like to know from, maybe you know, if there is another word in Yiddish for that, because I don't know one.

SARAH: Okay. We will research that and get back to you.

GALEET: I think you must get to the bottom of this.

SARAH: Yes, we will. We will find the origin of *puchel* and other synonyms in Yiddish.

GALEET: Perfect.

SARAH: So you said you use that in your family. That's pretty common to use words from an ancestral language for euphemisms, for things that we feel uncomfortable saying in our primary language. And it's not just to be secretive so that if someone's at your house and you say *puchel*, they won't know that you meant fart. But also just because it feels weird to say that. And so in my house, we said *pish* instead of urinate.

GALEET: Oh yes.

SARAH: Also from Yiddish.

GALEET: Right.

SARAH: So, another example. And a few of the other people that I've interviewed have talked about similar words in their home for body parts or bodily functions or things that...

GALEET: Absolutely.

SARAH: ...death, things that people are afraid of, are sometimes also used from other languages.

GALEET: Yeah. That's interesting. Yeah. So those are the words on the, you know, Ashkenazi side that are used. And on the Persian side, as I told you, there is like not a lot of, you know, I didn't have a lot of contact. But there are, of course, words that—the primary word that my family uses from our Persian ancestry is *taarof*. And *taarof* is such an interesting concept. There is nothing like it in American culture. And *taarof*, what it is, is in Persian culture. It's this kind of this game that you play, this etiquette game. Let's say you're at someone's house and you're starving, but they ask you, “Would you like something to eat?” And you know that the rules are such in Persian culture that it's rude to be like, “yes, I'm so hungry, can I please have some food?” So you say, “Oh no, no, no, I'm not hungry. I'm fine, thank you.” And so then they know they're supposed to ask again. “Oh, no. No, you must eat. Please. I would like to give you some food.” “Oh, no. No, I'm fine.” And then they have to basically push it on you and say like, “No, please, please eat.” And then you say, “Okay, okay.” And then you eat. And those are—that's the rules of *taarof*. And so we joke about that all the time because my mom, who's not Persian, is probably the biggest *taarofer*. So we, we all use it in that kind of way. Like, oh, are you *taarofing*? It comes up a lot, in fact, at Passover with the whole Persian custom of hitting each other with scallions. My dad says that he thinks Dayenu is a whole *taarof* thing. Like, it would have been enough if you had just given us the Torah, you know. Dayenu. Oh, it would have been enough if you had just opened the Red Sea.

But not if we hadn't, like, gone through the Red Sea. You know, all this like, Dayenu. Like it's not really. It wouldn't have been enough. Right. So my dad thinks that, like, the hitting each other with scallions is like a game where we're like, ha ha ha, Dayenu, like, this is just a game of *taarof*. So it's like part of the game. Now, since doing the podcast, there are other words, especially the word *motreb*, which we think about a lot. And the word *motreb* is the word for entertainer, singer, musician. And that is a word that I knew about as a scholar, you know, having studied Persian culture a little bit. Although I shifted because I couldn't go to Iran. I shifted and started writing much more about Israel and Middle Eastern culture in Israel. So *motreb* means, you know, as like the *pshat*, right? It means musician. But it has this pejorative connotation in Iran. And that I knew, too. But it's Jews that were the primary musicians. They had no choice. There weren't very many trades that they could participate in. And since Muslims were really prohibited from participating in music. It was forbidden. Just as alcohol was forbidden. If people wanted to hear music, they had to bring in the Jews. And so Jews kind of had this *motreb*, this negative stereotype about musicians who were kind of like lazy and just, you know, low class, and Jews kind of merged together in this kind of—for Jews—this shameful way. And we kind of explore that and discovered all sorts of things that we hadn't known about this concept of *motreb* and the way that Jews themselves saw it in the podcast. And so the word *motreb* has also entered our family lexicon, really because of the podcast.

SARAH: So you didn't grow up hearing that word at all?

GALEET: I would talk to my dad about it at the beginning of graduate school, and, you know, asked my dad about it, and he said, oh, well, *saba* was definitely not considered a *motreb*. He was a very, very famous singer. My grandfather, known as the Nightingale of Iran. He was one of the most famous singers of Persian classical music. And he was adored, adored by Muslims. And, you know, they would kind of be glued to their radios once a week when he would play on the radio. And so I asked my dad about it, you know, but, you know, how did people, though, you know, think about Saba? Was he considered a *motreb*? Oh no, no, no, no. But then when we did the podcast, I found out it was much more complicated. You'll have to listen to the podcast to get the full story.

