

## David's Punishment for Singing



**'Study of King David'**  
(Julia Margaret Cameron, 1866)

תְּהִי-לִי חֲקִיָּה--בְּבַיִת מִגֹּדְרֵי זְמֵרוֹת... Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."

Ps 119:54

In an enigmatic aggada the Talmud seems to exhort King David for his extolling the divine in Psalm 119:54 by describing the Torah as a song: *Thy statutes have been my songs.*

The gemoroh seems to critique David for reducing the Torah to a mere song. Let us examine this midrash to explore the depths of what Torah seems to mean to the rabbis and what song represents. The critique is based on their reading of the pericope in II Samuel chapter 6 that describes the moving of the Ark from *Kiryat Ye'arim* to Jerusalem and the tragic consequences that ensued and the delay of that movement resulting from the tragedy.

## Prooftexts

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>ג</b> וַיִּרְכְּבוּ אֶת-אָרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים, אֶל-עֲגֹלָה חֲדָשָׁה, וַיִּשְׁאָהוּ, מִבַּיִת אַבִּינָדָב אֲשֶׁר בַּגִּבְעָה; וְעֻזָּא וְאַחִיו, בְּנֵי אַבִּינָדָב, נָהֲגִים, אֶת-הָעֲגֹלָה חֲדָשָׁה.</p> | <p><b>3</b> And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart.</p>                                 |
| <p><b>ד</b> וַיִּשְׁאָהוּ, מִבַּיִת אַבִּינָדָב אֲשֶׁר בַּגִּבְעָה, עִם, אָרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים; וְאַחִיו, הַלֵּף לִפְנֵי הָאָרוֹן.</p>  | <p><b>4</b> And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was in the hill, with the ark of God, and Ahio went before the ark.</p>  |
| <p><b>ה</b> וַיְדוּד וְכָל-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, מִשְׁחָקִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה, בְּכֹל, עֲצֵי כְרוֹשִׁים; וּבַכְנֹרֹת וּבַנְּבָלִים וּבַתְּפִילִּים, וּבַמְנַעְנָעִים וּבַצִּלְצָלִים.</p>                         | <p><b>5</b> And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD with all manner of instruments made of cypress-wood, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with sistra, and with cymbals.</p> |
| <p><b>ו</b> וַיָּבֹאוּ, עַד-גֵּרֶן נָכוֹן; וַיִּשְׁלַח עֻזָּה אֶל-אָרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים, וַיֹּאחֲזוּ בוֹ--כִּי שָׁמְטוּ, הַבָּקָר.</p>  | <p><b>6</b> And when they came to the threshing-floor of Nacon, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen stumbled.</p>  |
| <p><b>ז</b> וַיַּחַר-אַף יְהוָה בְּעֻזָּה, וַיַּכְהוּ שָׁם הָאֱלֹהִים עַל-הַשָּׁל; וַיָּמָת שָׁם, עִם אָרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים.</p>  | <p><b>7</b> And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.</p>   |
| <p><b>ח</b> וַיַּחַר לְדָוִד, עַל אֲשֶׁר פָּרַץ יְהוָה פָּרֶץ בְּעֻזָּה; וַיִּקְרָא לַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא, פָּרֶץ עֻזָּה, עַד, הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.</p>   | <p><b>8</b> And David was displeased, because the LORD had broken forth upon Uzzah; and that place was called Perez-uzzah, unto this day.</p>  |

### II Sam 6, 3-8

Rashi op cit

אל עגלה חדשה. טעה בדבר שאפילו תינוקות של בית רבן יודעין אותו, כי עבודת הקדש עליהם בכתף ישאו (במדבר ז ט), ולפי שאמר (תהלים קיט גד): זמירות היו לי חקיך בבית מגורי, נענש לבא לידי כך,

*David erred in this matter for even kids in cheder know the verse that the kohanim need to carry the Ark on their shoulders exclusively.*

Rashi on II Samuel 6:3:1

**On a new wagon.** [Dovid] made a mistake about something that even children at their Rebbe's school know "Because the sacred work was [incumbent] upon them, which they had to carry on their shoulders" (Bamidbar 7:9). And because [Dovid] said, "Your statutes were songs for me in the house of my dwelling,"<sup>1</sup> (Tehilim 119:54) he was punished to come to this,<sup>2</sup> and [to have] Uzoh die through his hand. Therefore<sup>3</sup> when they brought [the Ark] from the house of Oveid they brought it by shoulder as it says (Divrei Hayomim I, 15:12), "And he said to them, 'You, the heads of households for the Levites, you and your brothers sanctify yourselves and bring up the Ark... because, the first time you did it not.<sup>4</sup> Hashem, Elokeinu made a breach upon us because we did not consult with Him as was proper'."<sup>5</sup>

[Malbim](#) [JPS](#) [Alshich](#) [Ibn Ezra](#)

(חקים) זמירות, והגם שהייתי גר נרדף  
ממקומי, בכל זה למדתי חקיך בזמירות  
ובשמחה, אף החקים שאין טעמם נודע למדתי  
בשמחה:

[Metzudat David](#) [Malbim](#) [JPS](#) [Alshich](#)

[Ibn Ezra](#)

זמרות. מ"מ בכל המקומות שהייתי גר שם היו  
נחשבים לי חוקך כשיר וזמר ר"ל למדתי  
בשמחת הלב וכדרך המזמר:

[Torah Temimah](#) [Metzudat David](#) [Malbim](#)

[JPS](#) [Alshich](#) [Ibn Ezra](#)

זְמֵרוֹת הָיוּ לִי חֻקֶיךָ: וַיַּחַר לְדוֹד עַל אֲשֶׁר פָּרַץ  
ה' פֶּרֶץ בְּעוֹזָא א"ר אֶלְעָזָר שֶׁנִּשְׁתַּנּוּ פָּנָיו  
כַּחֲרָרָה אֵלֶּא מַעֲתָה כֹּל הֵיכָא דְכָתִיב וַיַּחַר ה'נ  
הֵתָם כְּתִיב אִף הֵכָא לֹא כְּתִיב אִף דְרַשׁ רַבָּא  
מִפְּנֵי מָה נֶעֱנַשׁ דּוֹד מִפְּנֵי שְׁקֵרָא לְדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה  
זְמִירוֹת שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר זְמִירוֹת הָיוּ לִי חֻקֶיךָ בְּבֵית  
מְגוּרֵי אִמֵּר לוֹ הַקְּב"ה ד"ת שְׁכָתוּב בְּהֵן הִתְעִיף  
עֵינֶיךָ בּוֹ וַאֲיַנְּנוּ אֶתָּה קוֹרָא אוֹתָן זְמִירוֹת הַרְיֵנִי  
מִכְשִׁילֶךָ בְּדַבֵּר שְׁאִפִּילוּ תִּינוּקוֹת שֶׁל בֵּית רַבִּין  
יִודְעִין אוֹתוֹ דְּכָתִיב וּלְבָנֵי קָהָת לֹא נָתַן כִּי  
עֲבוֹדַת הַקּוֹדֶשׁ וְגו' (סוֹטָה לָה ע"א)

**RADAK**

מְגוּרֵי. בְּמִקוּמוֹת שֶׁהֵיִתִּי גוֹלָה וּמִתְנַוֵּד בְּהֵם  
תַּחַת הָעֲצָבוֹן שֶׁהִיָּה לִי מִהַרְשָׁעִים בְּזִכְרֵי חֻקֶיךָ  
הָיוּ לִי זְמִירוֹת וְהֵיִתִּי מִשְׁתַּעֲשַׁע בְּהֵם:

Ben Yehoyada on Sotah 35a:13

מִפְּנֵי מָה נֶעְנַשׁ דָּוִד? מִפְּנֵי שֶׁקָּרָא לְדַבְּרֵי  
תּוֹרָה, זְמִירוֹת. קָשָׁא אִיךְ סִלְקָא דַּעֲתִיה  
לְקִרְוֹתָם זְמִירוֹת? וְנִרְאָה לִי בַעֲסַק הַתּוֹרָה יֵשׁ  
שְׁנֵי מִינֵי תוֹעֵלַת הָאֲחַת הוּא שַׁעַל יְדֵי לְמוֹדוֹ  
יָדַע אִיךְ יַעֲבֹד אֶת הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ וְאֵת הַדֶּרֶךְ  
אֲשֶׁר יֵלֶךְ בָּהּ וְאֵת הַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה.  
וְהַשְּׁנִי שַׁעַל יְדֵי עֵסֶק הַתּוֹרָה מְזַמֵּר עֲרִיצִים  
וּמְכַרִּית חוֹחִים וְקוֹצִים הַסּוֹבְבִים שׁוֹשְׁנָה  
הַעֲלִינָה כִּי לְכֵן הַתּוֹרָה נִקְרְאת חֶרֶב דְּכַתִּיב  
רֹמְמוֹת אֵל בְּגֵרוֹנָם וְחָרֵב פִּיפְיוֹת בְּיָדָם (תְּהִלִּים  
קמט, ו) וְדוֹד הַמֶּלֶךְ ע"ה אָמַר זְמִירוֹת הָיוּ לִי  
חֻקִּיךָ (תְּהִלִּים קיט, נד) כּוֹנְנָתוֹ עַל זֶה הַתּוֹעֵלַת.

A difficulty, on what basis did he (reduce) Torah to mere song?

It appears that in the study of Torah there are two purposes. The one that through the (intellectual study) one learns how to worship the divine, how to follow the prescribed spiritual path and what actions need to be taken. Secondly through learning Torah one “prunes the excess foliage” and cuts the thorns and thistles that surround the supernal rose (malchut/Schechina) which is why Torah is called a sword (pruner) as it states (Ps 149:6):

רֹמְמוֹת אֵל בְּגֵרוֹנָם וְחָרֵב פִּיפְיוֹת בְּיָדָם

So, when king David exclaims

“זְמִירוֹת” הָיוּ לִי חֻקִּיךָ--בְּבַיִת מְגוֹרֵי

He is really referring to the second purpose.

The Ben Yehoyada is splitting the spiritual path into the lower purpose , to refine character and show how to live the good life and the second purpose (*litzorech Gavoah*) for the sake of “rescuing the Schechina” by “pruning the foliage” using the metaphor of the sword that cuts the thorns surrounding the rose.

The 13 petalled rose used in the Zohar as the classic metaphor for the Schechina/Knesset Yisroel.

Now let us read the stunning pericope in Sotah 35a:

## Sotah 35a: The Punishment of Forgetting the Law

וכיון שעלה האחרון שבישראל מן הירדן חזרו מים למקומן שנאמר  
(יהושע ד, יח) ויהי בעלות הכהנים נושאי ארון ברית ה' מתוך הירדן  
נתקו כפות רגלי הכהנים אל החרבה וישבו מי הירדן למקומם וילכו  
כתמול שלשום על כל גדותיו

§ The Gemara returns to discuss the entry of the Jewish people into Eretz Yisrael. **And once the last one of the Jewish people ascended out of the Jordan, the water returned to its place, as it is stated:**

יח ויהי בעלות הכהנים  
נושאי ארון ברית-יהוה, מתוך  
הירדן, נתקו כפות רגלי הכהנים, אל  
החרבה; וישבו מי-הירדן למקומם,  
וילכו כתמול-שלשום על-כל-  
גדותיו.

18 And it came to pass, as the priests that bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD came up out of the midst of the Jordan, as soon as the soles of the priests' feet were drawn up unto the dry ground, that the waters of the Jordan returned unto their place, and went over all its banks, as aforetime.

Joshua 4:18

*“And it came to pass, as the priests that bore the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord came up out of the midst of the Jordan, as soon as the soles of the priests' feet were drawn up unto the dry ground, that the waters of the Jordan returned to their place, and went over all its banks, as it had before”*

The Gemara understands that the priests who carried the Ark stood in the water until all the Jewish people passed through the Jordan. Once all the Jewish people had reached the other side of the Jordan, the priests stepped back from the water and the Jordan returned to its natural state.

נמצא ארון ונושאי וכהנים מצד אחד וישראל מצד אחד נשא ארון  
את נושאי ועבר שנאמר (יהושע ד, יא) ויהי כאשר תם כל העם  
לעבור ויעבור ארון ה' והכהנים לפני העם

It follows that **the Ark and its bearers and the priests were on one side** of the Jordan, the east side, **and the rest of the Jewish people were on the other side**, the west side. Subsequently, **the Ark carried its bearers in the air and crossed the Jordan, as it is stated:**

11 And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over, that the ark of the LORD passed on, and the priests, before the people.  
יא ויהי כאשר-תם כל-העם, לעבור; ויעבר ארון-יהוה והכהנים, לפני העם.

Josh 4:11

*“When all the people were completely passed over, the Ark of the Lord passed on, and the priests, before the people”*

ועל דבר זה נענש עוזא שנאמר (דברי הימים א יג, ט) ויבאו עד גורן כידון וישלח עוזא את ידו לאחוז את הארון אמר לו הקב"ה עוזא נושאו נשא עצמו לא כל שכן

And over this matter Uzzah was punished for not taking proper care of the Ark, as it is stated:

9 And when they came unto the threshing-floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the ark; for the oxen stumbled.  
ט ויבאו, עד-גֵרְן כִּידוֹן; וישלח עוזא את-ידו, לאחוז את-הָאָרוֹן--כִּי שָׁמַטוּ, הַבָּקָר.

I Chron 13:9

*“And when they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzzah put forth his hand to hold the Ark; for the oxen stumbled”*

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: Uzzah, the Ark carried its bearers when it crossed the Jordan; all the more so is it not clear that it can carry itself?

(שמואל ב ו, ז) ויחר אף ה' בעוזא ויכהו שם על השל וגו' רבי יוחנן ור"א חד אמר על עסקי שלו וחד אמר שעשה צרכיו בפניו

§ The verse states:

7 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.  
ז ויחר-אף יהוה בעֲזָה, ויכהו שם האֱלֹהִים על-השֵׁל; ויָמַת שָׁם, עִם אָרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים.

II Sam 6:7

*“And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error [hashal]”*

**Rabbi Yoḥanan and Rabbi Elazar** disagreed over the interpretation of this verse. **One says:** God smote him **for his forgetfulness [shalo]**, because he did not remember that the Ark can carry itself. **And one says:** God smote him **because he lifted the edges [shulayyim]** of his garment in front of the Ark and **relieved himself in its presence.**

(שמואל ב ו, ז) וימת שם עם ארון האלהים א"ר יוחנן עוזא בא  
לעוה"ב שנאמר עם ארון האלהים מה ארון לעולם קיים אף עוזא  
בא לעוה"ב

The verse states:

ז ויחר-אף יהוה בעוזה, ויכהו שם  
האלהים על-השל; וימת שם, עם ארון  
האלהים. 7 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah;  
and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by  
the ark of God.

*“And he died there with the Ark of God”*

**Rabbi Yoḥanan says:** Uzzah entered the World-to-Come, as it is stated: *“With the Ark of God.”* Just as the Ark exists forever, so too, Uzzah entered the World-to-Come.

(שמואל ב ו, ח) ויחר לדוד על אשר פרץ ה' פרץ בעוזה א"ר אלעזר  
שנשתנו פניו כחררה

The verse states:

ח ויחר לדוד, על אשר פרץ יהוה פרץ  
בעוזה; ויקרא למקום שהוא, פרץ עוזה,  
עד, היום הנה. 8 And David was displeased, because the LORD had  
broken forth upon Uzzah; and that place was called  
Perez-uzzah, unto this day.

II Sam 6:8

*“And David was displeased [vayyihar] because the Lord had broken forth upon Uzzah”*



**Rabbi Elazar says:** *Vayyihar* means that his face changed colors and darkened like baked bread [*harara*] from displeasure.

דרש רבא מפני מה נענש דוד מפני שקרא לדברי תורה זמירות  
שנאמר (תהלים קיט, נד) זמירות היו לי חוקך בבית מגורי

**Rava taught:** For what reason was David punished with Uzzah's death? He was punished because he called matters of Torah: Songs, as it is stated:

Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."  
...היו-לי חקיה--בבית מגורי זמרות

Ps 119:54

*"Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage"*

אמר לו הקב"ה ד"ת שכתוב בהן (משלי כג, ה) התעף עיניך בו  
ואיננו אתה קורא אותן זמירות הריני מכשילך בדבר שאפילו  
תינוקות של בית רבן יודעין אותו דכתיב (במדבר ז, ט) ולבני קהת  
לא נתן כי עבודת הקודש וגו' ואיהו אתייה בעגלתא

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: Matters of Torah are so difficult and demanding that it is written:

5 Wilt thou set thine eyes upon it? it is gone; {N}  
כי עשה יעשה-לו כנפים; כנשר, ועיף  
התעוף (התעף) עיניך בו, ואיננו:  
התעוף (יעוף) השמים. {P}

Prov 23:5

*"Will you set your eyes upon it? It is gone"* i.e., one whose eyes stray from the Torah even for a moment will forget it, **and you call them songs?**

For this reason, **I will cause you to stumble in a matter that even schoolchildren know**, as it is written with regard to the wagons brought to the Tabernacle:

ט וְלִבְנֵי קֹהַת, לֹא נָתַן: כִּי- 9 But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none, because the service of  
 עֲבַדַּת הַקֹּדֶשׁ עָלֵהֶם, בְּכַתְּפֵי the holy things belonged unto them: they bore them upon their  
 יְשָׂאוּ. shoulders.

**Num 7:9**

*“And to the descendants of Kohath he did not give, because the service of the holy things belongs to them; they carry them upon their shoulders”*

**And** although the Ark clearly must be carried on people’s shoulders, David erred and **brought it in a wagon**.

In this scathing aggadah the *gemorah* critiques King David where he extols the divine in his Psalm (119) by comparing “Chukim” to melodies. (“your Torah is like music to my ears!”)

His punishment is a senile moment where he will forget the basic law of carrying the Ark of the Covenant which every Cheder kid knows by heart...that only the priests may carry it...leading to the tragic events whereby the oxen falter (Kiryat Ye’arim otherwise known today as Telzstone is rocky!) and Uzzah runs to prevent the Ark from falling, triggering the divine rage that kills him.

This ends up causing a huge delay in moving the Ark to Jerusalem.

This negative view of music and melody as a reduction of the status to Torah/Chukim to “mere” melody is not shared by the following Midrash.

