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 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 Yosef Goldman. Yosef is a prayer leader, rabbi, synagogue consultant, and musician who helps communities to cultivate vibrant prayer life. His work draws from his rabbinic experience in chaplaincy, education, and congregational leadership. As a composer and performer, Yosef blends the devotional music of his Mizrachi and Ashkenazi ancestors with contemporary Jewish sacred music to create connection and inspire social change. Yosef has released two acclaimed albums of original music and leads Kedmah, a Mizrachi sacred music ensemble whose debut album, Simu Lev, was released last year. Yosef, welcome to Heritage Words.

YOSEF: Thank you, Sarah, it's so great to be here.

SARAH: So let's start with your name. Tell us about your first name, your last name, any other names you have, and what they mean to you.

YOSEF: Sure. My full name is Yosef Ya'ish Mavdali Goldman, and the Mavdali is for my mother's maiden name, her Yemenite father's family. And the name Yosef and Ya`ish both come from my grandfather. So it is traditional in Sephardic families to name after the living. And my grandfather, Ya`ish Mavdali, was from a Yemenite family. He was born in Alexandria, grew up in Jerusalem, and eventually moved to, to the United States, first to the Lower East Side and then to Brooklyn. When he came to the States, Ya`ish, being an Arabic name that was—is common among Jews. And I'll tell you more about that name in a second. But that name became anglicized to Joe. I don't know who first started calling him Joe, but that was that was the name that he eventually went by, especially as a—as a New York City cabdriver. He was Joe. And when my parents chose to name me after him, the anglicized Joe became Yosef. Not because we have Yosefs in the family, but kind of reclaiming that Joe, but also retaining Ya'ish as my middle name. The word Ya'ish means *chiyut,* life, aliveness. Find it in the—in the writings of Maimonides, for example. It's the male version of the name that is common among Muslims of Aisha, and it was given to my grandfather after his mother had a series of lost pregnancies and children dying at a very young age. And so it was a name invoking blessing, invoking protection for—for life after so much loss. It's just, I'll add. It's interesting. I have an identical twin brother and, I come from a mixed-heritage family. My mother's parents are Yemenite father and Syrian mother, and my father's from an Ashkenazi-Russian-Polish background. And so my brother was—was named according to Ashkenazi minhag for my father's father, Benjamin, who had died when my father

was just—had just passed his bar mitzvah. So between the two of us, we have in our names kind of this celebration of the two heritages that are in our family.

SARAH: Wow. That's amazing. Just you and your brother can tell the whole story of Jewish names in many ways, not just naming after living or deceased relatives, but also how you are named after them in creative ways. Yoseph, after Joe/Yaish, and then, and then also just the fact that your grandfather was named with a word for life, which is a common thing for families that have had a lot of children dying young. And you also get people whose names are changed to Chaim or to Rephael or to other words, words that mean old people, like in Ashkenazi communities, Bobbe and Zaide or Alte and Alter.

YOSEF: Try to trick the fates, or the Satan, or whatever it may be.

SARAH: Exactly.

YOSEF: Amazing.

SARAH: Exactly. Okay. So you grew up. Where did—where did you grow up?

YOSEF: I grew up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and I grew up in the Modern Orthodox community there. Like so much of the mainstream Jewish world, it was almost exclusively—well, the institutions were Ashkenazi, and the people there were almost exclusively Ashkenazi. My grandparents were here in Brooklyn, down on Ocean Parkway and Sheepshead Bay, where there is a very large Yemenite—I'm sorry, Syrian community, and with other Sephardim on the outskirts. There's also a—there's a small Yemenite community in Borough Park, where my grandfather prayed for many years. We would go down to Brooklyn once a month or so to spend Shabbat with my grandparents. So in a way, we were—we were kind of shuttling between two Jewish worlds.

SARAH: And you mentioned that your grandfather was born in Alexandria, Egypt.

YOSEF: Yes.

SARAH: But he was Yemenite. Do you know when his family got to Egypt?