SARAH: Okay. Are there other words that you remember hearing from your dad? From Persian?

GALEET: Yes. There are other words and other words that we learned from our cousins especially like, again, more fart words. We were kind of amazed by, you know, that there were different words for a silent but deadly. There's like one word for it, you know, *chos* versus a loud fart, which is *guz*. So, you know, those were just things we would,

again, it was like things we would laugh about. But I think that was more from my cousins than from my dad. I think, though, and maybe this is just because we're musicians or because, you know, it's what I'm interested in. I'm much more conscious of sounds, like these are things that I think about a lot more. Things like that I've inherited from my grandmother is, like, ululation, like <ululating sound> that kind of thing.

GALEET: So my grandmother's lilili-ing. You know, that started out as me imitating her and almost, like, making fun of her. Because, you know, she would do it, and then I would do it, and then she would be like, oh, my God, like that, you know that I was doing it, she was so excited. And it would be this kind of like, really fun thing that I only did to kind of like, tease her. Then it just became something that I was like, I realized I wasn't really doing it the correct way. You know, she was kind of moving her tongue this way, and I was doing something that just mimicked what she was doing. But it sounded good. And people were like, oh my God, you know, you can do that. And I was like, well, no, I can't really do that, but I'm doing it. So, you know, sometimes the ways that we kind of poke fun at our family members becomes something, the, it just becomes us. And I do that a lot now. You know, I mean, when I'm, you know, trying to express joy at an event or it's part of my shtick it's something that I really like. I love doing because it makes me think of my grandmother, you know, and it's sort of the same thing. It's like why people speak these languages and why people use these words. Because it keeps a part of their family alive, right? It's like when I sing with my grandfather, I feel like I'm with him and I'm kind of maintaining him. And when I make that sound, I feel like I'm, you know, I'm, I'm with my grandmother and it's, oh, I'm getting emotional. This is one of the few Persian things that I do, and it's again, it's a sound, you know, when, when my dad or my uncles, they would get frustrated or annoyed. They'd be like, you know, ah ha uh! That's their Persian, like you're annoying or, you know, frustration, frustration sound, ah ha uh! And I do it sometimes as a joke. And I noticed my son, he'll do it sometimes to make fun of me. And it's a sweet thing. I mean, it's, sometimes these ways that we kind of poke fun are actually kind of meaningful and sweet, and touching. Something that, you know, you wouldn't think would be. But I don't know, it kind of moved me to hear my son making those very Persian noises.

SARAH: Absolutely. And even if they're not in the dictionary, they're still part of language. Right. They're a way that we communicate with our voice, and also what you were saying about feeling you're connected to your grandparents and sort of making fun of them, but sort of becoming part of you. I mean, I think that's pretty common in, like, I wrote a paper about young American Jews' use of Yiddish. And that's a big part of it, that they're doing it in kind of an ironic way, but, and also kind of voicing their grandparents or even explicitly saying, "as my grandma used to say," and then saying it,

but it's also a part of who they are and a part of how they're keeping the memory of their their ancestors alive.

GALEET: Absolutely. Yes, yes. Beautifully said. I studied Persian, I should say, a little bit in grad school, but they were never words that stuck. But there were things like that. Like the sounds. Like, my grandmother doing these, you know, these sounds for joy and for, you know, in going to the synagogue and hearing everybody ululate and the different sound of the music and I should say the difference between the pronunciation in, you know, in my grandparents' synagogue versus in, you know, Ashkenazi synagogues, and I'll just say one other thing that I was like, very conscious of growing up. And that is like I was a bar and bat mitzvah tutor. And I was trained under my father, who was the cantor. I trained kids to chant for their bar mitzvahs. And my dad was adamant about having people pronounce the words in this kind of Sephardi way, even though, you know, he was at an Ashkenazi synagogue. And I always assumed erroneously that this is how he grew up in Iran, that this pronunciation that he was so focused on was the Persian pronunciation. And then kind of like as I grew older, I was like, wait a minute, like, this isn't the pronunciation that I hear in the Iranian synagogue and only like, maybe ten years ago I had this revelation in talking to my father and I said, wait a minute, When did you become so serious about this pronunciation? He was like, oh, well, even when I was a bar mitzvah student in Iran, my father had to tell the *gabbis* not to correct my Hebrew because I told them I was going to be pronouncing it as they do in Israel.

SARAH: Wow.