**MIDRASH as sympathetic to Zemer**

(שמות יד, כא): וַיִּבְקְעוּ הַמַּיִם. הִגִּיעַ זְמַן שֶׁל שִׁירָה, שֶׁתֵּאמַר, שֶׁנֶּאמַר  
 (שמות טו, א): אִזּוֹ יִשְׁרָאֵל מִשֶּׁהָ, רַבִּי תַנְחוּמָא אָמַר הִגִּיעַ זְמַן שֶׁתַּעֲשׂוּ  
 זְמִירוֹת לְהַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁנֶּאמַר (שמות טו, כ): עֲזִי וְזִמְרַת יְהוָה,  
 זְמִירוֹת יְהוָה. אָמַר רַבִּי בִּיבִי (תהלים קיט, נד): זְמִירוֹת הָיוּ לִי חֻקִּיהָ. וְקוֹל  
 הַתּוֹר נִשְׁמַע בְּאַרְצָנוּ, אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן קוֹל תִּיִּיר טָב נִשְׁמַע בְּאַרְצָנוּ,  
 זֶה מִשֶּׁהָ, בְּשַׁעַת שֶׁאָמַר (שמות יא, ד): וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה כֹּה אָמַר ה'  
 כְּחֻצַּת הַלְיָלָה.

*The time (zeman) has come for song, that it be spoken, as it is said:*

א אִזּוֹ יִשְׁרָאֵל מִשֶּׁהָ וְכֵן יִשְׁרָאֵל אֶת-הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת, לִיהוָה,  
 וַיִּאמְרוּ, {ר} לֵאמֹר: {ס} אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי-נָאָה  
 גָּאָה, {ס} סוּס {ר} וְרִכְבּוֹ רָמָה בַיָּם. {ס}

*I Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spoke, saying: I will sing unto the LORD, for He is highly exalted; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.*

**Ex 15:1**

*"Then Moses sang". Rabbi Tanchuma said: "The time (zeman) has come that hymns (zemirot) be made for the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said:*

ב עֲזֵי וְזִמְרַת יְהוָה, וַיְהִי-לִי {ר} לִישׁוּעָה; {ס} זֶה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאֵלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאֵלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאֵלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. {ס} 2 *The LORD is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation; this is my God, and I will glorify Him; my father's God, and I will exalt Him.*

**Ex 15:2**

*"My strength and might (zimrat) is Yah (Exodus 15:2)", the hymns (zemirot) of Yah. Rabbi Bivei said:*

נִדְּמָרוֹת, הֵיוּ-לִי חֻקֹּת -- בְּבֵית מִגְדָּוִי. 54 *Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.*

**Ps 119:54**

*"Your laws are a source of strength (zemirot) to me" The song of the turtledove (hattor) is heard in our land": Rabbi Yochanan said: "The voice of the good explorer (tayayr) is heard in our land: this is Moses, when he said: "Moses said, "Thus says Hashem: Toward midnight (Exodus 11:4)".*

יב הַנְּצַנִּים נִרְאוּ בְּאֶרֶץ, עֵת הַנְּמִיר הַגִּיעַ; וְקוֹל הַתּוֹר, נִשְׁמַע בְּאֶרֶץ-נוֹ. 12 *The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;*

**Cant Rabba 2:12**

**The Sefer Ha-Chinukh summarizes the positions of the Rambam and the Ramban as follows:**

*The mitzva of bearing the ark on the shoulder: That we were commanded that the priests should bear the ark on their shoulders, when Israel transports it from place to place, as it is stated (Bamidbar 7:9): "Because the service of the sanctuary belonged to them; they bore it on their shoulders." And the Rambam wrote: Even though this mitzva was addressed to the Levites, it was at that time, that is to say, in the wilderness, owing to the small number of priests in those days. But in later generations, the priests are obligated in this mitzva and they must bear it, as is explained in the book of Yehoshua (3:6) and in the book of Shmuel.*

And the Ramban z"l wrote [in his strictures to the third principle]:

*That which the Master said that the commandment was given over to the priests is not true. Heaven forbid that we should say that any commandment in the Torah should change, so that the Levites should be forever disqualified from carrying the ark. And he explained the matter well. And the Levites bore it during the days of David, as it is stated (I Divrei Ha-Yamim 15:26): "When God helped the Levites who bore the ark of*

*the covenant of the Lord." And it is written (ibid. v. 27): "And all the Levites who bore the ark."*

*But the truth is that all the priests and the Levites are fit to carry the ark by Torah law, as they are all called Levites, as it is written (Yechezkel 45:15), "The priests the Levites." And it is also written (I Divrei Ha-Yamim 15:14-15): "So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bore the ark of God upon their shoulders the bars being upon them, as Moshe had commanded according to the word of the Lord."*

*And they said in Sifrei: "Where did he command? 'But to the sons of Kehat he gave none.' Because they are all called the sons of Kehat." And he wrote further, that which the Rambam z"l said that this is explained in the books of Yehoshua and Shmuel, he did not find this explanation. Rather, he found the opposite, for it says there (Yehoshua 3:3): "And they commanded the people, saying, 'When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests and the Levites bearing it.'" But the truth is as we said that the entire tribe is fit to bear the ark. And furthermore the matter is spelled out in tractate Sotah (33b), as the Sages said: "How did Israel cross the Jordan?... On ordinary days the Levites carried the ark, but on this day the priests carried it alone." As it is written (Yehoshua 6:6): "And Yehoshua spoke to the priests saying, Take up the ark of the covenant," so that the miracle should be performed through the priests who are the Holy of Holies in the tribe.*

It seems that what the Rambam z"l said that it is explained in Yehoshua, is referring to this verse, but it is not at all a necessary explanation, as we have explained.

*It seems that the correct view is in accordance with the words of the Ramban z"l that the entire tribe is fit to carry the ark. And that which it says:*

ג וַיֹּאמֶר לְלוּיִם הַמְּבֹנִיִּים (הַמְּבִינִים) לְכָל-  
יִשְׂרָאֵל הַקְּדוֹשִׁים לַיהוָה, תָּנוּ אֶת-אֲרוֹן-  
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּבֵית אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה שְׁלֹמֹה בֶן-דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ  
יִשְׂרָאֵל--אִין-לְכֶם מִשָּׂא, בְּקַתְּפָ; עַתָּה,  
עֲבֹדוּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, וְאֵת, עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

3 And he said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, that were holy unto the LORD: 'Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; there shall no more be a burden upon your shoulders; now serve the LORD your God, and His people Israel.

## II Chron 35:3

*"And he said to the Levites... Put the holy ark in the house which Shlomo the son of David king of Israel did build; you need no longer carry it upon your shoulders,"*

*this means that Israel would no longer have to carry the ark from place to place. But it does not mean that if they would have to carry it, the Levites would not carry it. This is clear and evident to all. And that which the Sages said (Chullin 24a), "Blemishes disqualify priests, but years do not disqualify priests," they only said this about the*

*priestly service, that years do not disqualify from that service. But as for the service of carrying, even priests are disqualified by years, like the Levites.*

The root of the *mitzva* is that the essence of the glory of Israel is the Torah through which they were distinguished from the other nations, and they were made God's portion. **Therefore, it is fitting and proper that it should be carried on the shoulders of the most distinguished and sanctified people among us.** There is no need to go on at length about a matter that is obvious to school children.

## **Torah as Shira**

More perplexing is that Torah itself is called “*shira*”. In parshas Haazinu the verse says “כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת” . Hazal tell us that this verse refers to the writing of a Sefer Torah. Why does the Torah call a Sefer Torah a song?

**Yaavetz in Pirkei Avos suggests that our singing of Torah calms the divine rage evoking forgiveness no matter what the crime we committed:**

He cites the Midrash Eichah which states that during the period of the 1<sup>st</sup> Beis HaMikdash, Hashem was able to tolerate the Jews doing terrible sins such as idol worship, forbidden sexual relations, and murder.

However, he could not forget/forgive Bitul Torah. The Yaavetz asks why. Is Bitul Torah really worse than killing somebody?

To answer, the Yaavetz brings a parable of a king who had a servant. One day, the servant was negligent in preparing the food of the king. For such a transgression, the punishment should have been death. However, the king pardoned the servant because the servant also played music for the king when he was sad. **The king said that as long as his servant played music for him, he didn't have the heart to kill him.**

Explains the Yaavetz, the same is true with us. Even when we do horrible sins that should warrant our destruction, as long as we continue learning the Torah, Hashem still has affection for us. Learning Torah is so dear to Hashem that even when everything else seems to be going wrong, when Hashem hears us learning He renews His love for us *as if He heard us singing shira to Him. In Hashem's eyes, a Jew's Torah is shira.*



סוטה דהע"ה נענש על שאמר זמירות היו לי חקיך בבית מגורי.  
 אע"ג דכל התורה איקרי שירה. דע שירה לחוד וזמירות לחוד כי  
 שירה איננו הנגון שמנגנין אלא מאמר או כתוב מסודר כשורה  
 ושורת הבנין ע"ד שאמרו כל השירות לבינה ע"ג לבינה וכו' שהוא  
 סידור כשורת הבנין ועכשיו נהגו לסדר בחרוזין הידועים והנביאים  
 היה להם סידור אשר לא נודע לנו כוונתם וענינם מ"מ שירה הוא  
 הסידור הנערך בערך ידוע ואח"כ מנגנים אותו בנגונים הנאותים  
 לזה. והנה פרשה בתורה המסודרת ובנוי שירות ידועים כגון שירת  
 הים והאזינו וכדומה נקרא שירה. וכל התורה בכלל המסודרות  
 ובנוי חמשה ספרים זה אחר זה נקרא שירה אבל חומש א' לא  
 נקרא שירה. ואמנם דהע"ה נענש על שאמר זמירות הי' לי חוקיך  
 בבית מגורי ואלו היה אומר שירה לא היה לו עונש בכך. ולפי

*“Know” that there is a difference between shira and zemer. For “shira” means the musical score on a sheet as we are told “all chanting/cantillations in the written sefer torah scroll are modelled of one brick upon another or one brick alternatively laid upon 2 bricks.” Just like the layers and rows of bricks making the side of a building. Nowadays we are accustomed to arrange music according to conventional rules just like historically the Levites had their own musical convention which remain a mystery to us as to their rules and harmonies. Nevertheless, Shira*

represents the score (or theory and harmony) upon which is known following which, the music is actually played following the musical staff prepared for it.

Now those sections of Torah that are constructed for song like Shirat Hayam and Ha'azinu is called "Shira". And even the entire Torah itself, ordered and built like five scrolls, one after the other is called a Shira, however only one scroll isn't called Shira.

(The Chasam Sofer refers to the integrity of Torah as a kind of metaphor for song only when it remains in its organic unity of 5 seforim, fragmenting one fractures the whole and is not considered song).

Now David was punished for calling Torah a zemer, for had he called it a shira he would not have been punished.



**The Gaon** answers that there exists a tremendous difference between "Zemirah" and "Shirah".

Zemirah, like the Zemiros of Shabbos, are finite. They have a beginning and end. [*Kah Ribbon (a Sabbath song) starts with a Yud, it ends with a Lamed -- and it's over. All Zemiros are similar.*]

Shirah represents the infinite. Shirah represents the articulation and expression of feelings, which have no end and no beginning.

When a person breaks out in Shirah, it is a manifestation of what his essence is all about. There is no end to that. It is not finite. However, Torah can be called Shirah, but Torah cannot be called Zimra.

To refer to Torah as Zimra has the connotation that there can be a beginning to Torah and an end to Torah and then I would be finished with Torah.

That is untrue. Torah can't be finished. Torah is Shirah -- the infinite expression of what a Jew is all about, his innermost essence. That was King David's sin.

**R. Samson of Sens** explains in his commentary to Ahilot (16:4) that in context of this Midrash, "song" refers to a mere metaphor:

ואף על גב דאיענש דוד על שקרא לדברי תורה זמירות ר"ע משל בעלמא

The Possuk say “וירכיבו את ארון ה על עגלה חדשה” that David drove the ark of Hashem on a new wagon (6:3). Chazal teach us that since David said in Tehillim “זמירות היו לי חוקיך” (Your laws (the Torah) were like songs to me)”, he was punished for forgetting the mitzvah that the Aron must be carried on one’s shoulders, and he transported it on a wagon which caused devastation.

The Avnei Ezel asks an obvious question on this: what is the connection between the mitzvah of בכתף ישאו (that the Aron should be carried on one’s shoulders) and what David said in Tehillim. Furthermore, how is this punishment equated as measure-for-measure?

He answers that the real way to experience and live Torah, is through true toil and effort; as Chazal say “*the Torah only exists in someone who (metaphorically) kills himself for it*”. He adds that Torah and Mitzvos which are performed with laxity and insufficient effort are not adequately fulfilled. Therefore, one must bear the weight of the Aron (the Torah) on their shoulders and not just carry it through less difficult means.

David called the Torah “זמירות” to represent his joy over it. However, this joy and elation also denotes effortlessness and ease. Consequently, Hashem caused him to forget this effort, in the mitzvah of בכתף ישאו.

This teaches us a valuable lesson. We must always toil and invest effort into that which we do and not try to avoid effort. As we learn in Pirkei Avos, ‘לפום צערא אגרא’ (loosely meaning: the gain is in accordance with the pain).





## The Torah is a Shirah

*I could define poetry this way: it is that which is lost ... in translation.*

**Robert Frost <1>**

**Rav Uri Cohen** writes:<sup>1</sup>

When Hashem tells Moshe to “write this song (*shirah*) for yourselves” in Parashat Vayelekh (*Devarim* 31:19), the *pshat* is that it’s referring to the song that comes next – Haazinu. And yet, the *halakhah* says that it’s referring to the entire Torah, and that this is actually the last of the #613 *mitzvot* – write a *sefer torah*. <2>

In other words, the Torah refers to itself as a *shirah*. What are the implications?

For starters, we should clarify the meaning of *shirah*. In modern Hebrew, there’s a distinction between *shir*, which means a song, and *shirah*, which means a poem. Nevertheless, in Tanakh there is no such distinction. <3> This explains why some commentaries think the Torah is a poem, and some think it’s a song. Let’s explore these two metaphors.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://harova.org/torah/view.asp?id=1943>

## THE TORAH IS A POEM

The first approach is that the Torah is a poem. The one who most famously discusses this is the Netziv (the Rosh Yeshiva of the Yeshiva of Volozhyn), in the introduction to *Haamek Davar*, his commentary on the Chumash. The contemporary rabbi who translated this selection calls it “one of the most beautiful pieces on Torah, and on poetry, that I have ever read.” Here it is:

*We still have to understand how the whole Torah could be called a poem! Surely it is not written in the language of poetry. Rather, the answer is that Torah has in it the nature and the richness of poetry.*

*A. (The Nature) – For the Torah speaks in a fragmented language. And it is well-known to anyone who has studied that this language of fragments is very different from the language of prose. In a poem, the idea is not fully explained, the way it is in prose. So, one has to make notes on the margins, to say that one rhyme means this, and another rhyme means that. And that is not just creative interpretation. That is simply the nature of poetry, even the most basic poetry. And it is further understood that one who deeply studies an idea expressed in this poetic form becomes connected to it. The illuminating language of the poem and its unique grammar is far sweeter to him than to one who simply comes to read it quickly and extract the main idea...*

*This is the nature of the whole Torah as well, whose stories are not fully explained. Rather, one has to make insights and explanations based on the intricacies of the language. And this is not just creative interpretation (drush). On the contrary, this is the most basic way (pshat) to understand the verses...*

*B. (The Richness) – In poetry, there is a richness that comes from its having been adorned with all kinds of hints, in a way that isn't done with prose. [Examples are] the custom of using the first letter in each line to spell out the alphabet, or to write out the poet's name. There is a richness that is [unique] to this fragmented language and not to prose. And it is well-known that in order to achieve this level of richness, the poet is often forced to bend the language so that the beginning letters end up being the ones he is seeking.*

So, it is exactly with the whole of the Torah, all of it. Aside from the most basic, simple reading, there are in every word many secrets and hidden ideas. Because of this, there are many instances when the language of the Torah is not to be read literally. And all this is not [just] true for the Holy [Chumash] alone, but with all [of Tanach]. <4>

In other words, the Netziv thinks that what typifies poetry in general and the Torah in particular is its intricate language and complexity, both of which leave it open to many interpretations.

Rabbi Dr. Aviad Stollman, Head of Collections at the National Library of Israel, extends this idea:

*[T]he laws and ordinances of the Holy One, blessed be He, were given to us deliberately in poetic style because the essence of the poetic approach, more so than any other style, made it possible to embed and conceal new and special ways of interpretation, which we can discover only by toiling over the Torah. Although today we hardly [ever] come up with new interpretations of Scripture, writing Torah novellae (chiddushim) on the Talmud is for us the principal way in which we perform the commandment to “write down this poem,” for it enables us to participate in the literary-interpretive dialogue of the Torah.<5>*

According to this first approach, the Torah is misunderstood if it is read as prose – in fact, it is poetry. <6> In the words of Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, the official rabbi of the Kotel: “Whoever tries to read poetry as prose will err and misconstrue the intent of the poet, and so it is with reading the Torah. The Torah cannot be read as though it were a dry narrative that stands on its own. Rather, one must . . . discern its style with the help of the Oral Torah and tradition. Only in this way can one comprehend and connect to the depth of its intent.” <7>

## THE TORAH IS A SONG

The second approach is that the Torah is a song. We can say that Hashem composed the Torah as a musical score and used it to sing the world into existence. <8> We already have metaphors describing Hashem’s role in creation as speaker, <9> architect, <10> and artist. <11> Singer can be added to this illustrious list as well. <12>

Rav Charlop, one of the main students of Rav Kook, all but says this. In his opinion, the world is one big song, and every part of the world is a note in it. Since God “looked into the Torah and then created the world,” <10> the Torah is a song as well. When the *halakhah* says that a *sefer torah* is *pasul* (invalid) if it’s missing even one letter, <13> that’s because it is like a song with a note missing (even though only someone who knows the song really well would notice). When we keep the *mitzvot*, we are playing the notes of the song. That’s why it’s vital to get every last detail right in *mitzvah* fulfillment – so the song is played right. <14>

Torah is compared to a song in other ways as well. For example, Rav Herzog, the first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, says that just as everyone at any age can appreciate a good piece of music, so too everyone at any age can have an appreciation for Torah. <15> The *Arukh HaShulchan* uses the song metaphor to present a Torah pluralism:

*In every [Torah] debate – whether between Tannaim, Amoraim, Geonim, or Poskim – in truth, one who properly understands [will see] that they are the words of the Living God, and all of them reflect some aspect of halakhah. On the contrary, this is the glory of our holy and pure Torah. The entire Torah is called “shirah,” and the glory of a song is expressed when the kolot (voices or sounds) are different from each other – the beauty of it is in [the harmony]. A swimmer in the sea of Talmud will appreciate the beauty of all the different kolot – each and every one of them. <16>*

Rabbi Rabinowitz cites the *Arukh HaShulchan* and concludes: “When a person writes a Torah for himself, he studies it again and again, delving into it, examining and comparing, and then he can add his understanding to the same symphony of different notes, notes that unite to create that amazing creation – the Song of the Torah.” <17>

Finally, the Torah is a song in the sense that emotion is (or should be) a vital part of it. Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook gave a *sichah* (talk) in which he said:

*The whole Torah is a song. The whole Gemara and the whole Shulchan Arukh are a song, which reveals their flow of Godly life. My father [Rav Kook], of blessed memory, came up with a proverb: “Just as yesh chukim le-shirah (there are rules for composing a poem), so too yesh shirah be-chukim (there is singing in the rules).” Since the Torah is a song, [it’s appropriate that] we learn Torah with a niggun (tune). [In the words of Tehillim 35:10:] “My whole being will exclaim, ‘Who is like you, God?’” [Furthermore, the machzor includes the words:] “Hachayot yeshoreru (the angels sing)” – and we sing with them. <18>*

According to this second approach, the Torah is misunderstood if it is read as plain lyrics (or poetry) – in fact, it is a song with its own music. In the words of Rav Kook, “Many of the deep aspects [of the Torah] cannot be understood unless one is properly prepared emotionally. This is why the Torah is called a song.” <19>

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks elaborates beautifully:

*And why call the Torah a song? Because if we are to hand on our faith and way of life to the next generation, it must sing. Torah must be affective, not just cognitive. It must speak to our emotions. As Antonio Damasio showed empirically in Descartes’ Error, though the reasoning part of the brain is central to what makes us human, it is the limbic system, the seat of the emotions, that leads us to choose this way, not that. If our Torah lacks passion, we will not succeed in passing it on to the future. Music is the affective dimension of communication, the medium through which we express, evoke and share emotion. Precisely*

*because we are creatures of emotion, music is an essential part of the vocabulary of mankind. . .*

Song is central to the Judaic experience. We do not pray; we *daven*, meaning we sing the words we direct toward heaven. Nor do we read the Torah. Instead, we chant it, each word with its own cantillation. Even rabbinical texts are never merely studies; we chant them with the singsong known to all students of Talmud. Each time and text have its specific melodies. The same prayer may be sung to half-a-dozen different tunes, depending on whether it is part of the morning, afternoon or evening service, and whether the day is a weekday, a Sabbath, a festival, or one of the High Holy Days. There are different cantillations for biblical readings, depending on whether the text comes from Torah, the Prophets, or the Ketuvim (“the Writings”). Music is the map of the Jewish spirit, and each spiritual experience has its own distinctive melodic landscape.