YOSEF: I don't—so there was not—I wish that I remembered the exact dates, but there was a moment in the late 19th century that apparently there was a group aliya, a small-ish group, aliya, from—from Yemen. And for reasons that none of us know, my family walked from—well, they walked from Sana`a to the coast to—to travel by boat.

But they traveled to India at first. My best guess is that it was—had to do with affordability. Or maybe they knew of a job. And from there, after some period of time, they traveled to Alexandria. I know that there were a lot of Sephardic—there was a sizable Sephardic community in India, largely Iraqi merchants. And also Alexandria, as far as I know, was one of the most diverse—it was a cosmopolitan Ottoman city in general, but also among Jews—Jews, Sephardic Jews from all over, and even some Ashkenazi Jews. So that might have been a reason for them to—to land there. I can tell you that my grandfather left—my grandfather's family left Jerusalem in 1929 when he was 13. I don't know—I don't know the timeline going back to when they left Sana`a, but they left Jerusalem during the unrest of 1929. And they were in Jerusalem—they were part of the founders of Nahalat Tzvi, which was a Yemenite neighborhood, one of the first handful of neighborhoods outside of the the walls of the Old City. That came to be called the Nachlaot.

SARAH: Oh, okay. Wow. So my grandfather was also born in Egypt, in Cairo, in an Ashkenazi community. His family had moved from Lithuania to Cairo in the mid-19th century, and I guess Egypt was a vibrant place and easier to live than Palestine at the time. So I think it makes sense that we both had ancestors there, and my grandfather also then moved to Jerusalem in the late 20s, early 30s, and was also involved in—in founding institutions in Jerusalem.

YOSEF: Amazing.

SARAH: Okay, so let's talk about languages. What languages do you speak, and what languages did your ancestors speak?

YOSEF: I speak English and Hebrew. I wish I spoke Spanish better after having studied it for—for so many years in school. And you know, I have a little bit of Aramaic from studying Talmud for many years. I, you know, my—the language of my heritages are Yemenite and Arabic and Yiddish and—I have strong memories of my grandparents speaking those languages and hearing some words from my parents. But it was never really like it was never a language that was spoken in any—in any way in our—in our home or the—yeah. So specifically, my mother's parents were speaking more of a Syrian Levantine Arabic, which is and the words and pronunciation is significantly different from Yemenite Arabic and my—my mother knew just a few words from when her mother, when her grandmother, her paternal grandfather, was alive. But really, the—the words that she knew were from Syrian Arabic.

SARAH: Because she had spent more time in that community in New York, in Brooklyn?

YOSEF: So my grandparents were living in the Syrian community. So my grandmother—that was probably a large factor in the choice that that was the—would be the Arabic that my grandparents spoke to each other. And. Of course, my, you know, my—the pronunciation and to whatever extent the prayers in the Yemenite community were in Arabic, that was—that was still part of my—my grandfather's practice.

SARAH: But your grandpa, your grandfather went to a Syrian synagogue in Brooklyn?

YOSEF: So he went—he went to a Yemenite synagogue in—in Borough Park for a long time. There's a—actually a—there was a—it was a—a branch in some ways of the—of the Beit Kaneset, the synagogue, that was from Nahalat Tzvi. A group of folks from that neighborhood started a synagogue in I think it was in the Lower East Side. And then there was—as folks moved out to Brooklyn, there was one in Borough Park. And he would—he would drive out there from Sheepshead Bay and was a shamash and prayer leader and president, you know, small shul, taking on all the leadership roles that were needed. And it's interesting. My mother, who went to, you know, they were in a Syrian community. So my mother went to Syrian institutions, a Syrian Jewish Day School, went to the Syrian synagogue around the corner. It was actually, you know—organized a bunch of girls to—to go to the, like, Shabbat afternoon singing that otherwise was entirely men. But when, you know—so, the Shabbat observance was very, like, was very central in the home. But they would drive out to this synagogue and then later as—as my mother's practices were developing, my grandfather chose, when she was in Israel for the year, chose to—to not travel on Shabbat, even though it meant going to the Syrian synagogue that was not his own prayer tradition. So by the time I started visiting, we were going to—I was going with my Yemenite grandfather to the Syrian synagogues.