GALEET: So I didn't learn how to chant from the Torah in Persian *ta'amim*. I was a bar mitzvah tutor in the Ashkenazi chanting of the Torah, which I do really well. And, you know, I've been doing since I started teaching it when I was 13. But when I was 30 only. I had already studied Persian classical music as part of my field work, and that's when I said, "Wait a minute, Dad, I want you to teach me how to do this in the Persian style." And so that's when I started chanting in that tradition. And when my kids had their bar mitzvahs, that's how I wanted them to chant. And they did the *haftarah* in Ashkenazi tradition. And they, you know, led services mostly in Ashkenazi style because it's an Ashkenazi egalitarian synagogue. I'm a woman. It would be really difficult for me to be in a non-egalitarian synagogue, because that's how I grew up. My father was a cantor in conservative-with-a-capital-C congregations. And so it's kind of just been this sort of figuring out how to bring my ancestral, you know, practices, and how to transmit them to my kids in a way that, that feels, I guess, comfortable.

SARAH: Yeah. So I want to turn back to your ancestral languages. What do you feel when you hear a word from Yiddish and from Persian? Do you have a particular association or feeling?

GALEET: It makes me think of my grandparents for sure. When I hear Yiddish. I feel this connection to my family. But, you know, because I was connected to them, I think I didn't have as much of a desire to forge that connection. And I think that's why I kind of gravitated to doing more Persian stuff. When I hear Persian, I still don't know Persian that well. I still feel like an outsider. When I hear Yiddish, I don't feel like an outsider, when I hear Yiddish for some reason. I think it's because there's so much Yiddish that it feels like, I don't know, it feels like nostalgic. It feels like, this is what I grew up with, around so much Yiddish. When I hear Persian, I also get kind of excited. I perk up. It's kind of still a secret language to me that I feel connected to but also distant from.

SARAH: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. You mentioned that you learned songs from your grandfather, and in your recordings, you sing in, Hebrew and Persian. Right?

GALEET: Well, like I said, I don't speak Persian. And so connecting with my ancestral music, and in Hebrew, in a language that I do speak, was the way I connected, because I can hear my grandfather sing in Persian, and it's so beautiful. And I connect with it on a lot of levels, especially now that I've studied Persian classical music. But when I hear my grandfather with this same Persian singing but singing Hebrew, singing *piyutim*, singing the songs of *selichot*, I can connect with it because I actually know what he's singing at a deeper level, and I know the language. And so that's kind of what my most recent album was. It was this way that I was able to connect and sing with him.

<CLIP> *Galeet Dardashti - Aneinu (feat. Younes Dardashti)*

GALEET: And I didn't know my grandfather very well. I met him, but we didn't have a shared language. You know, he didn't speak any English. And at the time, my Hebrew wasn't that good. And frankly, his Hebrew wasn't good either. And I didn't speak Persian or French. And so here was a way for me to connect with my grandfather and with my Persian Jewishness, by not only singing Persian music, but singing with him. And that that was the big project in *Monajat*, this album that I recorded was that I could—I also composed my own music in Hebrew, some *piyutim* that I composed that I wanted to bring in that I thought were related to themes of *selichot*, but I could actually trade verses with my grandfather and sing, you know, a piece like *Aneinu* or *Adonai Hu Ha'elohim*.

<CLIP> *Galeet Dardashti - Adonai Hu Ha'elohim (feat. Younes Dardashti)*

It's a really exciting project for me to be able to connect in that deep way where I'm actually singing with and sometimes harmonizing with him.

SARAH: Yeah, it's really, it's really a beautiful album. And that idea of singing with your grandfather, it reminds me of the idea of heritage words, where we bring in words from our grandparents' language into our English. And so we are connecting with them through that word. But the way you do it in your recordings is even more intense or even more real, that you're connecting with your grandfather because you're actually singing with his actual voice.

GALEET: Thank you. Yeah. No, I mean, and when I sing *Aneinu* with him, you know, just like thinking about the words, you know, the words are, you know, answer us. And here I'm, like, answering my grandfather too, you know, singing back and forth with him. So, it's just really exciting for me that I found a way to do it.

SARAH: Yeah. And the title of the album, *Monajat*. Tell us about that.

GALEET: Oh, yeah. *Monajat* literally means this kind of intense prayer with God. That's what it means in Persian. And I found these recordings many years ago. I learned about these recordings that my grandfather made in Iran in the 1970s. He made these recordings of *selichot* as a fundraiser for a Jewish organization. But when I asked my dad, okay, these are all recordings that say that they're *selichot*. And then at the end, there's a recording listed as *Monajat*, at the very end of the *selichot* recording. And I said to my dad, like, what is this? What is *Monajat*? My dad said, Oh, I don't know exactly what it is, but it was *Saba's* special thing. And he would end *selichot* services, you know, with that piece, *Monajat*.