Judaism is a religion of words, and yet whenever the language of Judaism aspires to the spiritual it modulates into song, as if the words themselves sought escape from the gravitational pull of finite meanings. Music speaks to something deeper than the mind. If we are to make Torah new in every generation, we have to find ways of singing its song a new way. The words never change, but the music does. <20>

In conclusion, when we refer to the Torah as a *shirah*, we mean that it is both poem and song. Its texts are intricate and demand interpretation, and at the same time they are uplifting and inspiring. In this way, the Torah lets us teach the world to sing in perfect harmony. <21>

## NOTES

1. Robert Frost, *Conversations on the Craft of Poetry* (1959). The complete quote is: “I could define poetry this way: it is that which is lost out of both prose and verse in translation.”
2. Rambam, *Hilkhos Tefillin, Mezuzah, VeSefer Torah* 7:1.
3. Rabbi Dr. Ron S. Kleinman, “Al HaTorah Ke’Shirah’,” Bar Ilan’s Daf Parashat Hashavua, Simchat Torah (undated). <http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/simchat1.html> It was also published in *MiPeirot Hallan: Al Parashat HaShavua* (Bar Ilan Press, 1998), pp. 597-599.

4. Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (the Netziv), *Haamek Davar*, Kidmat HaEmek (introduction), #3. Translated in Rabbi David Kasher, “The Poetry of Torah – Parshat Ha’azinu.” <http://parshanut.com/post/98312914296/the-poetry-of-torah-parshat-haazinu> (I modified the translation slightly, using parenthesis and brackets.)
5. Rabbi Dr. Aviad Stollman, “‘Your Laws are Songs for Me’ (Ps. 119:54),” Bar Ilan’s Daf Parashat Hashavua, Haazinu 2006. <http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/haazinu/sto.html>
6. Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, *Shmonah Kvatzim* 3:308.
7. Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, “Parashat Vayelech: The Song of the Torah,” *The Jerusalem Post Magazine*, October 7, 2016, p. 42. <http://www.jpost.com/Not-Just-News/Parashat-Vayelech-The-Song-of-the-Torah-469560>
8. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (1977), the first section: “Ainulindalë: The Music of the Ainur.” [http://www.ae-lib.org.ua/texts-c/tolkien\\_the\\_silmarillion\\_en.htm#ainulindale](http://www.ae-lib.org.ua/texts-c/tolkien_the_silmarillion_en.htm#ainulindale)
9. “With ten statements, the world was created” (*Pirkei Avot* 5:1).
10. “When the Holy One, blessed be He created the world, He looked into the Torah and then created the world” (*Zohar, Terumah* 168a).
11. “There’s no artist (*tzayar*) like our God” (*Megillah* 14a). See my Vayakhel 5771 article, “Hashem is the Ultimate Artist.” <http://harova.org/torah/view.asp?id=1438>
12. This is how Ezra Klinghoffer phrased it in his Bar Mitzvah speech, September 21, 2014 (<http://www.michaelmedved.com/column/guest-blog-ezra-klinghoffer/>): “The Midrash says that God in creating the world looked in the Torah – as an architect in building a house would look in his blueprints. God is an architect. But I think He’s also a singer. A beautiful image is suggested by my favorite fantasy author, J.R.R. Tolkien. In his book *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien tells the history of his mythical world, Middle Earth, before the events of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, going back to a creation story. In the beginning, writes Tolkien, the One God taught song to his angelic beings, the Ainur, who sang before him just as we know angels do before the God of Israel. In this way, as Tolkien tells it, God used song to create his world. Is it going too far to say our God, Hashem, not only spoke but, using the Torah as His instrument and His song, sang the world into existence?”
13. Rambam, *Ibid.* 7:11.
14. Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlop, *Mei Marom*, Vol. 13: *Al Siddur HaTefillah* (Jerusalem: Beit Zvul, 5758), p. 178. Based on this, one contemporary author argues that we should look at Judaism less as a religion and more as a song. See Rabbi Yonatan Milo, “HaTorah – Shirah VeTavim,” *M’at Min HaOr* #565 (Nitzavim-Vayelekh 5770), p. 12. [http://www.tora.co.il/parasha/meat/nizavim\\_vayelech\\_70.doc](http://www.tora.co.il/parasha/meat/nizavim_vayelech_70.doc)

15. Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog, as cited by Rabbi Yissocher Frand, “Rav Herzog on the Comparison of Torah to a Song,” June 7, 2002. <http://torah.org/torah-portion/ravfrand-5760-haazinu/>
16. Rabbi Yechiel Mikhel Epstein, *Arukh HaShulchan*, introduction (published at the beginning of Vol. 1 of Choshen Mishpat). Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (see below) paraphrases this elegantly: “Rabbi Yehiel Michael Epstein in the introduction to the *Arukh ha-Shulchan*, *Choshen Mishpat*, writes that the Torah is compared to a song because, to those who appreciate music, the most beautiful choral sound is a complex harmony with many different voices singing different notes. So, he says, it is with the Torah and its myriad commentaries, its ‘seventy faces.’ Judaism is a choral symphony scored for many voices, the written text its melody, the oral tradition its polyphony.”
17. Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, “Parshat Vayelech: Singing the Torah,” *The Jerusalem Post*, September 18, 2015, p. 23. <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Parshat-Vayelech-Singing-the-Torah-416485>
18. Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook, *Sichot HaRav Zvi Yehudah – Devarim* (Jerusalem, 5765), p. 522.
19. Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, *Igrot HaRaYah* 1:89 (p. 94). Compare the formulation of Rabbi Sacks: “The Torah is God’s libretto, and we, the Jewish people, are His choir. Collectively we have sung God’s song. We are the performers of His choral symphony.”
20. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, “Torah as Song (Vayelech 5775),” September 16, 2015. <http://www.rabbisacks.org/torah-as-song-vayelech-5775/>
21. The reference is not to the jingle in the 1971 Coca-Cola commercial, but to the subsequent full-length single by The New Seekers entitled “I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing (In Perfect Harmony).”



## CALLING DIVREI TORAH "ZEMIROIS"

**Rav Mordechai Kornfeld** writes:<sup>2</sup>

David ha'Melech was punished for calling Divrei Torah "Zemiros," songs (Tehilim 119:54). Hashem said to him, "Divrei Torah can be forgotten in the blink of an eye (Mishlei 23:5), and you are calling them 'Zemiros' (that are treated lightly, without concentration)!" Hashem caused him to forget an explicit verse as punishment for treating Divrei Torah like Zemiros.

This statement seems to contradict the Gemara in Eruvin (18b) which teaches that every home in which Divrei Torah are heard at night will not be destroyed. The Gemara derives this from the verse, "He does not say, 'Where is Hashem, my Maker, Who gives songs in the night'" (Iyov 35:10). "Songs" refer to Divrei Torah, and the verse means, "Whoever learns Torah during the night will not have to ask, 'Where is Hashem [Who could have saved my house from being destroyed]?" Why does the Gemara there call Divrei Torah "songs" if one is prohibited to treat Divrei Torah like Zemiros?

Divrei Torah are compared to songs in other places as well. The Gemara in Megilah (32a) teaches that one should sing the words of Torah that he learns, and that it is improper for one to learn Torah without a melody ("ha'Shoneh b'Lo Zimrah").

Similarly, the Gemara in Sanhedrin (99b) quotes Rabbi Akiva who teaches, "Zamer b'Chol Yom." **RASHI** there explains that this means that a person should constantly review what he has learned, like one who sings a song repetitively. (See also Chagigah 12b, Nedarim 38a, Eruvin 21b (on the verse "Shiro Chamishah v'Elef," Melachim I 5:12), and Chulin 133a (on the verse "Shar b'Shirim Al Lev Ra," Mishlei 25:20).

How can the Gemara in all of these places refer to Divrei Torah as "songs" when the Gemara here in Sotah explicitly says that one is prohibited to do so?

The **MAHARSHA** in Eruvin (18b) answers that the verse cited there refers to one who learns Torah during the quiet of the night, when he can be heard from a distance (see Rashi there). In this regard, Divrei Torah learned at night may be compared to Zemiros since they can be heard from a distance, just as Zemiros can be heard from a distance. In contrast, Torah learned during the day should not be compared to Zemiros. (Similarly, the Gemara in Chagigah 12b refers only to Torah learned at night. However, the Gemara in Nedarim refers to the Torah in general when it calls it a "Shirah," and not only to Torah learned at night.)

David ha'Melech was criticized for calling Divrei Torah "Zemiros," because calling the Torah "song" implies that the Torah flows easily from the lips without concentration and constant effort. In order to truly acquire Divrei Torah, a person must put great effort into learning Torah.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dafyomi.co.il/Sotahh/insites/so-dt-035.htm>



The criticism of David ha'Melech is appropriate with regard to one who learns Torah Lishmah. For one who does not learn Torah Lishmah, but merely in order to reach a particular goal, the Torah indeed is comparable to "Zemiros" and it does not become a part of the person.

The Gemara in Eruvin may mean that even Torah which is learned at night in order that it be heard from a distance (to acquire honor) also protects one's home from harm. The Gemara in Chagigah, which says that a person who learns Divrei Torah at night merits to have a "Chut Shel Chesed" during the day, may refer to a person who learns Torah even she'Lo Lishmah. (See the Gemara earlier in Sotah (21a) which says that even Torah she'Lo Lishmah protects a person from suffering, both in Olam ha'Zeh and in Olam ha'Ba, and see Insights there.)

The Gemara in Nedarim discusses the verse (Devarim 31:19) in which Hashem commands Moshe Rabeinu to teach the "Shirah," the Torah, to the Jewish people so that the Torah they learn will be testimony for them that they will be punished if they transgress the Torah. The Gemara there may also refer to learning Torah she'Lo Lishmah, learning Torah in order to receive reward and avoid punishment. David ha'Melech, who found in the joy of learning Torah comfort during times of suffering (see Rashi), learned Torah Lishmah, and therefore he should not have described his Divrei Torah as "Zemiros."

Alternatively, perhaps one is permitted to refer to Divrei Torah as "songs" with regard to *reviewing* what one has already learned. Review involves merely saying over the Divrei Torah repetitively without great concentration. In contrast, Torah that is learned in-depth with deep concentration may not be referred to as "songs."

Rebbi Akiva in Sanhedrin exhorts a person to *review* his studies constantly, with Zemer (Rashi DH Zamer). The Gemara in Megilah is also describing a person who reviews his learning ("ha'Shoneh"). Similarly, the Gemara in Eruvin that discusses learning at night refers to a person who *reviews* at night that which he learned during the day. Since it is more difficult to concentrate at night (see Sanhedrin 34b, regarding the law that Beis Din convenes only during the daytime), the night is normally designated for reviewing what one learned during the day. When David ha'Melech was criticized for referring to Torah as "Zemiros," it was because of his statement that *in-depth study* of the Torah provided him with solace during his times of exile, like songs that provide solace. Since he was referring to in-depth study, he should not have referred to the Torah as "Zemiros." (-Based on teachings heard from ha'Ga'on Rav Moshe Shapiro, shlit'a.)

However, the other places which refer to Torah as "song" (Nedarim 38a, Chagigah 12b, Chulin 133a) do not seem to refer specifically to the act of reviewing that which one has learned. They seem to be calling the Torah itself "Shirah."

The **DIVREI SHALOM** (5:62, see also 5:63-67) suggests, based on the words of the **MAHARAL** (Sanhedrin 101a), that although calling the Torah a "Zimrah" is disrespectful, calling the Torah a "Shirah" is not. A Zimrah is a lighthearted tune, such as the tune a person hums to himself when he is in a merry mood. A Shirah, though, refers to a musical composition which requires great talent and concentration to compose or perform. Referring to the Torah as "Zimrah" is disrespectful and misleading as it implies that it is not necessary to concentrate on Torah.

This approach, however, does not answer the question from the Gemara in Eruvin which says that the verse, "... Who gives *Zemiros* at night," refers to a person who learns Torah at night. Perhaps a simple answer may be suggested to explain why it is acceptable to refer to Divrei Torah as "Zemiros" in this

context. The verse in Iyov does not refer to the Torah itself as Zemiros, but rather it refers to the *person* who learns Torah as *one who sings* Zemiros (consistent with the way that one is supposed to learn Torah, according to the Gemara in Megilah 32a). It is inappropriate only to refer to the Torah itself as "Zemiros," but not to the person who learns Torah as "one who sings."

**Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein** writes:<sup>3</sup>

The American historian Cyrus Gordon (1908-2001) wrote,

**“Our contemporaries have split the atom, reached the moon, and brought color TV to the common man. The ancients... were not less talented than today’s population, but they often expressed their intelligence in different ways. They manipulated language so deftly that it often takes the modern scholars a long time to grasp the presence, let alone all the subtleties, of ancient riddles.”**

One poignant example of such ancient nuances in language is the existence of two Hebrew terms for “song”: *shir/shirah* and *zemer/zimrah*. In this essay we will explore the differences between this pair of synonyms, and, in doing so we too will become attuned to the intricacies of the Hebrew language.

The simplest way of differentiating between *shirah* and *zimrah* is that *shirah* denotes verbal song, while *zimrah* refers to instrumental music.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the Yiddish word *klezmer* (roughly, “Jewish Music”) is actually a portmanteau of *klei* (“instruments”) and *zemer* (“music”).

The Malbim explains that *zimrah* (plural: *zmirot*) is somehow a higher, more intense form of song than *shirah*. He writes that this is why whenever the two terms appear in tandem, *shirah* is always first and *zemer* is always second.

In what is possibly a separate explanation, the Malbim writes that *shirah* is a more general term which can refer to “song” both in a religious sense and in a secular sense, while *zimrah* refers specifically to a religious song which speaks of God’s praises.

Similarly, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Edel (1760-1828) writes that *shirah* is simply an expression of one’s happiness without necessarily tying it back to the source of the happiness (i.e. God), while *zimrah* is always a means of acknowledging God’s role in bringing happiness and thanking Him for it.

Similarly, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) explains that *shir* refers to the lyrics of poetic verse sans the tune, while *zimrah* refers to the tune or melody sung in a song or played by a music instrument.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/an-expression-of-song/>

<sup>4</sup> This understanding is proffered by a bevy of authorities, including Ibn Ezra (to Ps. 105:2), Radak (to I Chron. 16:9), Sforno (to Ps. 105:2), the Vilna Gaon (cited in his son’s *Be’er Avraham* to Ps. 27:6), Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ps. 33:2), and Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer.

## The Song of Torah

Chanan Morrison writes:<sup>5</sup>

Near the end of his life, Moses commanded the people:

יט ועתה, כתבו לכם את-השירה הזאת, ולמדה את-בני-ישראל, שימה בפיהם: למען תהיה-לי השירה הזאת, לעד--בבני ישראל. **19** Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach thou it the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel.

**Deut 31:19**

***“Now write for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites”***

This verse is the source-text for the obligation of each Jew to write a Torah scroll.<sup>1</sup>

But why did Moses refer to the Torah as a 'song'? In what way should we relate to the Torah as song?

### Studying *Mussar*

A young scholar once wrote Rav Kook a letter probing certain philosophical issues, raising difficult questions that troubled him. Rav Kook was delighted to see the young scholar immerse his talents analyzing the philosophical aspects of Torah, unlike most Torah scholars who dedicate themselves solely to the study of Talmud and practical Halachah. Exploring abstract philosophical issues, Rav Kook stressed, is especially important in our times.

Nonetheless, Rav Kook urged the scholar to approach this field only after a prerequisite study of *mussar* texts.

***“You should first acquire expertise in all moralistic tracts that you come across, starting with the easier texts. Great scholars, wise-hearted and exceptionally pious, wrote this literature from the heart. Many subjects of inquiry cannot be fully grasped until one’s emotions have been properly prepared.”***

In other words, it is important to precede the analysis of Torah philosophy with the study of simpler texts that clarify the unique holiness of Torah. What is the function of this preparatory study? By studying *mussar*, we gain a proper appreciation and reverence for the subject at hand. Only after this emotional preparation are we ready to delve into an intellectual analysis of Torah thought.

### Engaging the Emotions

It is for this reason, Rav Kook explained, the Torah is called a 'song.' Just as the beauty of song stirs the heart, so too, the special power of *mussar* literature lies in its ability to awaken our inner

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<sup>5</sup> Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Igrot HaRe'iyah* vol. I, p. 94, [http://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYELECH\\_66.htm](http://www.ravkooktorah.org/VAYELECH_66.htm)

sensitivity to the divine nature of Torah. This emotive preparation is essential, as only the pure of heart are successful in penetrating the philosophical foundations of the Torah.

While ethical works do not engage the intellect to a high degree, they nonetheless enable the soul to recognize the Torah's inner foundations. Of course, one should not be content with reading moralistic literature, but should continue with in-depth, analytical study of the Torah and its worldview.

