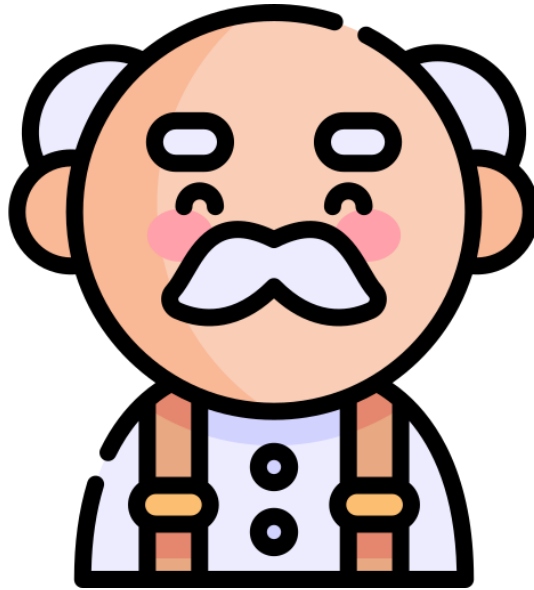


# Bayati

Bayati is an Arabic musical maqam (scale/mood).



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Yes, this is the sound of my grandfather crying. I know his crying sound well. This is the second time I've heard him cry in my life. No, that's not right, I think I'm a little nervous! But, I remember the first time very well, as if it was yesterday. I was four years old, and I was staying with him at his house that day. The phone rang while he was carrying me in his arms. My grandfather picked up the phone, he didn't move his lips for no more than half a minute, then he returned the phone back to its place in an unprecedented complete silence.

In short, but by no means incomplete, the gist of that call was that he lost his only daughter, my mother, and her husband, my father, whom he considers also his only son, in a car accident on their way to pick me up at night from his home.

As I was in his arms, his soft hands caressed my cheeks, while he looked at me with eyes full of pain. I have never forgotten that look in his eyes. Then he said to me...

- Sorry, Ahmed, my love. Tomorrow we have a very long day ahead of us, I need to prepare well for it. Sorry.

I didn't understand at that moment what he meant by that preparation, but I remember very well what he did. He sat on his couch, hugging me tightly, and started to cry. That was the preparation he meant. I cried because of his tears, we cried together until I fell asleep, and he continued to cry alone until

I woke up. He knew that my affliction was much greater than his. When I woke up, I touched his soft white beard; it was completely soaked in tears, he was still crying. I asked him, saying...

- Why are you crying, Grandpa? I don't like seeing you cry. I don't want you to cry again, ever!

He smiled at me, while wiping his tears, his wet hand caressed my cheek again. He said...

- I promise , Ahmed, I will never cry again, ever.

And indeed, I never saw my grandfather cry after that moment. From then on, he was my grandfather, my father, my mother, my brother, and my friend. He was everything to me in life, and I was everything to him.

My life was not easy anyway. Sometimes, those days come and slap you in the face with a cruelty whose reasons you don't know. I knew the reasons, of course, but I was too young to comprehend them. Do you believe you'll ever truly understand, no matter how hard you try?

Days like snakes constantly hovering around you, then they bite you, provoking you to fight. If you obey them, they coil around your neck, suffocating you. They tighten their grip more and more, controlling the strangulation. They stretch out like years and decades, draining your strength, imprisoning you in the folds of some fleeting moments. And actually, there is no energy left in us to fight. It's a losing battle par excellence. Even that expression "*losing battle*" itself has a crude and impudent optimism, for I see indeed no adversary there, nor

any loophole through which a glimmer of potential balance might emerge.

But my grandfather was always there. He had a heart whose love encompassed everything. He was my constant source of joy in that strange world, devoid of mercy, a world that never understood for a moment.

One of those days stands out well. I came back from school feeling gloomy and sad. My grandfather noticed my sadness and called me to play football in the backyard to cheer me up. I was angry, snakes were dancing around me. I kicked the ball with all my might, and it hit him in the face, shattering his glasses and knocking out one of his teeth. His beard was completely soaked in blood. I panicked as soon as I saw it, feeling guilty. I approached him, remorseful, to check on him. At that moment, I felt like I lost my ability to speak. He did nothing but smile at me, and as usual, his hands caressed my cheek as he said to me...