SARAH: And what about on your dad's side? Did you also encounter the Ashkenazi community? You said you heard your grandparents speaking Yiddish. Was that in a community of other people who spoke Yiddish?

YOSEF: So my grand—I remember my grandfather was deceased. But I remember my grandmother occasionally—occasionally veering into Yiddish with her siblings. So I'm describing my—my grandfather's being an immigrant. My Syrian grandmother was born just after the family arrived to the United States. But on my father's side, both of his parents were—were—had—their families had been here for several generations. But they—they still spoke Yiddish among their friends and read Yiddish newspapers and were very much involved in—before—before I was alive—very much involved in what was happening in Europe, and—and their homes, from what I understand, were open to

folks coming from Europe. So they were, you know, they were very much still—Yiddish was still very much an alive language for them.

SARAH: So you said that you know some words from your ancestral languages. Why don't you start to talk about those?

YOSEF: So yes, I know some—just a few words that I remember from—from my home—from—mostly from—some from my grandparents. More from—from my mother. And the first thing that comes to mind is the word *`ayouni*, which just literally means 'my eyes'. And, you know, it's a term of endearment for a loved one, for children. I think that it's a word that is—can find in other languages as well, the eyes being such an expression of one's soul, of one's essence, and one's beauty. So that was constantly the term of affection from—that I would hear from my—my grandparents or my mother. And my mother would also—and my grandmother—whenever we would leave a place or be out on a—heading out on a trip or something, would say *Allah ma`ak,* which means 'may God be with you.' And they're—they're similar—these are kind of expressions of—of—of blessing. *Salamu idek*, which means 'bless your hands.' It's—it's something that you would say to some—to, let's say, a host or hostess who had offered you something, or a cook who had just, you know, given you something that she had made—a Shabbat dinner, let's say, or—or. And two related terms like, *inshallah* and *mashallah*. *Inshallah* means, you know, im yirtzeh Hashem, 'if God wills it', which is going to be, you know, qualification for something that we hope will happen, whereas *mashallah* means something more like 'this is what—God has willed this' and in some ways it's—it's the positive side of saying like, bli ayin hara, keneine hora. It's like—both, like, acknowledge that something good has happened, where keneine hora is just like saying 'I hope nothing, nothing bad happens to ruin this great thing.' Whereas *mashallah* is like, 'wow, God is here in this', and it could be, you know, upon hearing good news or, you know, seeing a beautiful new baby. And these are expressions that are common among Jews and are also common among, you know, other—other Arabs, Muslims, which—these are universal expressions of—of blessing and invoking of—of God. I'll just add that a lot of prayer, just like in—in—in Ashkenazi communities, there are tkhines and other—other sorts of prayer that—that we find in—in the vernacular, it's true as well of Jews from—from Arab and Muslim lands that we—we have texts in Arabic, Judeo Arabic. And so, *Allah* would be a common term that we use—that our—my ancestors used to refer to God. And the other term that I was thinking of is a Yemenite word. That is *ja'ale*, which I guess in other Arabic dialects might be pronounced ja`ala, but Yemenites say *ja`ale*, which is a communal gathering to where they sing songs and discuss the tradition. It's really an intergenerational sort of gathering—might happen in—in people's homes or in the synagogue, and we'll see elders and children sitting together. Songs are often—usually include songs from the

diwan and a key—a key characteristic is the dried fruits and nuts that is served as hospitality. Sometimes you have wine, beer, arak, but this fruits and nuts is—is always going to be there. It's not uncommon to have dried fruits and nuts at the end of a—of a meal in the Yemenite community, and I found my—my grandparents, you know, they would invite people over to come and sit in their living room and would take out these fruits and nuts, and they'd call—they'd call that *ja`ale* even if it was not accompanied by song and story. But that was in—kind of in the spirit of—of sacred communal gatherings with food at the center.