<sup>1</sup> *Sanhedrin* 21b. However, the *Shulchan Aruch* quotes the opinion of Rabbeinu Asher (the *Rosh*) that “Nowadays it is a mitzvah to write books of the Pentateuch, Mishnah, Talmud, and their commentaries,” since we no longer study directly from Torah scrolls.

**Strong's H2167 זמר** *zamar*; a primitive root meaning, “to sing praise.” The 3-letter root is *zayin* + *mem* + *resh*, however, the *Ancient Hebrew Lexicon* indicates the *mem* was originally a *nun*, being transposed over time because of their similar sounds. Thus the original 3-letter root was *zayin* + *nun* + *resh*.

*zayin* ז = the mattock, thus tool, food, cut, nourish

*nun* נ = the seed, thus continue, heir, son

*resh* ר = the head of man, thus head, first, top, beginning, man

The story: To **pluck** (*zayin*) that which the **seed** (*nun*) **began** (*resh*), i.e., to harvest fruit. The connection to making music, is that originally music was made through plucking the strings on a harp. How interesting is the connection between singing our praise to God, with harvesting fruit. Does He harvest the fruit sown by the Spirit in our lives, when we open our mouth in lovely and joyful praise to Him?

## Chop Them Down

The root ZAYIN-MEM-REISH, from which *zemer* and *zimrah* are derived, appears in the verb form as *zomer* (“cutting down”) and is actually the name of one of the 39 forbidden labors on Shabbat. What does this meaning have to do with “singing”?

Judaism's concept of God is comprised of two almost paradoxically opposed descriptions: On the one hand, He is transcendent and thus totally beyond our reach and comprehension; but on the other hand, He is immanent and thus ever-present for us to connect to. Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner (1906-1980) explains that the difference between *shirah* and *zimrah* reflects the tension between these two ways of approaching God. Both terms are expressions of “praise,” but *shirah* denotes praising God from a position of rapture and attachment to Him, while *zimrah* denotes praising God as an appreciation of God's transcendence and how far away He is from man.

In explaining the latter assertion, Rabbi Hutner notes that *zimrah* not only means “song” but is also a verb for “cutting.” When a person recognizes God's awesome transcendence and how He is so unapproachable, a person is essentially “cutting off” his own existence due to the recognition that his own existence pales in comparison to God's infinite greatness.

Rabbi Yaccov Haber relates that he heard from a certain Hassidic Rebbe in the name of the *Chasam Sofer* that the word *shirah* is related to the word *shirayim* (“leftovers”), because “song” is the leftovers of the soul, meaning that it remains one of the only ways the soul can express itself in a world dominated by materialism. Interestingly, in many of the songs/poems recorded in the Bible, the speaker refers to himself in third person (for example, Gen. 49:2, Num. 24:3, Jud. 5:12), instead of in the expected first person. Rabbi Immanuel Frances (1618-1703) explains that this is because true song is like an out-of-body experience, such that the one singing sees himself as a separate entity.

Rabbi Frances further explains that the word *shir* denotes the singer’s ability to mesmerize his listeners and captivate their attention as if he rules over them. In this sense, he explains that *shir* is connected to other words which connote “strength,” like *sharir* (“strongly-established”), *shur* (“wall”), and *sherarah* (“authority”).

By contrast, Rabbi Frances explains that the word *zemer* highlights other aspects of song/poetry: When Yaakov sent his sons to Egypt to buy food during a famine, he sent with them the *zimrah* of the Land of Canaan (Gen. 43:11), which is taken to mean *the best*. Rashi connects the word *zimrat* with *zemer* by explaining that it refers to the choicest produce over which people would “sing.”

Alternatively, Rabbi Frances explains that the act of pruning a vineyard from unnecessary shoots is called *zomer* (Lev. 25:3), and this relates to the art of creating music — the artist must expunge any unnecessary elements from his song in order for it to be wholly good.

Rabbeinu Efrayaim ben Shimshon (to Gen. 43:11) explains that the *zimrat ha’aretz* that Yaakov’s sons brought to Egypt consisted of fine wine, which is called *zimrat* because drinking wine makes one happy (Ps. 104:15), and when people are happy they “sing” (*zemer*). Interestingly, Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772-1810) writes that the *zimrah* of the Holy Land refers to a special *niggun* (“melody”) of Eretz Yisrael which Yaakov sent the Egyptian leader.

Rabbi Eliemelech of Lizhensk in *Noam Elimelech* (to Gen. 47:28, Ex. 19:1) explains that *zimrah* refers to “cutting” away those outer distractions which impede a person’s ability to properly serve God. Both he and the *Chasam Sofer* similarly explain that *Pesukei d’Zimra* (literally, “Verses of Hymns” recited daily in the beginning of the morning prayers) are meant to “cut down” the *klipot* (“husks” or “peels”) in preparation for our complete rapture with God.

## The Circle of Song

The Maharal of Prague (1520-1609) explains that the word *shirah* denotes something whose beginning is attached to its end. For example, the Bible uses the word *sher* to refer to a type of bracelet (Isa. 3:19), and the Mishnah (*Shabbat* 5:1) mentions a collar worn by animals around their neck called a *sher*. Similarly, the Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 25a) discusses if one found coins arranged like a *sher* (ring or bracelet), whether that formation is assumed to have been made deliberately or not. How does this connect to the word *shirah* as a “song”?

The Maharal explains that the idea behind *shirah* is that when one reaches the completion of a certain phase or task, then one offers a “song” of thanks to God for allowing it to happen. Song is best associated with happiness, because happiness comes through completion and fulfillment — such that when one reaches a stage of happiness, it is more appropriate for him to offer song. As Rabbi Moshe Shapiro (1935-2017) explains, when one reaches a stage of completion, he can look back and recognize how God had guided the situation the entire time and brought it to its conclusion. Only with such hindsight — where the beginning can be attached to the end — is song appropriate. Not beforehand.

Rabbi Shapiro further notes that the entire Torah is called a *shirah* (Deut. 31:19), because the song of *Haazinu* is a microcosm of the entire Torah and, by extension, a microcosm of the entire history of the world. In this way, the history of the world is a circle because at the end, Man will return to his former place of glory, as if Adam’s sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge never happened.

Interestingly, the word *yashar* seems to actually mean the opposite of *shirah*, because *yashar* denotes a line that continuously goes straight, while *shirah* represents a circle, a “curved line,” whose end leads into its beginning.

Nonetheless, Rabbi Shapiro notes that in rabbinic literature there is clearly a connection between the two: When the Bible tells the story of the cows that returned the Ark captured by the Philistines, it says that the cows walked straight to Bet Shemesh (I Sam. 6:12) — using the word *vayisharnah*, a cognate of *yashar*.

The Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 24b) exegetically explains that *vayisharnah* means that the cows *sang* while transporting the Ark.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) actually connects the word *shir* to the word *yashar* (“straight”), explaining that a song follows a straight path in focusing on a specific theme without deviating off-topic. In this way, the beginning of the song and the end of the song are linked, because they are just variations on the same theme. By contrast, he explains, the term *zimrah* refers to the best segment from an entire song. He understands that *zomer*, in terms of “cutting” or “pruning,” is a way of discarding the riffraff and leaving just the best. In that sense, Rabbi Pappenheim argues that *zimrah* refers to the choicest part of a song, as if the rest of the song was “cut out.”

Similarly, Rabbi Shimon Dov Ber Analak of Siedlce (1848-1907) explains that *shirah* is related to the word *shur* (“wall”), because just as a wall is comprised of multiple bricks carefully arranged together, so is a song or poem composed of multiple lines carefully arranged. Just as if one brick is removed, the entire edifice may fall, so is it true that if one line or verse of a song is misplaced, the entire structure loses its impact. He explains that this is also why a *sher* refers to a circular article of jewelry. Something round must also be fully intact in order to complete the circle — otherwise it is not whole. On the other hand, the word *zimrah* does not imply the entire edifice, but one small part of it, and so *zimrah* can refer to one segment of an entire song as independent or cut off from the rest of the song.

## **Mizmor Shir vs. Shir Mizmor**

With all of this information, we can now begin to understand why sometimes songs in Psalms begin with the words *shir mizmor* and sometimes they begin with *mizmor shir*. Ibn Ezra (to Ps. 48:1) writes that there is no difference between *mizmor shir* and *shir mizmor*. However, I have found two credible authorities who beg to differ.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim explains that when used side-by-side the terms *mizmor* and *shir* assume specific meanings: *shir* denotes the words/lyrics of a song, while *mizmor* denotes the tune/melody of the song. Based on this, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that within a specific song, sometimes the words begin before the tune, and sometimes the tune is played before the words start. In the former case the expression used for that song is *shir mizmor*, because the *shir* element precedes the *mizmor* element, while in the second case the converse is true.

Similarly, Rabbi Shimshon Pincus (1944-2001) in *Shabbat Malketa* explains that *shir* refers to the story told by a song, while *mizmor* refers to the tune within which that story is told. When one uses words to form a narrative that expresses his happiness and thanksgiving, this is called *shir*. But when one's elation is so emotionally intense that it cannot be logically expressed in words and can only be expressed by a wordless melody, this is called *mizmor*.

Accordingly, the recital of some chapters of Psalms begins with worded phrase (*shir*), and then, as the experience becomes more intense, can only be continued with a wordless melody (*mizmor*). Those chapters are introduced with the phrase *shir mizmor*. On the flip side, other chapters of Psalms begin with the intense experience of a *mizmor*, and only once that intensity subsides can the word of the *shir* begin. Such chapters open with the words *mizmor shir*.

Let us now turn to the mystical interpretation as to why Dovid Hamelech was punished for describing Torah as merely zimrah. The Alter Rebbe of Chabad will contrast shira and zimrah as to two aspects of accessing the divine.

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## **Kuntres Acharon Essay 6 Tanya<sup>6</sup>**

*The last two essays explained how the observance of the commandments seeks out the exiled sparks hidden in this world and thereby suffuses it with Godliness. They also pointed out that the same is true of the study of their laws. The present essay goes one step further and explains that the laws of the Torah transcend the world beyond any possible comparison.*

*When David triumphantly brought back the Ark from its captivity in the hands of the Philistines,<sup>1</sup> it was placed on a wagon. David had momentarily forgotten the stipulation of the Torah, "On the shoulder shall they carry it."<sup>2</sup> Commenting on this episode, our Sages teach<sup>3</sup> that David's*

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<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, elucidated by Rabbi Yosef Wineberg Translated from Yiddish by Rabbi Levy Wineberg and Rabbi Sholom B. Wineberg. Edited by Uri Kaploun. Kehot Publication Society

*forgetfulness came as a punishment for his having referred to the laws of the Torah as “songs”:  
“Your statutes were songs for me in my place of terror.”<sup>4</sup>*

*Why should this expression be regarded as an offense, and in what way is it related to its punishment?<sup>7</sup>*

**“David! You call them songs?!”<sup>3</sup>**

**“דָּוִד, זְמִירוֹת קָרִית לְהוּ כו'”.**

Because he had referred to the laws of the Torah as “songs,” David was punished by being made to “stumble in a matter that even school children know”<sup>3</sup>—that the Ark is to be carried on the shoulders.

In the *Zohar*,<sup>5</sup> we find the expression, “the praise of Torah and its song”—the Torah is a hymn and a song to God.

**הִנֵּה בִּזְהָר: “שִׁבְחָא דְאֹרִייתָא וְרַנְנָה כו'”.**

Let us understand, what is the praise of God when a particular object is forbidden or permitted?<sup>6</sup>

**וְלִהְבִּין, מַהוּ הַשְּׁבַח לְהַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא כְּשֶׁנֶּה אָסוּר אוֹ מוּתָר?**

A similar concept is implicit [in the verse], “How great are Your works, O God, Your thoughts are very deep.”<sup>7</sup>

**הִנֵּה הוּא עַל דְּרָךְ: “מַה גְּדֹלוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיךָ ה', מֵאֵד עֲמָקוֹ מִחֻשְׁבוֹתֶיךָ”.**

Why does the verse make the deed precede the thought? The Alter Rebbe will soon explain that from an appreciation of God’s great works, one begins to understand the depth of His thoughts.

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<sup>7</sup> These are among the questions discussed in the essay before us, and at greater length in *Likkutei Torah* and *Or Hatorah*, and in *Derech Mitzvotcha*, *Mitzvat Masa Ha’aron Bakatef*.



As is known, all the worlds, the exalted and the lowly, are dependent on the meticulous performance of a single mitzvah.

כי הנה נודע, שכל העולמות עליונים ותחתונים – תלויים בדקדוק מצוה אחת,

For example, if an altar offering is valid, then a supernal union in the sefirot is effected, and all the worlds are elevated to receive their life-force and spiritual sustenance.<sup>8</sup>

דרך משל: אם הקרבן פשר – נעשה יחוד עליון, ועולים כל העולמות לקבל חיותם ושפעם:

However, if [the celebrant] altered the precise requirements of the law—if, for example, he received the blood of the offering with his left hand, or in an invalid vessel, or<sup>9</sup> if there was a separation<sup>10</sup>—

ואם שינה – שקיבל הדם בשמאלו דרך משל, או שלא בכלי שרת פשר, או שהיתה חציצה,

then all the elevations of the worlds that would have been accomplished are nullified, as is the life-force and sustenance that they would have received from the Source of Life, the *Ein Sof*, blessed be He.

אזי נתבטלה עליות העולמות וחיותם ושפעם מחיי החיים אין-סוף ברוך-הוא.

So, too, through the use of valid *tefillin*, there is revealed the supernal intellect of *z'eyr anpin* and *nukva*, i.e., *za* and *malchut* of Atzilut, the source of life for all the worlds.

וכן בתפלין פשרות, מתגלים מוחין עליונים דזעיר אנפין ונוקבא, שהם מקור החיים לכל העולמות,

Yet, through [the omission of] one required detail they are invalidated, and the intellect departs.

ובדקדוק אחד נפסלין ומסתלקין המוחין.

The same applies to the detailed requirements of the prohibitory commandments—a single detail affects all the worlds.

וְכֵּהָאֵי גֻּוּנָא בְּדִקְדוּקָי מִצְוֹת לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה.

Let one therefore ponder how great are the works of God in the multiplicity of worlds and all their hosts,

וְהִלְכָה, הַמְתַּבּוֹנֵן מַה גָּדְלוֹ מַעֲשֵׂי ה' שְׁבַר־יְבוּי הָעוֹלָמוֹת וְכָל צְבָאָם,

and how all of these are literally null, relative to any one of the specific requirements of the Torah,

וְאֵיךְ כּוֹלֵם בְּטָלִים בְּמִצְוֹת לְגַבֵּי דְקְדוּקָא אֶחָד מִדְּקְדוּקָי תּוֹרָה,

for it is the profundity of the supreme thought and the Divine wisdom.

שְׁהוּא עוֹמֵק מִחֲשֶׁבֶה הַעֲלִיּוֹנָה וְחֻקְמָתוֹ יִתְבַּרֵּךְ,

For through [the observance of] one minor specification, all the worlds ascend and receive their life-force and spiritual sustenance—or the reverse, God forbid.

אֲשֶׁר בְּדִקְדוּקָא קַל עוֹלִים כָּל הָעוֹלָמוֹת וּמִקְבְּלִים חַיּוֹתָם וְשַׁפְעָם, אִוּ לְהִיפָּךְ חֵס וְשָׁלוֹם,

In the case of a detailed requirement of a prohibitory commandment, transgression brings about (God forbid) a descent in all the worlds.

From this, we may ponder the prodigious profundity of God's thought, which is boundless and endless,

וּמִזֶּה נִתְבּוֹנֵן גְּדוּלַת עוֹמֵק מִחֲשֶׁבֶתוֹ יִתְבַּרֵּךְ, שְׁהוּא בְּבַחֲיִנַת בְּלִי גְבוּל וְתַכְלִית,

and which infinitely transcends the vitality of all the worlds.

וּמַעֲלָתָהּ לְאֵין קֵץ וְתַכְלִית עַל מַעְלוֹת חַיּוֹת כָּל הָעוֹלָמוֹת,

For their entire vivifying power issues from a minor requirement of [God's thought],

שְׂכַל חַיּוֹתֵם שׁוֹפֵעַ מִדְּקָדוּק אֶחָד מִמִּנְהָ,

[this requirement being] drawn from its source, namely the depth of God's thought that specified it.

שֶׁהוּא נִמְשָׁךְ מִמְקוֹרוֹ – הוּא עוֹמֵק מִחֻשְׁבֹּתוֹ יִתְבָּרֵךְ,

Analogously, man's hair issues from his brain,

כְּמוֹ שֶׁעַר הָאָדָם הַנִּמְשָׁךְ מִמּוֹחוֹ עַל דְּרָךְ מִשָּׁל,

as is known from *Tikkunei Zohar* and *Idra Rabbah*.

וְכַנֹּדֵעַ מִתֵּיּוֹנִים וְהֵאדָרָא רַבָּא.

This was the delight of King David, may he rest in peace, as he sang to gladden his heart in his Torah study during his time of anguish.

וַיֵּאֵת הַיְתָה שִׂמְחַת דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל־יְהִי־שְׁלוֹם, שֶׁהָיָה מְזַמֵּר וּמְרַנֵּן לְשִׂמְחַת לְבוֹ בְּעֶסֶק הַתּוֹרָה בְּעַת צָרָתוֹ.

He was overjoyed when he contemplated how the entire world is of no account relative to one minor specific detail of the Torah.

However, for extolling the Torah with this quality, saying, “[Your statutes] were songs for me,”<sup>4</sup> he was punished.

אָךְ מָה שֶׁהָיָה מְשַׁתְּבֵּחַ בְּתֵהֵלֶת הַתּוֹרָה בְּמַעֲלָתָהּ זֶה, וְאָמַר: "זְמִירוֹת הֵיוּ לִי כוּ" נִעְנַשׁ עַל זֶה,

God reproved him: “You call them songs?!”<sup>3</sup>

וְאָמַר לוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ־בְּרוּךְ־הוּא "זְמִירוֹת קָרִית לָהּ!?"

Indeed, this quality [of the Torah], that all the worlds are nothingness compared to one detail of it,

משום שבאמת, מעלתה זו – שכל העולמות בטלים לגבי דקדוק אחד ממנה,

is [but] of the hinderpart, the externality, of the profound supernal thought.

היא מבחינת אחרים של עומק המחשבה,

This is explained elsewhere<sup>11</sup> in the name of the Arizal on the teaching of our Sages, “The Torah is the withered vestige of supernal wisdom.”<sup>12</sup>

כמו שכתוב במקום אחר בשם האריז"ל על מאמר רבותינו זכרונם לברכה: "נובלות חכמה שלמעלה תורה".

However, the innermost core of the depth [of supernal thought], which is the innermost core of the Torah, is utterly fused with the [infinite] *Ein Sof*-light that is vested within the Torah in a perfect unity.