<CLIP> Galeet Dardashti - *Monajat* (feat. Younes Dardashti)

GALEET: I asked more people, and they were like, yeah, I don't know. It was his, like, thing. He would sing this Persian thing at the end. And so I had a Persian colleague of mine help me translate it. And then my dad also helped me. And as it turns out, it's this poem that's written in the style of a Rumi poem. And these were the kinds of poems that my grandfather would interpret as a singer of Persian classical music. But this poem, we think, actually, we think my grandfather wrote it in the style of Persian classical music. But it's all about arising to worship God, which is what actually many of the mystics, like Rumi, were writing about. I mean, they weren't secular, right? They were mystical poems. And it's just this beautiful poem that he felt like it was completely normal to bring into his own Jewish practice. It felt completely natural. He was innovating his Jewish

ritual practice in Iran. And so it kind of gave me artistic license to kind of take his pieces and sample him, which is what I do in *Monajat*. It kind of made me feel like, okay, my Saba did it in Iran. He was, you know, taking artistic license that, you know, it made me feel like I could as well. And so *Monajat*, I was very moved. I was very moved by his *Monajat* and how —there was no clear boundary between kind of religious and non-religious in his world. And so that's why I named the project *Monajat*.

SARAH: I think that was a great choice. I love it.

GALEET: Thank you.

SARAH: Aside from teaching your kids Persian Torah reading, are there other ways that you're incorporating your ancestral cultures in your home?

GALEET: Yeah, I mean, for me, it is much more about the sounds and about the music and about teaching my kids, whether it is Yiddish songs or Persian Jewish songs. That's kind of, I guess, how my family is keeping our family in the tradition. That's what it's really about in the Dardashti family is kind of keeping in the music and the traditions as much as we can. And so that means that my son now leads part of *kiddush* or the *hamotzi*, you know, doing some of the traditions that my family has brought down, even though we didn't grow up that way. And I guess this is the advice that I would kind of give other people that I've tried to share is that I didn't grow up with very much Persian Jewish practice. But you can still do it. You can still—there are still ways of bringing in traditions and practices, whatever works. You know, for some people it's food. And that to a certain extent has happened in my family. But it's more my Ashkenazi husband who's kind of continuing my family Persian traditions. But in every family, I think there are different ways, you know, whether it is languages, whether it's words, whether it's music, whether it's food, whether it's religious practices. There are ways that you can still reconnect, and it's not too late to find some of those traditions that can be meaningful to you. I just want to encourage people to continue to find those ways and to look for those ways that inspire you from your own ancestral background.

SARAH: That's beautiful. We should all sample our ancestors.

GALEET: <laughs> In however ways you can.

SARAH: Exactly. Well, thank you so much, Galeet Dardashti. This has, oh, Galeet Joon Dardashti. This has been a wonderful, rich conversation, and thank you for this, but also for all the wonderful work that you're doing to keep your ancestral cultures alive and to enrich the Jewish community and the world.

GALEET: Oh, thank you so much, Sarah Bunin Benor, for all of the amazing work that you do with the Jewish Language Project and far beyond.

SARAH: Heritage Words is produced and edited by Avishay Artsy, with help from Kyle Fingerhut, Annabel Noar, and Hannah Pressman. I'm the executive producer, Sarah Bunin Benor, founding director of the HUC-JIR Jewish Language Project. The theme music is from Maurice El Medioni's French and Algerian Arabic album Cafe Oran, featuring The Klezmatics' David Krakauer and Frank London, courtesy of Piranha Records. Heritage Words is a collaboration of the Jewish Language Project and HUC Connect with support from listeners like you. Your tax-deductible donation supports the important work of documenting endangered Jewish languages and raising awareness about Jewish diversity. If you'd like to make a financial contribution or sponsor an episode, you can contact us at [jewishlanguages.org](http://jewishlanguages.org). There you can also learn about the broader initiative Heritage Words is part of, Heirloom: Recovering Our Jewish Family Languages. You can apply to be a language advocate or participate in the mentor-learner track. And you can sign up for occasional email updates and follow the Jewish Language Project on Facebook, Instagram, Threads, TikTok, and YouTube. If you liked this episode, please subscribe! Thank you, *a sheynem dank, soghboshi, toda, and mersi muncho.*