SARAH: That's beautiful. And so that was your grandfather, who would use that word, or also your Syrian grandmother?

YOSEF: Syrian grandmother. It—it became just like a—a term of, you know, what you would—when—if you're having people over and you're putting out a little bit of fruits and nuts that was *ja`ale*.

SARAH: That's neat. So it's kind of like a tish in the Ashkenazi.

YOSEF: Yeah. Yeah, kind of like a tish, but—but multigenerational and thinking about, like—maybe this is just, you know, my experience of—of it in—in a, I would say, diasporic, like, out of—removed from Yemen. But I think that it seemed—it feels to me like the transmission from generation to generation is—is—is—is kind of at the core of it.

SARAH: Well, speaking of transmission, to what extent did these words get transmitted to your language? You've heard them, but do you also use them?

YOSEF: I definitely find myself using *inshallah*. In my mind—I think—when I think of *mashallah*, I think of—I think of older people using it, you know, the same way that I might imagine, like, an Ashkenazi bubbie pinching someone's cheek and saying, ‘keneine hora.’ But I guess I'm quickly growing into that person. I—I definitely say *ayouni* to my children, and they're getting less and less embarrassed of it, and I'm not sure if it's the language or if it's the—the kind of—the public displays of affection and the age that they're at.

SARAH: Well, how old are they?

YOSEF: My daughter's ten and my son is six and a half. Occasionally—I'll throw in some—some other words. You know, I'll call my daughter *habibti* or *habibti albi*, the beloved of my—of my heart. Other—other terms. Because you can never have enough

ways to describe your affection for your children. And I think that as I think about it, no matter what term I use in what language, I think I'll get the same response. I think that they—they definitely appreciate it on the inside. But, I did discover that both of my children—they like to play with Duolingo, which is cool. They've both been exploring Arabic on Duolingo, and told me about it. So, you and I have discussed the Kedmah some. So that is—that's a—that's a project of Hebrew poetry mostly, piyutim, and the—that are poetry and the music that they're sung to. But such a large part of that project is, kind of, familiarizing folks with the—the nuanced and long and rich history of Jews in—in Arab lands and Muslim lands and, you know, how Jews were intertwined and integral in the creation and performance of Arab culture, including music, and the kind of essential Arab quality of Jewish sacred music from the—the—the building blocks of the modes the maqam, the maqamat, that are the basis of songs, tefilah, the, the, the prayers, the kriyat haTorah, the, the, the trope system for reading Torah, and not to mention the melodies that a lot of the songs that were taken from Arab folk or Arab classical music, teaching a lot about that these days at HUC in programs that my partner Yoni and I do with Kedmah, and talking a lot about that with my children and, you know, playing a fair amount of not just Jewish music in maqam, but also music from the golden era of Arab music: Egyptian, Syrian, Lebanese. And I'm hoping that they feel more at home with this, despite the fact that so much of our our own Jewish communal life and the institutions that we're a part of are Ashkenazi.

SARAH: Do you go to an Ashkenazi synagogue now?

YOSEF: Plural. I go to many different synagogues that like—and they're almost exclusively Ashkenazi. Partly because of where we live. There are a couple of—couple of great egalitarian Sephardic minyanim that meet occasionally. I'll say I'm—as my children get older, I'm more and more interested in ensuring that they actively feel that this is a—this heritage is a part of their—of their Jewish identity. And in reaching out to other folks who work in the Sephardic community, who have one foot in the Sephardic community and one foot in the kind of broader Jewish community and understand the fuller landscape of the Jewish world, to see how folks like me, who have this dual heritage, can ensure that our—our—our children have a strong Sephardic identity and not just, you know, pride in knowing that they have ancestors that came from these places.

SARAH: So—and your wife is a rabbi, right?

YOSEF: My wife is also a rabbi, yes. Rabbi Annie Lewis.

SARAH: And is she a pulpit rabbi?