אבל פנימית שבעומק, שהוא פנימית התורה, היא מיוחדת לגמרי באור-אין-סוף ברוך-הוא המלוכש בה –  
בתכלית היחוד,

Relative to the Infinite One, all the worlds are as absolute naught, sheer nothingness, nonexistent,

ולגבי אין-סוף ברוך-הוא, כל העולמות כלא ממש ואין ואפס ממש,

for “You were [the same] before the world was created, [You are the same since the world has been created].”<sup>13</sup>

כי "אתה הוא עד שלא נברא העולם וכו".

Being of absolutely no account relative to God, all the worlds effect no change in Him.

Hence, the internal aspect of the Torah too (which is wholly united with God) is not at all to be lauded as being the animating force of all the worlds, for relative to the internal aspect of the Torah, they are reckoned as nothingness itself.

והלקד, גם לפנימיות התורה – אין לשבחה כלל בתהלת סיות כל העולמות, מאחר דלא ממש תשיבי,

In this inward aspect of the Torah, there can be no mortal heartfelt joy and delight

ובבחינת פנימיותה אינה שמחת לבב אנוש ושעשועיו,

but rather, in a manner of speaking, the heartfelt joy and pleasure of the King, the Holy One, blessed be He, Who delights in it.

אלא כבכול, שמחת לב ושעשוע המלך הקדוש-ברוך-הוא שמשתעשע בה,

For [only] “God understands its way and knows its station”<sup>14</sup> and quality

"פי אלקים הבין דרכה וידע מקומה" ומעלתה,

through His self-knowledge,<sup>15</sup> as it were; knowing Himself, he also knows the Torah that is entirely one with Him.

בידיעת עצמו כבכול,

This, however, is “concealed from all mortal eyes.”<sup>16</sup>

אבל "נעלמה מעיני כל חי",

As it is written, “My Face—i.e., the innermost dimension of the Torah, its pnimiyut, as implied by the word panim—shall not be seen,”<sup>17</sup> as is explained there<sup>11</sup> in the name of the Arizal.

כמו שכתוב: "ופני לא יראו", דהיינו בחינת פנימיותה, כמו שנתבאר שם בשם האריז"ל.

Hence, the verse, in which the Torah itself is the speaker, “I was...a delight unto Him,”<sup>18</sup>

וזהו שאמר הכתוב: "וְאֶהְיֶה אֲצִלוֹ כו' שְׂעֻשׂוּעִים" –

specifically “unto Him.”

The order of the words in the original makes it clear that the Torah is God's delight alone.

[Likewise, in the following phrase] which describes the Torah as causing God delight by “playing before Him,”

– "משחקת לפניו" –

the verse specifies the term “before Him”—lefanav, deriving from panim (“face”), which is related to pnimiyut (“inwardness”)—for this refers to the inwardness [of the Torah] that cavorts before the inwardness of the Infinite One.

לפניו דוקא, דהיינו בבחינת פנימיותה,

**The Alter Rebbe will now explain that this sublime level of Torah in which God alone delights descends to nurture the souls of the Jewish people. For this reason, the Midrash calls the Torah *uman* (lit., “a craftsman”), one who skillfully nurtures a young child.**

Concerning this [innermost level of the Torah], it is written, “I was by Him *amon* (‘one who is nurtured’),”<sup>19</sup> [and the Midrash comments], “Do not read *amon* but *omain* (‘one who nurtures’).”<sup>20</sup>

ועל זה אמר "ואהיה אפלו אמון" אל תקרי "אמון" אלא "אומן" כו'.

This sublime and innermost level of the Torah descends to nurture Jewish souls, inasmuch as they transcend the world. The world, however, is vitalized not by this level of the Torah but by its externality.

It is with reference to the hinderpart (the external aspect of the Torah) that it is written, (and in this verse, the Torah describes itself as) “Playing in the world, His land; and my delights are with mortal men.”<sup>21</sup>

ועל בחינת אחרונים אמר: "משחקת בתבל ארצו, ושעשועי את בני אדם",

It is the external aspect of the Torah that brings delight to the world and to man.

For the Torah was given in states of both inwardness and externality;

כי התורה ניתנה בבחינת פנים ואחור,

as it is written concerning the “flying scroll” of Zechariah, “and it was written front and back.”<sup>22</sup>

כדכתיב במגילה עפה דזכריה: "והיא כתובה פנים ואחור".

*Panim* (“face” or “front”) is the root of *pnimiyut* (“inwardness”); *achor* (“back”) is the root of *achorayim* (“hinderpart,” i.e., externality).

**Since David seized upon [and praised] the hinderpart [of the Torah],**

ולפי שתפס דוד בבחינת אחוריים,

A term such as “songs” relates to the merely external aspect of the Torah that relates to the world and animates it.

**he was punished with forgetfulness, which derives from an attitude of externality.**

לקח נענש בשכחה, הבאה מן בחינת אחוריים,

A person does not forget things that are truly internalized within him but only things which remain external to him.

He thus became momentarily oblivious to the verse concerning the Ark, *“The sacred service is their duty; on the shoulder shall they carry it”*<sup>22</sup>—

ונעלם ממנו לפי שעה מה שכתוב: "עבודת הקדש עליהם בכתף ישאו"

in order to combine and unite the “shoulders,” which are akin to the hinderpart,

לחבר ולחדד את ה"כתפיים", שהן בחינת אחוריים,

with the sacred service, viz., the supernal wisdom, which is also called “sacred,” in a manner that reflects inwardness,

אַל "עבודת הקדוש", היא חכמה עילאה, בבחינת פנים,

**for this state [of inwardness] is the source of the Tablets in the Ark,**

שמשים נמשכו הלווחות שבארון,

of which the verse states, “**Written on both their sides...**”<sup>23</sup>

כמו שכתוב: "כתובים משני עבריהם כו",

and as explained in the Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate *Shekalim*,<sup>24</sup> [the Tablets] did not have any front (panim) and back (achor)—they were entirely panim, signifying pnimiyut (“inwardness”).

וכמו שכתוב בירושלמי דשקלים, שלא הייתה בהן בחינת פנים ואחור,

The purpose of carrying the Ark on the shoulders was thus to connect the external aspect of man with the inwardness of the Torah.

Study that reference (in the Jerusalem Talmud) well.

ע"י שם:

## FOOTNOTES

1.

II Samuel 6; I Chronicles 13.

2.

Numbers 7:9.

3.

*Sotah* 35a.

4.



[Psalms 119:54.](#)

5.

Cf. III, 8b.

6.

Note by the Rebbe: “As is explicit in many sources, including the *Tanya*, there are various categories—*mutar* [‘permitted’], *kasher* [‘fit for use’], *tahor* [‘pure’], (and also, as in the *Tanya*, end of ch. 52, *patur* [‘exempt’]?), and their respective opposites. It seems to me that the Alter Rebbe chose just these two categories [‘forbidden’ and ‘permitted’] because they embody a principle common to them all: *assur* [lit., ‘bound’] implies that something is held in the clutches of the *sitra achara* [and hence cannot be elevated to God] while *mutar* [lit., ‘unbound’] is so called (as in the *Tanya* [ch. 7; see also ch. 8]) because a permitted thing is free to be elevated.”

7.

[Psalms 92:10.](#)

8.

Note by the Rebbe: “Cf. the end of *Iggeret Hateshuvah*.”

9.

The Rebbe notes that the first example is a change that relates to the person; the second is a change that relates to the vessel; while with regard to “there was a separation,” the Rebbe notes that “both of the preceding stages were done without any change.”

10.

“Separation” (*chatzitzah*) can denote (e.g.) the intervention of a foreign body between the *Kohen* and (i) the vessel (*Zevachim* 24a, in the Mishnah) or (ii) the floor (the Gemara there, 15b) or (iii) his vestments (ibid., 19a).

11.

Note by the Rebbe: “See *Iggeret Hakodesh*, Epistle 19.”

12.

Note by the Rebbe (in *Likkutei Biurim*, vol. 1, p. 485): “*Bereishit Rabbah* 17:5 and 44:17; explained in *Etz Chaim, Shaar Haklalim*, end of ch. 1, et al.”

13.

Text of the morning prayers, cf. *Tanna Dvei Eliyahu Rabbah*, sec. 21.

14.

Cf. [Job 28:23.](#)

15.

*Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah* 2:10.

16.

[Job 28:21.](#)

17.

[Exodus 30:23.](#)

18.

Proverbs 8:30.

19.

Proverbs 8:30.

20.

Beginning of *Bereishit Rabbah*.

21.

Proverbs 8:31.

22.

The scroll referred to in [Zechariah 5:1-2](#) is the same (see *Rashi* there) as that referred to—earlier in the *Tanach*—in [Ezekiel 2:9-10](#), from which the above quotation is drawn. The Rebbe notes that an explanation is needed as to why the *later* reference is quoted.

See also *Eruvin* 21a.

23.

[Exodus 32:15](#).

24.

*The Alter Rebbe has moved the punishment from the difference between shir and zemer to the axis of inside vs outside. David is punished for “merely” calling and reducing Torah to the external as opposed to the infinitely greater source of Torah as the inside as exemplified by the Luchos that defied natural law by having writing engraved through it yet able to be read the same way. As opposed to the Aron which concealed the luchos representing the externalities which he praised. Being punished by forgetting this very law pointed to the source of the sin.*

זְמֵרוֹת הַיּוֹדְלִי חֻקֶיךָ בְּבַיִת מְגוֹרָי:

Your laws are a source of strength to me wherever I may dwell.

**Psalm 119:54**

## דרוש לשבועות

**וַאֲהִיָּה אֶצְלוֹ אֲמוֹן וְאֵהִיָּה שְׁעִשׂוּעִים יוֹם יוֹם מִשְׁחַקַּת לִפְנֵי כָּל עַת מִשְׁחַקַּת בַּתְּבֵל אֶרְצוֹ וְשְׁעִשׂוּעֵי אֶת בְּנֵי אָדָם.**

ופי' במדרש רבה ר"פ בראשית אמון פדגוג האיך מה דאת אמר כאשר ישא האומן את היונק והוא לשון פרנסה וכן הוא עוד ברבות משפטים פ"ל. והענין כי משה רבינו ע"ה אמר להקב"ה כי תאמר אלי שאהו בחיקך כאשר ישא האומן את היונק כו' מאין לי בשר כו' והיינו לפי שהיה במדרגה גבוה מן המים משיתיהו עד שהיה כבד פה לגבי תשבע"פ וכבד לשון לגבי תשב"כ [ועמ"ש מזה בפי בשלח בדיה להבין ענין לחם משנה] ולכן אמר מאין לי בשר שאין זה בערכו כלל. [ועמ"ש מזה בפי בהעלותך] רק המן ירד בזכותו מזונא דחכמתא, אבל התורה משבחת א"ע במעלה יתרה שיכולה היא לירד ממעלתה הגבוה והרמה להיות אמון שהיא רועה ומפרנס נש"י כנודע שהתורה נקי מזון לגפש ולכן נקי התורה לחם כמ"ש לכו לחמו בלחמי. וזהו כאשר ישא האומן את היונק. דר"ל שמפרנסו בלחם אחר ימי יניקה דאם ר"ל שמניקו מהו שאמר כאשר ישא האומן כו' מאין לי בשר כו'. והנה גילוי בחי' זו להיות התורה בבחי' לחם הוא בשבועות זמן מ"ת שהקריבו שתי הלחם לחמו בלחמי תשב"כ ותשבע"פ כי בימי הספירה הם ימי יניקה כי לידת נש"י הי' כשביעי של פסח ובני ישראל הלכו ביבשה בתוך הים שנמשכו מההעלם אל הגילוי ומשביעי של פסח עד שבועות מ"ד ימים הם בבחי' יניקה דהיינו הגדלת המדות חסד שבחסד כו' עד"מ שהחלב מגדל אברי הולד וכך ימי הספירה הם המשכות ימים עליונים היום יום כו' לעומר שעורים שהוא מאכל כהמה הוא מקור וחיות הנפש הבהמית של האדם [כי הנשמה ונפש אלקית א"צ תיקון לעצמה כו'] להפוך כל המדות שבה שתהיינה לה' לבדו ולא תחללו כו' יום ראשון חסד שבחסד כו' והיינו בחי' גידול של המדות שבנפש הבהמית והעלאתן ממטה למעלה ע"י בחי' המשכת מוחין מלמעלה ונק' בע"ח מוחין דיניקה, וכמ"ש במ"א

ע"פ ולבן שינים מחלב, וזו היא המשכה עליונה מלמעלה מן הימים העליונים הנמשכים במ"ד ימי הספירה עד"מ דם נעכר ונעשה חלב. כך ע"י אתכפיא שהאדם מוכך מדותיו נמשך הגדלת המדות. אך אין התינוק יודע לקרות אבא ואימא עד שיטעום טעם דגן שבבחי' יניקה עדיין לא נכנס בו דעת עד שיטעום טעם לחם היא בחי' התורה שנתנה אחר ימי הספירה בשבועות ואזי הקריבו כו' שתי הלחם והוא מזון לנפש האלקית לכו לחמו בלחמי והקרבה זו צריכה להיות ממושבותיכם בחי' ישיבה היא בחי' ק"ש כי תפלה בעמידה וק"ש בישיבה בעולם הבריאה ששם הוא היחוד שבק"ש יחודא עלאה או"א שא"א לנו להשיגו באצי' [וכמ"ש בפע"ח שער הק"ש פ"ד]. ופי' הכתוב ממושבותיכם מבחי' ק"ש במס"ע תביאר לחם כו' תוכלו להמשיך בחי' התורה להיות

לכם בבחי' לחם הגורם להמשיך בחי' הדעת וההשגה. וזהו ואהיה  
אצלו אמון:

**ב ואח"כ** ואהיה שעשועים שע"י בחי' אמון הוא המשכת בחי' לחם  
ומזון להיות הדעת וההשגה עי"ז אח"כ נמשך גילוי  
בחי' השמחה והשעשועים. והנה ביאור ענין השמחה והשעשועים  
המתגלים ע"י הדעת וההשגה. יובן במ"ש זמירות היו לי חקיד כו'  
ואמרד"ל [במדרש רבה. וכתנחומא ובגמרא פי' דסוטה דליה צ"א] שנענש  
דוד על שקרא ד"ת זמירות ואמר לו הקב"ה זמירות קרית להו  
הריני מכשילך בדבר שאפילו תינוקות של בית רבן יודעין אותו דכתיב  
ולבני קהת לא נתן כי עבודת הקדש עליהם בכתף ישאו והוא הביא  
את הארון בעגלה. והענין הוא כי פי' וביאור מלת זמירות הוא כמו  
זמר וניגון שמזמרים ומנגנים ניגון א' כמה פעמים אע"פ שהכל  
עריכות ומתיקות א' מ"מ כשערב לו לאדם איזה ניגון וזמר יכול  
לזמר ולנגן אותו כמה פעמים. וכך היה לי חוקיך חוקים נק' מצות  
שאין בהן טעם כמו פרה אדומה ושעטנז כו' כלומר שהגם שאין למצוה  
זו שום טעם ודעת בשכל המושג ומובן מ"מ ערב ומתוק לחיכו עד מאד  
והיינו לפי שאף גם אם אין טעם ודעת מלוּבש בהמשכת מצוה זו  
למטה בהתלבשותה בגשמיות מ"מ יסודתה בהררי קדש הוא מבחי' רצון  
העליון ב"ה שלמעלה מעלה מבחי' טעם ודעת הנמשך מבחי' ח"ע  
והחכמה מאין תמצא שהיא נמשכת מבחי' אין הוא בחי' רצון העליון  
ב"ה כי הנה החכמה נק' עדן שהוא עונג הנשמות בג"ע בשכל הנבראים  
המשכילים בגדולת א"ס ב"ה ונהנים בהשגתם תענוג נפלא עד אין קץ  
ע"ד שאמרו בגמ' על אלישע אחר מוטב דלידייני כו'. והנה אף  
שבספרים נזכר רק ב' בחי' ג"ע תחתון ועליון. אבל באמת יש הרבה  
מיני ג"ע זה למעלה מזה עד אין קץ ותכלית גבוה מעל גבוה כו'. וע"ז  
רמזו רז"ל ת"ח אין להם מנוחה לא בעוה"ז ולא בעוה"ב שנאמר ילכו  
מחיל אל חיל כו' אלא שהספרים לא דברו מהם רק מהב' מיני ג"ע

מחיל אל חיל כו' אלא שהספרים לא דברו מהם רק מהב' מיני ג"ע  
ג"ע עליון ותחתון. אבל בג"ע העליונים עד רום המעלות לא שלחו את  
ידם וכל עדן שלמעלה מעלה עד רום המעלות הכל נק' בשם חכמה  
כי העונג שבהם הוא לפי ערך ההשכלה וההשגה ויש השגה למעלה  
מהשגה עד רום המעלות. אך כל בחי' השגה ותענוג מריש כל דרגין  
כו' אינו אלא בבחי' זיו. וכמארז"ל ונהנין מזיו כו'. וזהו בורא קדושים  
ישתבח שמך לעד מלכנו. קדושים אלו הנשמות וקדושים בכל יום  
יהללוך סלה בלי הפסק בהשגה למעלה מהשגה כי ת"ח אין להם מנוחה  
כו'. וכל ההילול והשבח הזה אין זה אלא ישתבח שמך בחי' שם כלבד בחי'  
זיו כו' (כמיש מזה בדיה את שנתתי תשמרו) ושמו בגימ' רצון שהרצון הוא  
למעלה מעלה מבחי' חכמה והחכמה היא הנמשכת מבחי' הרצון שכך  
עלה ברצונו להתלבש בבחי' חכמה. ולזאת הרי בחי' החכמה בטילה  
כאין לגבי בחי' רצון העליון ב"ה המתלבש בה ואין ערוך אליו וזהו ענין  
הזמירות שקרא דוד לד"ת לבחי' החוקים שעם היות שאין בהם טעם  
היינו לפי שנמשכו ונלקחו מרצון העליון ב"ה שהוא למעלה מההשגה  
והטעם. ומ"ש אורייתא מחכמה נפקת נפקת דייקא. אבל יסודן  
למעלה מהחכמה תר"ך עמודי אור עדי"מ העמוד שמחבר הגג עם  
הרצפה. כך המצות נשפלו למטה. אבל שרשן גבוה מאד נעלה ע"כ  
היה שמח שמחה גדולה בעסק התורה ומצות ע"י התבוננות זו שהם רצון  
העליון וע"כ קראן זמירות שהן היו לו כמין זמר שמנגנין זמר א' בהם  
כמה פעמים מגודל המתיקות שבו. כך עם היות שכל המצות כולן הן  
רצונו ית' והרי זהו שבח אחד לכל המצות שכולם מתלבש רצה"ע ב"ה  
מ"מ היה מתענג ושמח בכל א' כמו שמתענגים ושמחים בעריכות  
ומתיקות הניגון והזמר שניגון וזמר א' מנגנין ומזמרים כמה פעמים  
מאחר שהוא זמר יפה מאד וזו היא שמחה של מצוה. דהיינו מחמת

עוצם גדולת המצוה עצמה כי גבהה מעלתה מאד שהוא הוא רצה"ע ב"ה שלמעלה מהחכמה שהוא בחי' עדן ותענוג והשגה נפלאה עד אין קץ מריש כל דרגין כו'. אך מ"מ נענש דוד ע"ז לפי שעדיין לא הגיע לתכלית השכח העיקר שבתורה ומצות ומעלתן העצמי' שהרי לא שבח אותן אלא בבחי' רצה"ע ב"ה המלוכש בהן. והנה הרצון הוא עדיין בבחי' מעלת ומדרגת חיצונית שלהם. וכמ"ש וראית את אחורי לפני לא יראו. אבל פנימיותן ועיקרן הוא הוא עונג העליון ב"ה שהוא פנימית הרצון וע"ז נאמר אחר וקדם צרתני ועד"מ מכשרי אחזה שהתענוג הוא עיקר המכוון והרצון הולך אחר התענוג שמחמת שיש נחת רוח ותענוג לפניו לכך הוא רוצה וחפץ בכך. ולכן נק' הרצון בחי' אחוריים ובחי' חיצונית לגבי העונג העליון ב"ה המלוכש בו וע"ז נאמר וראית את אחורי לפני לא יראו שאין פנימית העונג מתגלה כ"א בחי' הרצון בלבד כמו שאינו נראה ונגלה באדם לזולתו רק בחי' רצון בלבד כשמגלה לו רצונו להיות כך וכך. אבל פנימית העונג המלוכש בו והמכוון מזה איזה עונג ונחת רוח לפניו מזה לא ניתן להתודע ולהגלות ועונג זה הוא המלוכש במצות שהן רצונו ית'. וזהו אשר קדשנו כמצותיו אשר מלשון באשרי כי אשרוני שהוא לשון הילול ושבח והוא על עוצם ריבוי התענוג שיש בזה כדי להלל ולשבח מאד ובבחי' זו נאמר באשר וטובל בשמן רגלו שבבחי' רגלו בלבד הוא מלוכש בבחי' שמן היא בחי' ח"ע כו'.