- Don't worry, Mr Ahmed. It's alright. Just take it easy on me, I am not as tough as you!

Then he gently took my hand, saying...

- Let's go...

That day, we went to the eyeglasses store and got him a new pair of glasses. Afterwards, we visited the dentist, who fitted him with a shiny silver tooth to replace the broken one. He was always joking with me, saying that he would eat me up with that silver tooth when he was chasing me around the house. Sometimes, I would deliberately slow down so he could catch

me, enjoying the feel of his soft lips as he pretended to devour me with his tender heart. How beautiful you were, Grandpa!

My grandfather was a music lover ever since he was young. He had an old gramophone and enjoyed listening to one of his music recordings on it every day while sipping tea on the couch. One day, I returned home from school, and after finishing the delicious lunch he had lovingly prepared, he said to me with his usual light-heartedness...

- Come here, let me play you something to clean out your ears, you little rascal!
- Play it for us, Grandpa!

It was a classical Arabic piece called **Bayati**\*. My grandfather and I sat on our couch, listening to this piece while sipping our tea. Its music was truly beautiful, deeply impactful despite its simplicity. That day, I realized that there is a special charm nestled in the depths of all that is simple. Listening to it, I felt an incomprehensible longing and fondness. I loved it so much. We used to listen to it every day. It became our third in that strange world. My grandfather loved humming along with that piece, it seemed to me as if he were playing it with his voice like one of the musicians, his voice overflowing with warmth and life.

On the day of my graduation from middle school, my grandfather rewarded me and bought us two tickets to a musical concert at the Arabic Music Theatre in Cairo.

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\* In fact, **Bayati** is not the name of the piece, **Bayati** is a name of an Arabic musical **maqam** (scale/mood). This piece does not have a unique name, it's an Arabic classical piece composed in a classical form called **Samaii** on the maqam of **Bayati**, and composed by the Egyptian **qanon** player **Ibrahim El Erian** (I've attached links for this piece at the end). For short, let's call it **Bayati**.

**Bayati** was part of the concert program. It was the first time I heard live music in my life. It was much more beautiful than I had ever heard. Seeing the elegantly dressed musicians, each embracing their instrument with pride and sincerity, instilled in your soul a hope for beauty. I was listening to the piece and feeling a slight breeze of fresh air quietly emanating deep within me. I felt like a dove flying in the vast space of the theatre above the musicians' heads, adding to that warm scene the touch of peace it deserves.

There was one musician in the middle of the orchestra holding a beautiful, oval-shaped instrument that I hadn't seen before. I quietly asked my grandfather about it, he whispered to me that it's called the '**Oud**'. The instrument captivated me throughout the concert. Its voice was calm and affectionate, touching the heart and embracing the soul.

After the concert ended and we warmly applauded the conductor and the musicians, my grandfather and I stepped outside the hall to breathe in some fresh evening air. We were overjoyed; so decided to walk home. As we walked, my grandfather hummed the melody of the piece with his cheerful voice, I interrupted him, saying...

- Grandpa, I want to learn to play the oud. I really loved that instrument.
- Oh my goodness, Mr Ahmed. From tomorrow you'll start to learn the oud! Your wish is my command, sir.

On the following day, we went to the Arabic Music Institute, where one of my grandfather's friends worked as a teacher. He

welcomed us warmly and helped us to complete the required enrolment paperwork. Then, he directed us to a renowned oud maker in Cairo. We went to him and bought an oud for me. I happily hugged my beloved instrument all the way back home. It became our fourth in that strange world.

I started my journey of learning the oud. Every morning, I would go to the Institute for lessons. My playing skills improved day by day. After two years of joining the institute, we started learning **Bayati** as one of the classics of Arabic music. After mastering it well, I went home that day and jokingly called my grandfather, saying...

- Grandpa, Come here, let me play for you something to clean out your ears, you old man!
- Let's hear it, Mr Ahmed!

We went out to our garden, my grandfather sat down, and I sat next to him, resting the oud on my thigh. I began to play **Bayati**. I began to play the piece, but I had barely played a few seconds of its introduction when he quickly stood up, gesturing with his hands for me to stop, and said with his usual spontaneity...