YOSEF: She—she was a pulpit rabbi for most of the past dozen-plus years. We've both been largely in pulpits. She was an—is an excellent pulpit rabbi. The two of us were most recently co-leading a congregation, a lovely congregation in the Maryland suburbs of DC. Just moved up to Brooklyn and she is currently a dean for first-year rabbinical students at JTS and leading their Mekhinah program, and running admissions for their rabbinical cantorial school.

SARAH: So, when you co-led a congregation, did you incorporate Sephardi nusach into your prayers at that congregation?

YOSEF: No. Introduced—we were there for three years, and towards the end, introduced a few melodies. I don't know if what would have been if we had stayed. It was a time very aware of rate of change. Happened to be that we were coming in right after the worst of the—of the pandemic, after their wonderful founding rabbi had left. So there were, you know—it wasn't a congregation with, like, a music program where there's a sense of a wide range of musics coming through and being performed and expanding the range of, you know, and I think it's interesting. I like—I'm—it was, as we've discussed, I'm teaching Hebrew Union College cantorial students now about Sephardic and Mizrahi piyut, which includes much of the history of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, or at least a taste of that and taste of maqam and and a wide range of these songs. I guess in my own congregational life it's—it's hard to to figure out how much of that to put in, but there's—I, you know, I've work—I've brought in through Kedmah I've brought a lot of these melodies into a wide range of congregations. And when I do residencies now in congregations, I'm sure to to include a couple of Sephardic melodies and teaching these piyutim. I think it's a very interesting moment now. A lot of folks are asking related questions of what it means to bring these heritages through melodies and also texts and language, into congregations that are majority Ashkenazi. What would it look like for the—for our prayer and music life to reflect some more of the variety of our people, and to do it in a way that preserves some of the associations with its—with—with the origins?

SARAH: Yeah. I think we are at a crossroads in American Jewish history. I think originally, congregations were mixed: Ashkenazi and Sephardi. And then when there was a critical mass of Ashkenazim after the original Sephardim had founded congregations, they would break off into a new congregation. Like B'nai Jeshurun in New York was an Ashkenazi break off from the Spanish Portuguese Synagogue, and—and then most of American Jewish history was congregations that were identified as Ashkenazi or Sephardi. But then, I think we're at this historical moment where we're starting to see an influx of Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews into historically Ashkenazi

congregations, and they seem to be changing the liturgy. You know, you get people like Asher Shasho Levy, who we also interviewed on this podcast, and he is working as a chazan in a predominantly Ashkenazi congregation but bringing in Sephardi nusach—and not just melodies, but also prayers that are not in the Ashkenazi siddur or prayers that are different in Sephardi and Ashkenazi siddurim. So I'm wondering how you see yourself playing a role in that, in that change, that incorporation, that infusion of Sephardi nusach into historically Ashkenazi congregations?

YOSEF: So, yeah, Asher's doing really wonderful work. So part of my role is just to go around to these communities and remind them that there's this beautifully beautiful and rich tradition of music and—and piyut and a different approach to prayer and spirituality. And reminding them of the—the diversity within their own communities. And when we go into schools, similarly, of talking with—with school children about where their families are from and really, you know, focusing on the diversity of the Sephardic and Mizrahi children and teachers, and lifting up some of the substance of—of those traditions as well. And with prayer leaders—a moment at HUC to help folks find access to these traditions, including, you know, introducing them to the wide range of resources available on—on the internet and connecting them to other—to folks who are asking these questions so that as the moment presents itself, they can begin to—to incrementally bring some of these—these traditions in. Also, you know, over the past many years have been building relationships and helping to connect like-minded folks who are working with—with Sephardic and Mizrahi music in spiritual, communal settings, whether that's as prayer leaders or song leaders, and continue to—to do that and—and—and ask these questions from within the Sephardic community about what it looks like in, Sephardic and Mizrahi communities—what does it look like to—to be a part of bringing these traditions in in a way that feels like it's authentic and representing our traditions. And continuing to explore, you know, what it means to bring in a service. In the residences that—that I lead in, you know, consulting with synagogues to create these hybrid services, inspired some by my—my colleague Yoni Battat, who is, you know, taking some influence from Jewish Renewal and saying, here we're going to take a verse, maybe a verse from Shir haShirim, and chant it, like a small number of words, and take a melody either from a piyut or from Arab classical music and—and just sit with those—with that chant. I'm very—I'm very excited to see what the next five, ten years looks like.