**ג והנה** ההפרש שבין בחי' אחוריים לבחי' פנים מבשרי אחזה  
 שבעורף אין בו התחלקות אברים שעור א' מכסה את  
 כולו. משא"כ בבחי' פנים נראה ונגלה ציור התחלקות האיברים  
 עינים לראות אזנים לשמוע כו' ותענוג שבבחי' ראייה הוא בחי' אחרת  
 משמיעה כו'. כך הוא למעלה כביכול שבחי' רצון העליון כ"ה נק'  
 בחי' אחוריים ואין בו שום התחלקות ולכך הרצון המלוּבש במצות  
 כולל כל המצות בשוה שכולן הן בחי' רצונו ית' והרי זה שבח א' לכולן  
 אלא שהוא שבח גדול מאד כנ"ל שהרצון עליון הוא למעלה מהחכמה כו'  
 ולכן נק' העונג והשמחה הנמשך מזה בשם זמירות כמו זמר שמנגנים  
 ניגון א' היפה מאד הרבה פעמים כנ"ל. אבל העונג העליון ב"ה  
 המלוּבש במצות יש לכל מצוה תענוג פרטי כי העונג היא פנימי'  
 המכוון המלוּבש ברצון ואין פנימית המכוון המלוּבש ברצון מצוה זו מלוּבש  
 ברצון מצוה אחרת כי לכל מצוה יש כוונה אחרת כנודע. וכמו עד"מ  
 בפנים הרי התענוג שבראי' המלוּבש בעינים אינו דומה כלל להתענוג  
 שבשמיעה שבאזנים וכן תענוג שבטעמים חיך אוכל יטעם כו' כל מין  
 תענוג הוא מהות אחר. כך בחינת עונג העליון הנמשך ומתגלה ע"י  
 המצות כציצית תענוג מיוחד ומשונה מהתענוג שבמצוה אחרת וכן בתפילין  
 כו' ובכל המצות. ולא כמו מעלת הרצון שהוא מדרגה אחת לכולן (יע"ש  
 בד"ה ראו כי ה' נתן לכם השבת כפי' דרכיה דרכי נועם) ולכן במ"ת דכתיב פנים  
 בפנים דכר ה' שהי' גילוי בחי' פנים עליונים שהוא עונג העליון כ"ה  
 המלוּבש בתורה ומצות. הנה אמרז"ל על כל דבור פרח נשמתן לפי  
 שבכל דבור מעשרת הדברות הי' גילוי עונג פרטי המלוּבש בדיבור זה  
 בלבד שאינו דומה לגילוי העונג שבדיבור השני והגורם לזה שזכו  
 ישראל לכך במ"ת היינו משום דכתיב פנים בפנים, שגם מלמטה למעלה  
 היה בבחי' גילוי הפנימיות ולא בבחי' אחוריים כי גם בתשוקה וכלות  
 הנפש שממטה למעלה יש ב' בחי' הא' כמ"ש מי לי בשמים ועמך לא  
 חפצתי כארץ. דהיינו שמבטל רצונו וחפצו המלוּבש בגוף ונפש הבהמית  
 ורוצה לדבקה בו ית' בתשוקה וצמאון כו'. אך מ"מ רצון זה ותשוקה זו היא

בחי' אחוריים שהרי עדיין נפשו האלקית מלוּבשת בגוף ונה"כ בתענוגות  
 בני אדם אלא שרוצה לצאת מהם ומסכים בהסכמה אמיתית שתתפשט  
 האהבה מלבושיה שכנוגה לדבקה באלקים חיים. אך עדיין לא נתפשטה

האהבה עד שתחפץ בקרבת אלקים בשמחה וטוב לבב מרוב כל ולהתענג על ה' אהבה בתענוגים ממש שזהו בחי' הב' וכמ"ש כלה שארי ולבבי כו' והיא בחי' ומעלה יתירה שמחה ותענוג בה' ממש והיא שמחה של מצוה ונשמח בדברי תורתך ובמצותיך לעולם ועד כי הם חיינו כו' ובחי' זו הב' היא בחי' גילוי פנימית וז"ש פנים בפנים דבר ה'. כלומר שהיו חיבור והתקשרות בחי' פנים עליונים בבחי' פנים התחתונים שהי' התלבשות עונג העליון ב"ה שהוא הוא פנימי' הרצון בבחי' עונג התחתון שממטה למעלה כלה שארי ולבבי כו' בבחי' פנימי' האהבה בתענוגים להתענג על ה' ממש שע"כ זכו והשיגו העונג העליון ב"ה המלוכש בכל מצוה עונג פרטי. ולכן על כל דבור ודבור פרהה נשמתן. וזהו שנענש דוד המלך ע"ה על שלא שיבח את התורה רק בבחי' זמירות שהוא מצד בחי' אחוריים של המצות ולא שיבח את התורה בבחי' זו הפנימי' שהיא מעלתן העקרית העצמית, ולכן העונש היה ג"כ מדה כנגד מדה ששכח מעלת התורה שהיא בבחי' פנים כי הנה לכך נאמר בכתף ישאו שהלויים היו נושאי הארון והיו כתפיהם לחוף ופניהם כנגד הארון זה כנגד זה והיינו לפי שצ"ל בחי' פנים בפנים כנ"ל וגם הלוחות שבארון הי' בבחי' פנים לכל צד שהלוחות היו כתובים משני עבריהם שלכל עבר לא נראה רק בחי' הפנים והוא נענש ששכח זה ונשאו בפרות על העגלה ומה שנענש שנפל בבחי' שכחה היא בחי' אחוריים [עמ"ש פ' תצוה סד"ה זכור כו' לא חשכת] היינו מדה כנגד מדה שלפי שלא שיבח את התורה בבחי' פנים אלא בבחי' אחוריים שכח מעלת הלוחות שהיו בבחי' פנים ונפל לבחי' שכחה היא בחי' אחוריים. ובזה יובן מ"ש ואהיה שעשועים כי בחי' שעשועים הן הן בחי' גילוי בחי' פנימי' דהיינו בחי' עונג העליון המלוכש במצות שהיא פנימית הרצון משא"כ בחי' זמירות הן בחי' אחוריים שהוא הרצון כנ"ל [ועמ"ש עוד מענין זה ע"פ ויהי מקץ שנתיים ימים ובאגה"ק קרוב לסופו ד"ה חזר זמירות קרית להו]. אך הנה ואהיה כתיב לשון הזה והיינו שצריך להמשיך גילוי והתהוות בחי' השעשועים. דבאתעדל"ת תליא מילתא.

זהו יום יום דהיינו בחי' ק"ש שאומרים דבר יום ביומו כי בכל יום נעשה בריה חדשה. וע"כ בכל יום צריך לקרות ק"ש ולמסור נפשו באחד בכל יום ואהבת בחי' תענוג כו' וע"ז גורם ירידת התענוג עליון שעשוע שבמצותו שיתלבש בתורה וזהו אני תורתך שעשועתי. שעשועתי הוא פועל יוצא שממשיך השעשועים בהתורה והיינו ע"י אני אותיות אין פי' בחינת ביטול היש שעושה מאני אין והיינו שגם בלימוד התורה לא יהי' בבחי' יש אלא בביטול היש כמ"ש בכל נפשך סמוך לדברת במ כו' וע"ז גורם למעלה להמשיך מהיש לאין דהיינו מיש האמיתי שעשועים העצמיים יומשך הארה בחכמה שהיא בחי' אין ממש [והוא ג"כ ההמשכה מבחי' אני בבחי' אין ע' בע"ה שער השתלשלות הי"ס דרך העגולים במה"ב פ"ב בענין אני ואין. ובמא"א אות א' ססעי' ס"ד מל' דא"ק נק' אני מתלבשת ברדל"א נקרא אין עכ"ל וע' מענין ואהי' כוהר ויקהל דרי"ז ע"א והייתי לא כתיב אלא ואהיה כו' ור"פ שמיני דל"ה ע"ב ובהרמ"ז שם וכפ' אחרי דס"ה ע"ב וסימן ואהיה כו' ודס"ז ע"ב]:



## VaEh'yeh Etzlo Amon

### *An adaptation of the Maamar found in Likutei Torah*

*There is a passage in the book of Proverbs in which the Torah itself is the speaker, and anthropomorphically describes itself as having pre-existed the entire created universe. After such statements as “When [God] established the heavens, I was there; when He drew a circle over the surface of the deep,” the Torah goes on to say, (Proverbs 8:30-31), “I was with Him as a nursling, and I was His delight every day, playing before Him at all times; playing with the world, His earth, and my delights were with the sons of man.” These statements are not merely poetic; they contain profound mystical references to the essential quality of the Torah, the bestowal of which upon the Jewish people we celebrate on the holiday of Shavuot.*

The Torah's being described as a “nursling” (*amon* in Hebrew) is reminiscent of Moshe's (Moses') statement to God in Numbers 11:12-13. There, Moshe has just been told by God that the Jews would miraculously be supplied with meat in the desert, and Moshe “complains,” as it were, that he is not equipped to be the instrument of that event. “[Who am I,] Moshe says to God, that You should say to me, ‘Carry it [the Jewish nation] in your bosom as a nursing person [*omen*] carries a suckling child’ ... from where am I [to get] meat?”

As explained elsewhere (see, for example, the adaptation of the discourse *L'havin Inyan Lechem Mishna* on the Torah portion *B'shalach*; also that of the discourse *B'Etzem Hayom HazeH Yatzu Kol Tzivos Hashem Me'ereH Mitzrayim* on the Torah portion *Bo*), Moshe's soul derived from an extremely sublime spiritual level. His soul was so exalted that Moshe – who had just spent 40 days and nights atop Mount Sinai in such a rarified state of holiness that he was sustained entirely by spirituality and had no need of physical food – felt he could not relate to such a mundane thing as meat. He was at a loss to understand how he could provide it to the ordinary people. (Similarly, Moshe had told God that he was unfit to deliver God's message of deliverance to the Jews in Egypt because he suffered from a speech impediment. Chassidic philosophy explains that Moshe's concern was that his own lofty soul would be unable to bridge the gap with the ordinary Jews, so that God's message would not be successfully transmitted. God's response was that He would assist Moshe in “getting the message across,” i.e., Moshe should do his part in speaking to the Jews, and God would see to it that the spiritual “gap” was bridged.) Thus, instead of ordinary, physical nourishment, Moshe is associated with the Manna which miraculously descended from heaven in his merit (see *Ta'anis* 9a; *Zohar* III 156a). This was spiritual nourishment and something that Moshe could relate to.

One observation must be made before we can appreciate the significance of all the above. Since nothing in the Torah is accidental or casual, its metaphors are not merely figures of speech, but deliberately used to reflect an essential correspondence between the metaphor and its object. In this case, the references to nursing an infant likewise signify something deeper than simple literary imagery. A newborn infant is not fully developed; a baby has a lot of growing up yet to do. At first, a child is almost exclusively a creature of emotion, feeling pleasure, fear, and similar things

but unable to think about or understand what it experiences. Even its emotions need time to blossom and develop all the nuance of which they are capable. (A child does not experience “bittersweet” or poignant feelings, for example – just wild joy or raging anger.)

While it is true that in modern times, many infants are not nursed at all, this natural practice symbolizes a certain spiritual growth. As actual milk promotes growth of a child’s limbs, so does nursing represent and engender the spiritual development and growth of the soul’s emotional attributes. Over the period of nursing, the infant’s emotions mature and develop. However, it is not until significantly later that the child’s intellect emerges, which is why a newborn, although able to produce sound (and sometimes plenty of that!) is not capable of intelligent speech. This later stage of development is mystically associated with the child’s weaning and introduction to solid food, specifically bread, as the Talmud (*B’rachos* 40a) teaches (in support of the proposition that the Tree of Knowledge, which introduced an intellectual awareness to Adam and Eve, was actually wheat), “A child does not know to call ‘Father!’ or ‘Mother!’ until it has tasted the taste of grain.”

All the above can be brought to bear upon our topic. Kabbalistically, the three major Jewish holidays of Passover, Shavuos and Succos all have a role to play in the creation of Jewish souls. On the seventh day of Passover, new souls are “born,” as it were, in the sense that they emerge from the lofty spiritual realm of *Atzilus*, which is inseparable from God Himself, into the relatively “lower” realm of *B’riah*, where they are considered separate entities. However, these “newborn” souls are not yet fully developed. As explained elsewhere, a Jewish soul possesses ten spiritual attributes, seven of which parallel the emotional attributes of a person and three of which, intellectual attributes. The newborn soul, like a newborn infant, still needs time before its emotional faculties are fully grown; this applies particularly to the so-called “animal soul” which is the source of a person’s natural inclinations. These too, and not only one’s spiritual tendencies, need to be developed into vehicles for the service of God. Each of the seven emotional attributes, when “mature,” is a composite of all seven (making 49 emotional components of the soul in all), and for these “nuances” to come out, the soul must undergo a period of spiritual “nursing.” This refers to the 44 days of the *Omer* period between the seventh day of Passover and the holiday of Shavuos.

(For the *Omer* period, the time in which the Jews count the days from the Exodus from Egypt until the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, begins on the second night of Passover and contains 49 days in total. These correspond to the 49 emotional attributes of the soul. However, the first five days of *s’firah* (i.e., the first five days of the count), from the second until the seventh day of Passover, represent the mystical five attributes of kindness (the five *chassadim*: the first five emotional attributes within the compound attribute of *chessed*, or kindness, itself) which engender the growth of the rest of the attributes. These first five are identified with the realm of *Atzilus*, leaving only 44 which develop after “birth.”)

The mitzvah of counting the *Omer*, then, serves the mystical function of “nursing” the Jewish souls, developing their core emotional attributes to maturity. However, nursing is not an end in itself; it leads to weaning and the ability to assimilate solid food. This is symbolized by bread, and, just as “the taste of grain” introduces a new level of intellectual capacity to a toddler, it is the spiritual “bread” which the souls receive after nursing that brings out their intellectual attributes.

This “bread” is the Torah itself, which is called “food” (*mazon*) for the soul (see *Chagigah* 14a; *Bereishis Rabba* 43:7), and about which it is written (Proverbs 9:5), “Come, eat of My bread.”

The holiday of Shavuot, when the Torah was given to the Jews, thus mystically corresponds to the “weaning” of the newborn souls. That is why, on Shavuot, we are commanded to offer up a sacrifice consisting chiefly of two loaves of bread (Leviticus 23:17): one representing the Written Torah (the Bible) and the other representing the Oral Torah (the entire corpus of Jewish knowledge, including the Mishna and Talmud, which reveals the latent meaning of the Biblical verses).

(This level is granted to us by God in response to the Jews’ having nullified themselves in deference to Him during reflection on the Shema prayer, which is why the verse says that the two loaves are to be brought “from your dwellings” (*mimoshvoseichem*) – a word that can also mean, “from your sitting” – since the Shema is properly recited while sitting.)

(The holiday of *Sh’mini Atzeres*, at the conclusion of the Succos period, is the mystical “conception” of the souls.)

“Nursing,” as a concept, can be understood in its own right, or in the sense that it is a preparatory stage leading to eventual weaning onto bread. Moshe, in his humility, felt inadequate to this latter task of introducing the Jewish people to the “solid food” of the Torah, which is what he meant by the protest, “[Who am I] that You should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom as a nursing person carries a suckling child’ ... from where am I [to get] meat?”

Now, it must be understood that God Himself is absolutely transcendent and unknowable. Any relation to Him that we have is a gift from God, which He bestowed upon us through the vehicle of the Torah: by “compressing,” as it were, Himself into the Torah, we are enabled to grasp God Himself through our grasp of the Torah. The Torah itself is the vessel, the conduit, which contains and transmits this Godliness to us. This is why, although Moshe modestly felt he was unable to bring Godliness all the way down to our level – he felt unable to “nurse” the Jews up to the point of readiness for “bread” – the Torah itself does describe itself as performing this function, as it says “I was with Him as a nursling.”

That verse goes on to say, “I was His delight every day.” This refers to the joy and pleasure which come only after intellectual comprehension; not only is the Torah a “nursling” which brings out the intellectual level of the Jewish soul, it continues on to reveal the even deeper aspect of delight, or pleasure.

To understand what is meant by this, we must first consider why King David was punished for praising the Torah as “songs.” David wrote (Psalms 119:54), “Your statutes have been my songs,” and our sages teach (see *Bamidbar Rabba* 4:20; *Tanchuma*; and *Sotah* 35a) that God rebuked him for this, saying, “David! Do you call them [mere] songs?” As punishment, David forgot an elementary Torah teaching: it is explicitly stated in the Torah that the Holy Ark was to be carried on the shoulders of the Levites (see Numbers 7:9), but David, in transporting it, placed it on a wagon instead.