- Hold on there, Mr Ahmed! What calmness and vibe, you artist! Give me five minutes... This calls for a strong cup of tea!

My grandfather entered the house and quickly returned with two cups of tea and a pillow. He threw the pillow on the ground, then placed the tea on the table, saying...

- Here you go, Maestro!

He lay on the ground, a pillow beneath his head, quietly listening to the piece. Then he started humming along with his sweet voice, in a state of ecstasy I had never witnessed before. His face was so peaceful and beautiful. He gazed at the sky, silently conversing with his departed loved ones who resided there!

A week ago was my high school graduation ceremony at the institute. I had been rehearsing with my friends for the concert every day for several months. **Bayati** was part of the scheduled program for the concert. It was summer, and the concert took place in the evening on the open-air stage at the opera house. My grandfather was sitting there, happily, among the audience in the front row.

And when we started playing **Bayati**, our eyes met and we smiled in eloquent silence. Happiness enveloped his face, which seemed on the verge of leaping with joy, like that of a child. I know those looks of the so-called grown-up children very well. He was holding himself back from getting up and throwing himself on the ground in front of the stage, to gaze at the stars and converse with their neighbours!

After the concert ended, I asked my grandfather to go back home alone, because I was going to celebrate my graduation with my friends, and I would be coming back late.

But little did I know that my going out with my friends to celebrate would mean that my grandfather would receive another dreadful call that evening, telling him that I had joined my father and mother and left him alone, naked in that cruel,



stupid world - a world I become sure it didn't and will never understand - because of another damned car accident.

Here I am now, preparing to enter my grave, and I hear the sound of his crying filling my depths. He moans like a dove. Why do you lie, Grandpa? You promised me that you would never cry. Did you mean you would never cry as long as I was alive? Why are you lying? Your lies are a knife that slaughters me. I can't bear to hear more of your lies. Be silent for an hour so I can rest peacefully in my grave, then cry alone at home as much as you can.

A day has passed since I have been here alone in my grave. It is dark, silent, and gloomy. There is no sense of time here. I turn around inside it to no avail. A constant, overwhelming boredom.

But what is this? I hear a sound outside there. I can't quite distinguish it, but it is getting closer and clearer. It's the sound of musical instruments tuning their notes. I know that sound all too well. I also hear the sound of my Oud! What is happening out there? That's my grandfather's voice too!

Moments later, **Bayati** was filling the grave, erasing its gloom. It seems that my grandfather brought my friends to play it for me to comfort my loneliness. My grandfather was humming along with them as well, but this time his voice was like that of a sacrifice. Life had left his tones, and his voice was filled with sadness and death. Your voice is killing me, man!

This continued every day. My grandfather comes every morning, or what I assume is morning outside, with my friends

and they play **Bayati** for me several times. My grandfather hums along with them each time. Death was creeping into his voice day after day.

Here it is, a week has passed since my death. Lying on my side with closed eyes, facing the wall of my grave, waiting for my grandfather and my friends to play **Bayati** for me. I waited for their arrival for hours, but no avail. I heard no one outside. I got extremely anxious. My grandfather couldn't forget me this quickly.

I opened my eyes and found a faint, shining silver light illuminating the grave. When I turned to my right, I found him lying beside me, smiling at me, and his silver tooth was gleaming, the one he used to devour me with. It seems that this old man couldn't bear the separation.

Our eyes met once again, and suddenly, our grave expanded. Then, his soft hands caressed my cheek again as usual, and at that moment, our beautiful grave was filled with the warmth of his affectionate voice, saying to me...

**Hello.**

If you're interested in listening to that piece (**Bayati**), here are two lovely interpretations, especially the first one performed by the Tunisian Radio Ensemble in 2002.



I hope you like them!

Here's my own interpretation of this piece on the violin, not the oud. I'm pretty bad at both instruments anyway, but I think I'm slightly less terrible on the violin :)

If you're not used to hearing quarter tones and my sound seems off tone to you, then maybe the problem is yours! But if you are familiar with quarter tones and my sound still seems off tone, then I have to admit, it's me! Unfortunately, the previous trick doesn't work anymore :)



If you are interested in playing this piece, you can download it from here: **(Contains quarter tones!!!)**

<https://shalabycave.com/hello/bayati/samaii-bayati.pdf>