SARAH: So you mentioned authenticity. Let's talk a little bit more about that. What makes someone's use of a particular piyut or a particular melody authentic or not authentic?

YOSEF: Veering away from the word for a second, I just want to give an example of—so there's a melody that is known by many Ashkenazi Jews who sing Shabbat table songs. Some Shabbat zmirot. *singing* Ki Eshm'ra Shabbat *singing* People don't tend to know that that is a Turkish melody that's also sung in Turkish military settings, and it's made its way into the Syrian and Sefarad-Yerushalayim bakashot, and probably made its way into Ashkenazi communities through its use in Israel. So that you can lift that up as an example of Sephardic music being sung in Ashkenazi communities. But, you know, of what value is it towards the goals that we're describing, if the origins of it are not known? Or, similarly, you know, the *singing* kadesh, urchatz, karpas, yachatz *singing*. That's a melody that we think of as, you know, just American Ashkenazi standard, as popular as it gets—everyone's around the Seder table. That's a melody that comes—it's probably a very old Andalusian Sephardic melody that then makes its way through communities, Iraqi communities, other communities, and becomes—takes on characteristics of maqam, and long story short, the kibbutz movement finds it by way of Idelsohn's notation, which already is Westernizing it. It eventually finds its way to the first Reconstructionist Haggadah of Kaplan and—and its origins are not known, but it is—comes from—from Sephardic origins. And so that—those are examples of how taking a melody but removing it from its contexts doesn't serve to the goals of—of integration, of representation, of the prayers reflecting the spiritual heritage in a conscious way. What would it look like in practice? I think that's more difficult to answer. I think that it—it requires a lot of education that might be beyond the scope of how our communal life is organized. You know, I'm teaching in some more traditional settings, piyutim with a lot of words, with translation, transliteration, notes in English, and reviewing the melody over and over. And that is lovely, but that's—that is a very slow process. So to me, there—in a nutshell, there would be some level of knowledge of where the melodies come from. There's also the issue of translation, and one is the issue of language, which I mentioned, when there's a lot of Hebrew text in our American communities. And the other is musical language. You find that even some Ashkenazi melodies that have certain intervals in certain American spaces are difficult for folks to—to sing, Sephardic melodies that have a lot of ornamentation and certainly microtones. It's still a debate as to how to bring these melodies that when I'm singing it, or others who are well versed in this music, and singing it with other singers, non-Sephardic singers, we can approximate it in a way that—that folks who are singing feel it, and even if it feels—can feel—can feel off in their mouths. They can kind of hear what—where—what it is, but that's one step removed from those practitioners. It's—it—it takes on a different character. And the question is, if you—if you change those tones and round it out, at what point does it become qualitatively a different melody altogether?

SARAH: Right. You have that same issue in language. When you have a word that is borrowed from one language into another, it often changes its sound, its meaning, its grammatical use. Tish is a good example. Where in Yiddish, tish means ‘table’, and in Jewish English, tish means a celebration around a table or even just a celebration, a gathering with song and—and—and stories or—or some kind of celebratory gathering. And so another example is the word schmooze. In Yiddish, it’s not *schmooze*, it's shmues, and it—and it has a different meaning. It means, well, it comes from the Hebrew word ‘shmuot’, things that are heard, and it means to chat. And in Jewish English, it also means to chat, but then it comes to mean to kiss up, to work your way up some kind of hierarchy by talking to people. And it also becomes transitive. You no longer just schmooze with someone, you can schmooze someone. And so I think the same thing is happening in music, where you have melodies that change when they enter a different musical tradition. And—and so yeah, your question of how—how much change is acceptable for you to feel comfortable with it being an authentic use. But then you have the other—the opposite problem, which is, if someone who isn't trained in Middle Eastern music starts trying to do the quarter tones and the ornamentation, it might sound inauthentic, and it might—it might feel uncomfortable for people who grew up in that tradition.