The significance of this is as follows:

As we know, God deliberately created humanity in His image so that, by Torah-guided contemplation of our own makeup, we can come to understand something of God. See, e.g., the adaptation of the discourse *Vay'daber Hashem El Moshe B'Midbar Sinai* on the Torah portion *Bamidbar*, where it is explained that just as a person's will is superior to his or her intellect, in the sense that the will – what one desires – is not dependent upon logical considerations, but just “because” – so can we identify a spiritual level which we call the “will” (*ratzon*) of God, a level even higher than the “intellect” of God.

There is an element of Torah that we can intellectually comprehend, such as the reasons for mitzvos like “Do not steal” and “Remember that God took you out of Egypt.” We are to try to unite our own intellects with God's “intellect,” so to speak, by understanding God's “reasons” for such commandments. However, at root, all the Torah's mitzvos stem from a level higher than intellect can reach: the spiritual level known as the “will” of God. This is exemplified by that class of mitzvos which have no rational explanation at all, like “Do not wear *sha'atnez* (a mixture of wool and linen)” or “Purify yourselves with the ashes of a red cow.” Such mitzvos, called *chukim* (“statutes”) underscore that the Torah derives from God's will, which transcends intellect; even those mitzvos which do have a rational justification are rooted in the Divine Will – just as a person's reasons for things are really secondary to the underlying fact that they simply “want” the thing in question. King David was praising this transcendent quality of Torah by referring to God's *chukim*, statutes, as “songs.”

The reason “song” was chosen as praise for the Torah is that the enjoyment one derives from song likewise stems from a level which is not subject to intellectual justification. A person finds a particular melody pleasing, not for any rational reason, but just “because.” What is more, we are all familiar with the phenomenon in which a melody lodges itself in a person's mind and they repeat it to themselves over and over again. Although it is the same song they keep repeating, each repetition gives the person the same pleasure, and they can go on that way indefinitely. King David meant to express the uniformly sublime holiness of the Torah by this metaphor. Although there are many different mitzvos in the Torah, they all, uniformly, stem from God's exalted will, and thus, even though one may perform mitzvah after different mitzvah, each time elicits the holy level of God's will, like a repeating melody that gives the same pleasure time after time.

This sounds like great praise. If so, why was David punished for this characterization? The reason is that for all the sublime and inexpressible holiness implied by the comparison of mitzvos to song – i.e., by the identification of mitzvos with God's “will” – that does not capture the essential quality, the true advantage, of mitzvos.

For, in truth, even the level we have been referring to as “will” is not the innermost, most essential, level of a person – or of God. With respect to that ultimate quality, even “will” is but a superficial manifestation. Again, we will turn to comparison with our own selves to understand what is meant.

A person's will – i.e., what one wants – is driven by what gives one pleasure, or delight. A person may “want” chocolate ice cream, for example. Granted that that desire transcends intellectual justification – he or she wants the ice cream just “because” and not for any “reason” – it

nevertheless clearly flows from the fact that chocolate ice cream gives the person pleasure. If not for this fact, the person would not want the ice cream. Thus, desire, or *ratzon* in Hebrew, is itself a function of pleasure, or *ta'anug*, and it is this –*ta'anug* – which symbolizes that which is closest to the very quintessential core of the person, their very “Self.”

The same, allegorically speaking, applies to the Torah. Even the statement that the Torah is the “will” of God does not do justice to the inexpressibly lofty spiritual essence of what the Torah really is: the container, the conduit, by which the inconceivable spiritual level compared to the “pleasure” of God – that which is the very closest to God’s Essence, God’s “Self” – is transmitted to us Jews.

This is hinted at by the verse (Psalms 139:5), “You have formed me back and front.” The Torah possesses, as described above, an element that may be described as the “back,” or the outer, superficial, level – i.e., that aspect which is the *ratzon*, “will,” of God. However, on an even deeper level, the Torah’s “front,” its inner aspect, corresponds to *ta'anug*, God’s “pleasure.” And this is what is meant by God’s statement to Moshe (Exodus 33:23), “You will see My back, but My front will not be seen.” An observer can tell that another person wants something, for this is a relatively superficial aspect that can be made manifest.

But the pleasure that the person derives from the thing is felt only by that person – it is such a personal sensation that it is utterly impossible to manifest pleasure. (To be sure, the body may indicate that it is experiencing pleasure by smiling, for example, but this is not a manifestation of the pleasure itself. Only the person him- or herself actually tastes that chocolate, actually experiences its effect. No one else can have any perception of this at all.) This conveys to us some vague inkling of the awesome sublimity, the virtual identity with God’s very “Self,” that is meant when we speak of the spiritual level of God’s *ta'anug*.

A fundamental difference between the superficial level of *ratzon* and the inward level of *ta'anug* is seen in the fact that in Hebrew, the word for “inwardness” is the same as that for “face;” one’s physical face, in fact, may be said to express what is going on within. The opposite of the face is the back of the neck (*oref* in Hebrew). The *oref* is uniform: one stretch of featureless skin covers it all. By contrast, the face is composed of various individual, distinct parts. Similarly, the level of *ratzon* is uniform, like the melody mentioned above, which one can repeat again and again and derive the same pleasure from.

This is the level on which the mitzvos of the Torah, too, are uniform, in that they all represent the will of God. On the other hand, one’s face is capable of many types of pleasure: the eyes derive pleasure from beautiful sights; the ears, from beautiful sound; the mouth from taste, and so on. Each type of pleasure is distinct, and they cannot be lumped together uniformly. Similarly, on the essential level of *ta'anug*, each individual mitzvah of the Torah expresses another aspect of God’s “pleasure”: the mitzvah of *tzitzis*, one aspect, the mitzvah of *Tefillin*, a different one, and so on.

Therefore, regarding when God gave the Torah on Mount Sinai and personally articulated the Ten Commandments to the Jews, we are taught (*Shabbos* 88b), “at each Commandment, their souls flew [heavenwards].” Why should this have occurred after each and every commandment? Granted that the Jews were so overwhelmed by the great revelation that they simply expired in absolute

rapture for God, but what accounts for this happening over and over; would they not, at least to some extent, have gotten used to it as the Decalogue went on? The answer is that indeed, the revelation at Mount Sinai derived from the exalted spiritual level of *ta'anug*, which is expressed in many different ways. The Godliness revealed to the Jews in each commandment was different from that revealed in every other one. Thus, each and every commandment caused the same reaction: the Jews were so overwhelmed by the new revelation of God's *ta'anug* that they expired all over again.

We merited this great revelation because the Jews, too, had achieved such a degree of yearning for God Himself that their own *ta'anug* was implicated. Ordinarily, we speak of a level of love for God expressed by the verse (Psalms 73:25), "Whom do I have in the Heavens, and other than You I do not desire [anything] on earth" as an ideal. The Hebrew word for "other than You" literally means "with You"; this may be interpreted to mean that the speaker is so committed to God and God alone that he or she is saying that they do not desire anything in heaven or on earth – not even the most sublime spiritual levels – that is merely "with You," but not You Yourself. And indeed, this does seem to be an ideal level of love for God.

Yet, for all that the person on this level yearns for God to the point that he or she is willing to lose all independent existence in order to be reabsorbed in his or her soul's spiritual source – God Himself – this must still be regarded as a relatively superficial level compared to what is even deeper. For on this level, one is still a separate entity, even though willing – even eager – to give that up. But, after all, God is omnipresent, and even within one's physical form, one is not really separate from Him at all. On the contrary, it is actually only from within one's physical form that one is able to perform God's mitzvos.

The person who yearns to lose one's independent existence in favor of simply "dissolving" into Godliness may be on a very high level, but this person does not fully appreciate the advantage of existing just as they are – a part of God's all-encompassing Unity in any event – and being engaged in God's mitzvos, which derive from the level of *ta'anug*. One may, however, actually come to a state in which one literally derives pleasure from God's mitzvos, a state which indicates that the person's own inward self, one's own "face," is aligned with that of God. The Jews at Mount Sinai had achieved this, and thus merited the corresponding revelation of God's inner "Self," as it is written (Deuteronomy 5:4), "God spoke to you face to face at the mountain."

The Tablets on which the Ten Commandments were engraved also expressed the idea that God's innermost level, His "front," or "face," was being revealed. The Tablets were miraculously engraved through and through (see Exodus 32:15), so that whichever side one viewed was the front. There was, quite literally, no "back" to the Tablets of the Ten Commandments.

This in turn sheds light on why King David's punishment was appropriate to what he had done. In praising the Torah merely as "songs," King David referred to it as expressing the "will" of God – in this context considered only the outer, superficial, level. Since he failed to appreciate the inner advantage of Torah – that it derives from God's *ta'anug* – he was made to forget that the Holy Ark, containing the Tablets of the Ten Commandments, was to be carried on the Levites' shoulders. For, in carrying something on one's shoulder, one's face inevitably lines up with what

is being carried. This mode of transporting the Ark was symbolic of its “face-to-face” quality. Since David forgot this, he transported the Ark by wagon instead.

That, then, is the inner significance of the Torah’s statement that “I was His delight every day”: that is, the Torah’s essential quality is that it expresses that innermost level of Godliness referred to as *ta’anug* – God’s “delight” or “pleasure.” And this is something that can be attained by us, through dedication of our own selves to the point at which we ourselves take true pleasure, as described above, in God’s mitzvos (*simcha shel mitzvah*). This must be accomplished every single day, through the love of God developed during the Shema prayer, which is why the verse refers to “every day.”

The next part of the passage reads “playing before Him at all times.” This refers to the famous verses at the beginning of Ecclesiastes chapter 3, which begin (3:1), “To everything, there is a season, and a time for every thing under the heaven.” There follow a set of verses in which 24 separate “times” are enumerated, including (3:5), “... a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.”

When one embraces someone, the first person grasps the other from behind and holds them such that the two are “locked” into a face-to-face position. This may be understood as a reference to the relationship of God and the Jews during the time when the Holy Temple stood: we were so “in tune” with, so aligned with, God that we could be said to be in a constant state of embrace. We were always face-to-face. The other condition, that of “a time to refrain from embracing,” refers to the present era of exile, in which a person is likely to (God forbid) be distracted by worldly pleasures and drift from the state of “embrace,” of true pleasure in God alone.

Yet the Torah is described as “playing” before God “at all times.” That is, both at times like the “time to embrace” and times like the “time to refrain from embracing,” the Torah “plays,” in the sense hinted at by the verse (Genesis 21:6), “God has made a joke for me.” The Hebrew name used in this verse for “God” is *Elokim*, which signifies God as He “conceals” Himself within nature. It is almost as if God were playing “hide and seek” with us, by “hiding” behind the laws of nature in such a way that people could mistakenly think (God forbid) that nature, and not God, rules the universe. This is, of course, for a specific purpose: that we should “uncover” the Godliness within the world through Torah and mitzvos. In any event, it is the Divine name *Elokim* that is referred to as having made a “joke”; the joke is the very notion that God should be concealed, that He does not guide all of creation. What a ridiculous idea!

Our verse is telling us that at all times, the Torah is on the level associated with this “play.” Through Torah, we “see through” the joke. By performing mitzvos, even during times of exile, we bring Godliness into the very physical substance of the world, thus removing its disguise, revealing its true nature. This leads to the ultimate revelation of the true, Godly, nature of the universe with the coming of the Messiah, may it be immediately.

Finally, our passage concludes, “playing with the world, His earth, and my delights were with the sons of man.” The Hebrew word for “the world” is *tevel*, which is numerically equivalent, by the Hebrew grammatical device of *Gematria*, to twice the value of the word *aryeh*, lion. In the heavenly hosts, there are two levels associated with “lions”: that of the spiritual beings known

as *chayos* (“animals” or “creatures”), and that of the spiritual beings called *ofanim* (“wheels”). The *chayos* are said to inhabit the realm of *Yetzirah*, the spiritual source of the six orders of the Mishna, which represents intellectual comprehension of Godliness; they roar like lions out of the yearning for God that comes from their perceiving His greatness. On the other hand, the *ofanim* are creatures of the relatively lower spiritual realm of *Asiyah*, where they cannot comprehend Godliness but roar like lions anyway out of their natural love for Him.

The statement that the Torah “plays with *tevel*” – a word which implies both levels of “lion” – means that the Torah’s “playful” quality, that which unmask the Godliness “hiding” in the world, applies to both the higher spiritual creatures and the lower; to those that can achieve an intellectual comprehension of God and those that cannot. Through Torah, all can link up with God’s innermost “Self,” regardless of their spiritual capacity. The same applies to “the sons of man”: there are those people who, like the *chayos*, are able to engage in Torah study and intellectual comprehension; these unite with God’s “self” through the Torah. But by the very same token, also those who, like the *ofanim*, are – whether from preoccupation with the necessity of earning a livelihood, lack of intellectual ability, or other valid reasons – unable to understand Godliness, unite with God’s “Self” through the Torah. For the Torah is on a level which transcends such distinctions.

May we merit, on this upcoming holiday of Shavuot, to receive the Torah with joy and inwardness.



*Dante's Vision of Rachel and Leah* –  
Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1855

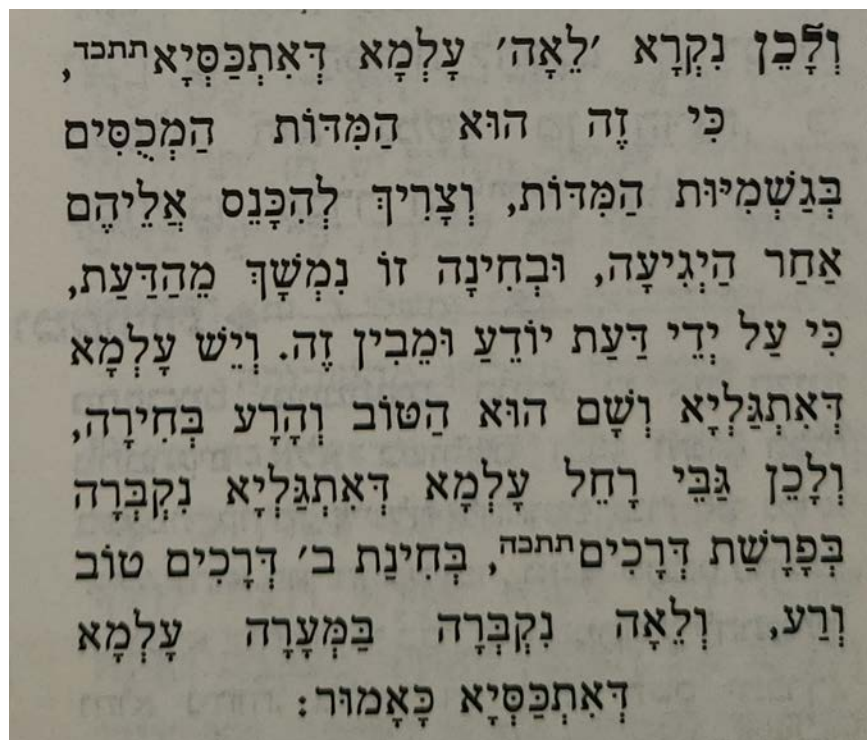




*In this following mystical version of zimra vs shira the Me'or Eynayim will posit the binary forms as the character typologies of Rachel and Leah. The Me'or Eynayim sees the same axis of inner outer (like the Alter Rebbe above) but as exemplified by the archetypes of Rachel and Leah which I might consider his key to the punishment of David.*

יְגִיעָה רַבָּה לָזָה, וְזֶהוּ בְּחִינַת 'לְאָה' בְּסוּד  
 יְגִיעַת הַמַּחְשָׁבָה, לְתַקֵּן הַמַּדּוּת וּלְהַפְּכֶם  
 מִבְּחִינַת 'הַתְּמָד' הַמְעָרֵב עִם הַפְּסֻלָּת  
 וּלְהִיּוֹת 'מִדַּת' הַטּוֹב בְּלֹא רַע. וְ'לְאָה'  
 מְלִשׁוֹן נְלֹאָה שֶׁהִיא עֵיפּוֹת וַיְגִיעָה תַּחֲבֹב.  
 וּכְשֶׁהָאָדָם עוֹשֶׂה כֵּן וּמְתַקֵּן הַמַּדּוּת,  
 הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מִמְּשִׁיךְ עָלָיו רַחֲמָנוּת,  
 כִּי פֶתַח הַרְחָמִים מִדַּת יַעֲקֹב תַּחֲבֹב. וְזֶהוּ  
 'וַיִּרְא ה' כִּי שָׁנוּאָה לְאָה רָצָה לוֹמַר כִּי  
 בְּעֵינַי בְּנֵי אָדָם שָׁנוּאוּי הוּא לְעֵינֵי וּלְיַגֵּעַ  
 עֲצָמוֹ לְהַפְּךְ הַמַּדּוּת, וְהַצְּדִיק יִגַע עֲצָמוֹ  
 וְהַפְּכֶם, עַל כֵּן 'וַיִּפְתַּח ה' אֶת רַחֲמָהּ סוּד  
 עוֹלָם הַרְחָמִים:

And this is the aspect of Leah which is the mystery of toiling intellectually...  
 And Leah comes from the expression of fatigues meaning tired and exhausted...  
 So when a person engages spiritually is such toil the Almighty rewards him with *rachamanut* (grace)... and this is the meaning of "and the Lord saw that Leah was hated" meaning from the perspective of people this approach (of toil and exhaustion) is unpopular, in order to rectify one's character traits.



Therefore Leah represents the concealed (internal) world..for the bad character traits are steeped in physicality, and one needs much effort to transform them which requires *daas* (God consciousness) for with *daas* one becomes aware of this ...

Now there is also a revealed (external) world where the choice of good and evil (Halacha) is manifested by Rachel (who represents this external world).

She is buried at the crossroads (Bethlehem)<sup>8</sup> which represents the two paths good and evil one must choose, however Leah is buried in the cave (of Machpelah) representing the hidden world as we stated.

The Rebbe now tropes on the following verse from Psalm 39:

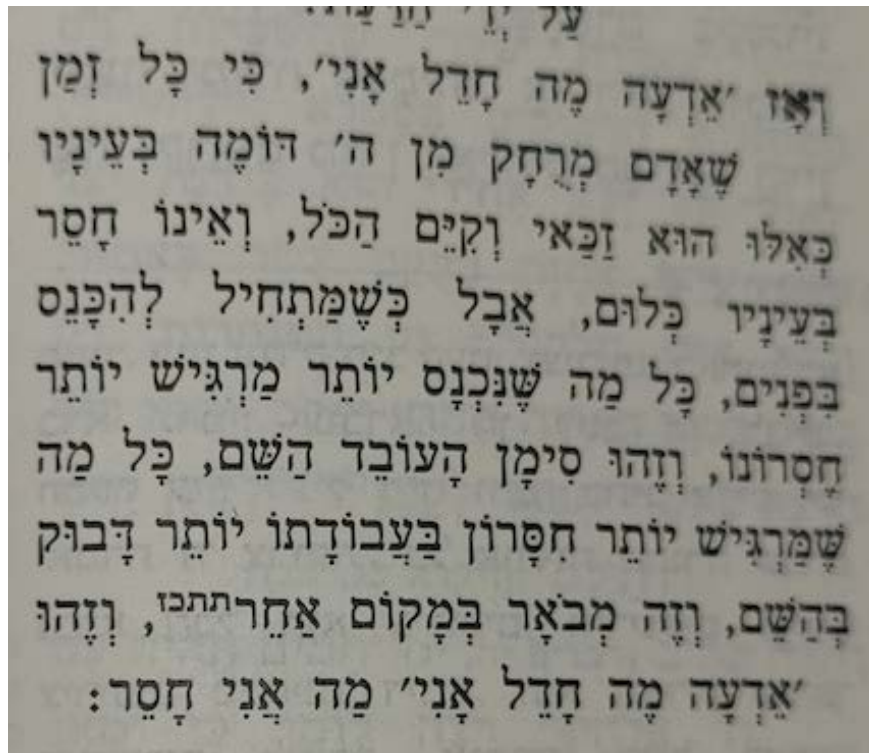
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>ה הוֹדִיעֵנִי יְהוָה, קִצְצִי--וּמִדַּת יָמֵי מֵה־<br/>הִיא; אֲדַעָה, מָה-תְּדַל אֲנִי.</p>                         | <p>5 'LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of<br/>my days, what it is; let me know how short-lived I am.</p> |
| <p>ו הִנֵּה טְפָחוֹת, נְתַתָּה יָמַי-- וְחֻלְדֵי<br/>כְּאֵין נִגְדָד; אֵךְ כָּל-הַקֵּבֶל כָּל-אָדָם, נִצָּב סֵלָה.</p> | <p>6 Behold, Thou hast made my days as handbreadths; and<br/>mine age is as nothing before Thee; {N}</p>                |

<sup>8</sup> בראשית מ"ח:ז

וְאֵנִי אֲבִיא מִפְּדוֹן מִמֶּלֶךְ עָלַי רָחֵל בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן בְּדֹרֶךְ בְּעוֹד כְּבַרְתִּי-אֶרֶץ לְבַא אֶפְרַתָּה וְאֶקְבְּרָהּ שָׁם בְּגֵרָה אֶפְרַת הוּא בֵּית לָחֶם: (ז)

Genesis 48:7

(7) I [do this because], when I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, while I was journeying in the land of Canaan, when still some distance short of Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath"—now Bethlehem.



**'LORD, make me to know mine end,** for as long as a person is far from God, he feels he is fulfilling the Torah and Mitzvot and merits (reward). In his own eyes he lacks nothing.

However, when he begins to enter inside, the degree to which he enters, the more he feels his (spiritual) lack, and this is (the litmus test) the sign of his serving God.

To the degree he feels more the lack inside is the degree to which he is attached to God.

This is the meaning of **'LORD, make me to know mine end,** as in **please show me what I lack...**

*I think the Me'or Eynayim is teaching us that the mere observance of externalities of Torah and Mitzvot lead one to this sense of spiritual complacency which is the typos of Rachel, the choice between good and evil acts.*

*However once one goes inside then one feels the opposite, an increasing sense of unworthiness and paradoxically a greater attachment to the divine.*

*Maybe this was the punishment of David, to reduce Torah to a song, meaning the externalities (like the Aron enclosing the tablets) and the smug satisfaction of performance of Halacha whereas the going inside and feeling the unworthiness would not have resulted in song but silence or Leah's tears.*



## Torah as Song

**David Porush** writes:<sup>9</sup>

*“Now therefore write down for yourselves this song [shirah], and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be my witness ... for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed” –*

**Deut 31:19-21**

*“Sing every day, sing every day,” –*

**Rabbi Akiva quoted in Sanhedrin (99a)**

*The first letters of the Torah when rearranged say שִׁיר תְּאוֹבָה [‘shir ta’ev’] “A song of desire.”*

**– Attributed to R. Isaac Luria**

When great poems get canonized in anthologies for college courses, they usually come thick with stuff that is supposed to help the student: short introductions, footnotes, annotations, guides, accent marks. They disambiguate inscrutable lines, point out cross-references and themes within the poem, and note the allusions to other texts and events that make the poem otherwise impenetrable. But the very density of these aids may have the opposite effect on the poor student. It also says, *There’s even more of this out there. You gotta be a pro to really get it.* Maybe that’s why most people can go very merrily through their whole lives without reading another poem after graduating high school.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://davidporush.com/2018/09/20/torah-as-song/>

The Torah is also like this. The newbie coming on the scene of the Jewish interpretive tradition stares down 73 volumes of the Schottenstein Talmud and millions of pages of other commentaries. Where do you begin? How can any human scale the mountain of interpretation?

But what if we approach the Torah, that densest of texts, like music? What if we treat it not first and foremost as a history of the birth of a nation or as a collection of dos and don'ts, or not even an elaborate assemblage of narratives, myths, and laws in prose, but rather as one very long song? And what if it even tells us so itself, *I'm a song. Write me down and sing me through all your generations?* Our assignment, to achieve enlightenment, becomes easier, less discouraging, and even joyful.

### **Torah sings its own birth**

The Torah is the first and greatest document written in the new technology of the phonetic alphabet. It is only natural that a new disruptive communications tech, exulting in its new-found powers of expression, would narrate its own birth story (“Mr. Watson. Come here. I want to see you”), show off what it can do, and surround its revolution with transcendent awe.

So one of the recurring themes of the Torah is the power and centrality of writing in the birth story of the Jews. God writes the first tablets that Moses brings down from Mount Sinai with His Own finger. Moses writes the second version, taking dictation from God. Every king is commanded to write two Torah scrolls, one for himself and one for his people. We each have to write the words and keep them as frontlets between our eyes and next to our hearts, and write them on the doorposts of our homes, perhaps imitating the first act of literacy by a general population, the smear of a secret sign in blood on the doors of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt so the Angel of Death would read it and pass over.

And finally all Jews are commanded to “write down for yourselves this song [*shirah*] and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be my witness” (Deut 31:19-21). This commandment comes as part of Moses’ farewell address and might be taken to refer to the Moses’ final song of victory and admonition he will soon sing. But it seems more likely, and becomes so much more powerful, if the Torah is here referring to itself as a whole. This is, after all, the very last of the Torah’s commandments. Doesn’t it make sense that the Torah’s author is ensuring that His words “shall not be forgotten”? Wouldn’t the Torah want itself to stay an eternal best seller and remain always number one on the hit parade by commanding everyone to write it themselves and then commit it to memory by singing it?

If we take this “song” to refer to the Torah itself, it also encapsulates the entire monumental revolution that the Torah has staged: an illiterate, oral culture of Hebrew slaves becomes a nation forged by writing almost overnight, and that act of writing is the transcription of a song.

Exodus tells us God's original pronouncement is one long utterance from atop the mountain, like one long shofar blast. But it's too mind-boggling to be comprehended by the newly-liberated slaves, so they beg Moses *to write it down for them*.

## **A scholarly approach to the Torah's media revolution**

As I have noted elsewhere, even from a scholarly perspective, it is not farfetched at all that the Torah is the story of the moment the Children of Israel convert from an oral to literate culture and marks the birth of its own means of transmission, the first alphabet. Exodus is now a story we can relate to today in the age of Facebook and Twitter. Moses is staging a media revolution! He brings a new, disruptive tech, the phonetic alphabet, that is so powerfully new that it seems divinely inspired. He then he delivers it exclusively to a huge population of slaves. The alphabet is so simple to learn, needing only 22 signs to master, that a newly literate population is armed with a new power almost overnight. It poses a viral, plaguey, counter-cultural threat to Pharaoh's hegemony which is founded on a hierarchical, hieroglyphic-based communications, one that has become ossified and enslaved to an obsolete, 1000-symbol writing system controlled by a narrow class of scribe-priests.

Moses stages a war of writing apps in Pharaoh's court, a demo of the alphabet's superiority, besting the hieroglyphic scribes, who throw up their hands to declare, "This must be the Finger of [a superior kind of] God!" He then leverages the threat of this dynamic weapon, this new communications technology, to liberate the slaves. Pharaoh realizes, against his own will, that he cannot resist this upwelling tide, and for the first and just about the only time in history, an absolute ruler lets a huge slave population go, even at the risk of imperiling his empire. Imagine putting the iPhone in the hands of every slave in the Old South, but denying it to their masters. America might have been spared the Civil War.

The phonetic alphabet, like a smart phone, also grants to the Hebrews new powers of imagination and communication. They conjure a new kind of abstract God, completely the opposite of the many, image-dependent, literal idols of the cumbersome, pictographic Egyptian culture. It gives the Hebrews access to feel as if they can read the will of that God directly, as He expressed it Himself in the Torah, in their native tongue, written in the new medium.

That archeologists trace the most likely birth of the alphabet to slave scrawls in the South Sinai (at Serabit el-Khadem) during the 14<sup>th</sup> century BCE, about the same time of Moses in the Hebrew chronology of the world (1312 BCE) makes this story compelling and vital.

It is also not farfetched to think that the Torah was one long song of 23,000 verses that was meant to be committed to memory. One of the great breakthroughs in understanding Homer's epic poetry is that it also marked the moment the Greeks became literate in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Harvard professor Milman Parry studied the balladeers of the illiterate cultures of Serbo-Croatia of the 1930s. Able to recite thousands of lines from memory, these singers told epic tales of heroes and wars. They mixed the distant past with current memory and family genealogies like those in the

Torah. They reciting the shared cultural histories of the tribes and towns they entertained and connected it to their audience personally.

Parry showed that the structure of these epic songs – their repetition of musical themes, melodies, consistent line lengths and accented syllables, rhyming patterns, stock phrases, and larger thematic patterns — all worked together as mnemonics, enabling the stupendous feats of memory by these illiterate troubadours. His student, Albert Lord, then elaborated Parry’s insight in a 1960 book, *The Singer of Tales*, showing that the structure of Homer’s epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, more than 15,600 and 12,000 lines long respectively, deployed the same interwoven devices of song. The conclusion was clear: the singer of the ancient Greek epics was oral and probably illiterate, and the epics were transcribed by someone in the newly-literate Hellenic tribes.

No wonder the last commandment of the Torah is that every Jew should recapitulate this awesome moment for themselves by writing a personal copy of the song, and then “put [it] in their mouths...for it shall not be forgotten.” Write the song down, then perform its music. In some ways, this is as fundamental to being a Jew as the acknowledgement that God is One and re-enacting the Passover story.

## **Torah as Art**

Reading the Torah as a song also transforms our interpretive approach to it. We know from the beginning that the multiple interpretations of the text aren’t competing for which is truest, but that many or all can be true at once and supplement or complement or even gainsay and negate each other. Like a great poem in the college anthology, that only enhances the awe we have of it. The fruit multiplies and the tree is stronger for it. This isn’t just a manual, or code of laws, or history, or a cryptogram. It’s art.

This explains why the Oral tradition, which gives authority to our millenia-long rabbinic and interpretive traditions, is as important as the written Torah. Reading the Torah as a song embraces our millions of words of scribbled commentaries and much else that liberates us. Scholars read the text and parse every jot and word to discover its original singular intended meaning, playing a millennia-long game of telepathy with its Author. They are trying to read God’s mind. A noble endeavor that keeps Jewish law and tradition alive and ever-growing.

But now we are freed to also embrace a much more accessible and personal job description: the Torah, like a great poem, was also an aboriginal musical performance that we all should try to resurrect and perform.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks makes many of these points in *The Torah as God’s Song*,<sup>[1]</sup> building on Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin’s<sup>[2]</sup> insight into the Torah as poetic:

*Descriptive prose carries its meaning on the surface. The Torah, like poetry, does not. ... The whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal . . . remains mysterious and 'fraught with background.[3]*

Rabbi Sack also quotes R. Yechiel Michal Epstein (1829-1908) from his *Arukh ha-Shulchan*. [1]

*The rabbinic literature is full of arguments, about which the sages said: "These and those are the words of the living God." This is one of the reasons the Torah is called "a song" – because a song becomes more beautiful when scored for many voices interwoven in complex harmonies.*

There is room now for the instruction manual version of the Torah, the *Shulchan Aruch* [4] and its description of how to follow the 613 *mitzvot*. There is also room for all the many volumes of the Talmud and all its commentaries and footnotes, not to mention the thousands of books, essays, blogs, sermons written since. There is room for this and also that, for Talmudic legislation and its stories – are they mere illustrative anecdotes? Parables? Metaphors? Flights of fancy? Casual comments and throwaway lines? All of the above?

And there is plenty of room – in fact there is a demand for – elucidations of hidden, syncretic, hieratic knowledge like Kabbalah.

Finally, the difference between the performance of a song and its written score is the latter's silence. This gap opens a vast space not only for all interpretation but for silence, for biting our tongues and for lifting our fingers from the keyboard to withhold saying what we think lurks in the text. There is room for the silence of humility or discretion or doubt. There is room for the silence that comes from the inability to say anything at all in the face of this infinite task.

## **The Lost Music**

Moses was the only human who could hear God's first original awesome utterance of the Torah and still have the wit to retain and transcribe it. All the other Israelites, assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai, quaked with fear and begged Moses to transform God's voice into the new medium, like vinyl to MP3, or illuminated codex to printed book. Today, so much of this song has been lost before we even begin to approach the text: the original cadence, rhyme, melody, voice, sound of the original singing. Even if the Torah trope (melody) and the vocalizations given us by the Masoretes are aboriginal from Sinai, we missed that long blast from high.

None of us can be Moses. We are all sentenced to yearn for, but never attain, perfect comprehension. That we can only capture snatches of the original tune demands respect for silence, even as we noisily and merrily try to recreate that sound from Sinai by singing the Torah (*trope*) and wordless Chassidic melodies (*niggunim*).



Judaism is a religion of words, and yet whenever the language of Judaism aspires to the spiritual it breaks into song, as if the words themselves sought escape from the gravitational pull of finite meanings. ... Words are the language of the mind. Music is the language of the soul.[5]

Yet if we do treat the Torah as a song or poem, we can't perform the original with fidelity. Sadly, musical notation wasn't included in the revelation on Sinai along with the alphabet, and we weren't there to hear it. In its stead, though, comes a pleasure of the text, as French critic Roland Barthes[6] phrased it, if we approach the Torah with our ear tuned to its music and poetry.

*This pleasure transcends the many joys of scholarship: it opens something prayerful in the primitive Hebrew of the Scriptures that we lose when we erect rational understanding – clarity – as the goal of all interpretation. If the Torah is the Supreme Poem or Song, every syllable has a secret melody.*

[1] Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "The Torah as G-d's Song," [https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/2308716/jewish/The-Torah-as-G-ds-Song.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2308716/jewish/The-Torah-as-G-ds-Song.htm)

[2] The Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin), Preface to *Ha'emek Davar*, Parag 3

[3] Rabbi Sacks, op. cit.

[4] *The Set Table*. Codification of the laws of the Torah – *halacha* – written by Joseph Caro in 1563

[5] Rabbi Sacks, op. cit.

[6] Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Editions du Seuil, 1973).

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## Afterthoughts

Although I preferred performance of piano as a child since it was immediately rewarding. Once I had mastered the piece and the musical memory in my fingers was now automatic I could enjoy the very music itself. My uncle Eric, the principal violist for the BBC symphony orchestra would mesmerize me with his fiddling on family get togethers, although I rarely heard my mother pick up the fiddle. As a concert violinist she had given up that career for my father and his religious halachic observance, which precluded her playing on Friday and Saturday evenings where most concerts took place.

Music revealed itself to me one day when visiting a girlfriend's mum who was dying of breast cancer. The Bach Brandenburg concerto no. 5 was playing in the background as she lay on satin sheets propped up, an Italian Contessa. From then on I was hooked. When they played the funeral

march of the Eroica Symphony during the Munich Olympics memorial to the 11 Israeli athletes I discovered the sense of the tragic in music that could never again be expressed in words. When I hear Debussy I realized that love could only be expressed in music sublimely. Every mood I experienced was better expressed by music.

Yet Mum insisted I take musical theory and composition. Here all I saw was the mathematical reduction of musical genius into rules of western musicality, (which never applied to the east). I realized what “well-tempered” meant which involved bending the mathematical models of the scale to fit the western sense of musicality. I was pained to have to study the dry theory, harmony and counterpoint, since at that age I did not appreciate the science of music.

Like a professor who studies the poetics of the Song of Songs, the style, literary genre, the grammar and prosody, the use of metaphor and metonymy, the allegory and the meter, he has made a career of it and received awards for his publications, yet never once has he fallen in love, understood the madness and obsession of love, the craziness and insanity of it, how it breaks lives apart and hurts so many in its wake.

Later I realized the wisdom of my mother’s insistence. There was now a second appreciation for the underlying rules that governed the great composers, each with his own style.

In the above review of chazal’s interpretation of the difference between shira and zimrah could it possibly mean the difference between these two ways of seeing music?

Is it possible that zimrah was a reduction of music to the rational theory of composition where shira represented the total experience itself?

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim explains that when used side-by-side the terms *mizmor* and *shir* assume specific meanings: *shir* denotes the words/lyrics of a song, while *mizmor* denotes the tune/melody of the song.

**MAHARAL** (Sanhedrin 101a), writes that although calling the Torah a "Zimrah" is disrespectful, calling the Torah a "Shirah" is not. A Zimrah is a lighthearted tune, such as the tune a person hums to himself when he is in a merry mood. A Shirah, though, refers to a musical composition which requires great talent and concentration to compose or perform. I like his comparison and contrasting pop songs from classical music! He surely had heard both troubadours as well as Chopin in Prague!

The Me’or Eynayim’s theory of Daas comes closest. Daas is the experience of the Torah/spirituality/the Divine beyond the rational analysis and theory. The halachic expertise and lomdus represents mere zimrah and David’s mistake was to extol the divine but limited to his own rational understanding. He would be punished mida keneged mida..with the forgetting of one particular law that every cheder kid knows by heart...the Levitical exclusion to carry the Ark on their shoulders.

The Ark then represents the external weight on the shoulders of the law/halacha/observance/lomdus/rational Hora'ah. But he failed to see Torah as what was inside the Ark, the Luchot...representing the heart the experience/Daas the music of Torah as a shira.

Living in this paradox between shira and zimra we carve out our own individual religious experiences of the divine, some more rational others more experiential...

What grabbed me about this gemoroh was its audacious criticism of David so against the Pshat of the story line in Samuel 6. They were clearly bothered by his use of the word zimrah despite its use as praise most other places.

This led to an exploration of the musicality of Torah....