YOSEF: Yeah, I think it highlights—it highlights the ways in which there are both commonalities and differences within our communities. And—there are, you mentioned, some places where there’s more Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews there. When there's enough of a scale, you see places that have a separate service—you have a Sephardic minyan and the Ashkenazi minyan, and to some extent that—that—that meets similar goals in different ways. These are—these are significant challenges. I don't—I have seen some melodies by—sung by—by wonderful practitioners in ways that to me with rounding out quarter tones, adding westernized harmonies, and presenting those songs in a way that, to me, the songs are unrecognize—the melodies are unrecognizable. So I think that this will remain—this will remain a source of tension, but hopefully a dynamic, generative tension, as we figure out how to—how to bring—how to create musical spiritual space that reflects the—our collective—the—the range of our collective traditions without homogenizing them.

SARAH: Yeah, I like that. And I think a lot of that has to do with awareness: people being aware of certain melodies coming from certain traditions, and then also, same with language, people being aware that certain words come from certain traditions. So *inshallah* is an interesting example. Do you—you said that you use *inshallah*, and I'm wondering if you feel comfortable with people of Ashkenazi background using that word as well?

YOSEF: I think it has to—depends on how it's used and the intention. I have heard Ashkenazi Jews that are in relationship with Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews or Arabs, who use that to mean what it means, because it's a, you know, it's a term with certain associations. And to my ear, it's—it's fine. It's—also, it's not particularly difficult to—to pronounce. And sadly, there are a lot of associations in the Jewish world with the Arabic language that are not positive, and associations with the word *Allah* which are not positive. And, you know, if that is in any way part of—of—of the—the usage, then that is—that is problematic.

SARAH: Oh, you're saying if people are using it in a making-fun-of-Arabic kind of way, then that's not acceptable.

YOSEF: Yeah. You know, or if there's, you know, if there is mixed—if there is even a, you know, kind of a mixed association with that language. I've heard, you know—I've also heard people use—use that term and other terms in ways that have—have an edge to them because of the fact that it's Arabic. And I'm ignoring the fact that that is just as much language of Jews as, you know, saying Kudsha Brich Hu in Aramaic or the Eybishter in Yiddish.

SARAH: Yeah. Yes, absolutely. And so you talked about using some of these Arabic heritage words from your family with your children. Do you feel that using those words helps to preserve the Jewish varieties of Arabic that your grandparents spoke?

YOSEF: I think it helps to preserve the memory of them. I don't know how much I'm transmitting the variety of Arabic with just a few words, but I think it's also very important for my children to—to hear it and know that this is part of who they are, and how, you know, the—part of the languages of love and affection and spirit that their ancestors used with God and with—with—with each other.

SARAH: That’s beautiful. What—what other thoughts do you have about your ancestral languages, identities, and communities?

YOSEF: I very much want to—to learn Arabic, spoken Arabic, written Arabic. I recently joined an Arabic choir, which I hope will be a step towards—towards learning more Arabic. I feel like the more that I get involved in—in Sephardic and Mizrahi music, the more that it's an essential piece of—to know Arabic, because so much of the—so much of the—so many of the melodies are from Arabic music, but also just so much of the poetry and—and liturgical poetry from around the Jewish world, things that—that made their way from Spain and other places into the Ashkenazi community based on Arabic poetry and meter. And, you know, for me to really—to really immerse into this world, the

Arabic language has to be a part of that. And hopefully as part of that, I will be able to—to share more of the language with my children.

SARAH: Well, Yosef Goldman, thank you so much. This has been a very interesting conversation, and I appreciate all that you do to raise awareness about the diversity of the Jewish world.

YOSEF: Thank you, Sarah. It's been a pleasure.